

WORLD TRAINERS TIP ARTICLE #2

Standing up in stirrups

To tell you the truth I can't really remember why I did it at the time, but one day while working a horse, I stood up in my stirrups and cantered around for a while. When I sat down in the saddle, while still cantering, I was amazed by what I felt underneath me. The shape and feel of the horse's back had completely changed. His back had raised up at least 3 inches and it did not feel as if I were sitting in his back anymore. It felt as if I were sitting on a well rounded back. I did this a few more times and the same thing happened each time.

I continued this exercise for a while, maybe a week. When I started trotting the horse, after my canter warm up, while still standing in the stirrups (not posting at the trot). I was amazed to find that the hindquarters were much more underneath my horse and the cadence was much smoother. Interesting to me, was when I would sit back and begin to post the horse would begin to struggle with balance and cadence. If I would go back to standing up, with my point of balance on the neck, the cadence would get better. Hmm... So I started doing more of this with other horses. There have been more than a handful of horses that this has helped. I believe that it builds strength in their backs and hind quarters by allowing them to find a "better balance" naturally, as opposed to forced balance that we traditionally have done with Arabian English horses. Here is how I think it works.

A horse will always try to stabilize themselves according to where weight is placed on them. For instance, we know that if you lean to the right, the horse will naturally step under you so your weight is evenly distributed atop them, and they are more comfortable. Using this same principle, if you move your weight forward, the hind quarters will follow by moving up under your weight.. Then, standing in our stirrups we take the pressure off their back and make it easier for them to accomplish this. Instead of being continually pounded down by our weight, their backs are more free to raise and build strength in that position.

The opposite of this is to bring your weight to the rear of the horse, pushing the horse forward from behind and then lifting the front end up with the bit. Some horses don't have any problem with this technique. If you think about the mechanics of how you direct the energy of motion and the effect of weight placement and how the horse adjusts to it, the traditional theory seems to be compromising the horse's ability to do what you want.

I am not suggesting that this is the way I ride all day on all horses, or that this is a better way. Just a different way. I think that traditionally we force a horse into a collected position. In a nutshell, we have pushed the horse from behind into the bridle and don't let it go forward as much as we have pushed, so the horse is forced to bunch up. When the horse doesn't want to continue in this position, it is tapped with a crop or legged up into position. We do this while putting all of our weight in the middle of their back,

sometimes landing gently, sometimes not. At best , this is making it more difficult for the horse to round its back. At worst, it seems unfair .

To stand up and move forward over the horse encourages the horse naturally to step under your weight with their hind leg and allows them to easily round their back to accomplish this. It is not forced , it is the natural response of the horse to our position .

I think that horses need to know how and why to find a collected position from a traditional "told to" technique. I think it is also useful to have a way to get a horse to do some of these things on their own , to make it their idea. It also pointed out to me some of the things I was doing to discourage the results I was after . By incorporating what I've learned from this , into the techniques I had been using already , its helped me beat my head against the wall less.

If your wondering if there is any credence to this at all, try this: get on your horse, start to canter like you normally would. Feel your horses back, be aware of how his back feels to you. Then, shorten your reins until your hands are in the mane, in fact take a handful of mane and pull yourself up to a standing position (lock your knees, if this helps) and canter five minutes that way. Then sit down while continuing to canter and feel the difference.