

LONGEING:

Horse training through the halter: Longeing is not just going in circles.



Longeing is more than just running in circles, it's a training opportunity. Journal photo.

*By Joe Wolter in **America's Horse***

Lots of times, when I first saddle a young horse, I'll want to see how he reacts to the saddle before I get on him. If I have a small corral, I'll turn him loose and get him to go from a walk to a trot to a lope and then back down. That will tell me whether he is tight or not. I recommend that most people do this. Even if you are pretty sure of the horse, just to be safe, it wouldn't hurt to limber him up before you get on. But if you don't have the facility, you can do the same thing by longeing.

When I longe a horse, I don't just chase him around in a circle. I want him to follow the feel of the longe line or lead rope. If I was on him, going around in a circle, I would want him to follow his nose. I want the very same thing when I'm longeing him.

What I definitely don't want is for the horse to be going around to the right, for instance, and have his nose tipped to the left. You see lots of horses doing that, and what they are doing is building a brace for their bodies. I don't want it artificial. I want it to be the way they would travel if it was their idea.

Sometimes, on some horses that are being longed, you can see just a little white in the corner of their inside eye. That might tell me that horse is looking the other way. That's what we've got to do away with. You want his nose tipped to the inside so that he's watching where he's going.

When I longe a horse, I'm going to both direct and drive him, but not necessarily at the same time. Say he's going around to the right, I'm going to be directing with my right hand and driving with my left. I'm directing with the hand that has the longe line, and driving by standing just a little behind him – allowing him to have somewhere to go – and using a little motion with my left hand.

Of course, you could eventually teach the horse to just go around you while you stand still in the middle of the circle. But I'm not trying to teach him an act. I'm trying to get him loosened up, feeling the longe line or lead.

When my horse feels right, or perhaps when he starts anticipating, I'll make him change directions by taking the slack out of the longe line and stepping just a little in front of him. The hindquarters should come around to the outside, and he'll reach with his front quarters, going the other way. Then I'll continue directing and driving, letting him go someplace.

Soon, I'll quit driving him and let him stop for a moment. Then I'll direct him again, and if necessary, drive him again. Pretty soon, I won't have to drive him. I'll just direct him, and he'll leave.

When that happens, I have control of the whole horse. When I get ready for him to move, I make contact with the longe line, and then drop the slack. I don't gather it up and pull on him. If he doesn't move, then I'll drive again. Before long, he'll start responding to that longe line, and it will feel as though he doesn't weigh anything. In other words, there is no resistance.

What we're doing is getting hold of his feet through the halter, and controlling the life in his body. Soon he is ready to get on.

Joe Wolter trained and showed horses for the Four Sixes Ranch in Guthrie, Texas. Today, he has his own ranch in Aspermont, Texas. When he's some place that doesn't have a round pen, he often longes his horses.