

## **Get Ready for LEVEL III Learn to Change Leads!! PART 1**

Do you worry about flying lead changes? Does your horse drag his flying lead changes? Do you ask yourself "why can't I change leads on the straight line?" Why is it so difficult? After all lead changes look easy enough, and horses do it all the time out in the pasture and on the lunge line. Many of us are often told not to practice lead changes or to just duck the shoulder off and go the other way and the horse should change. Lead changes are not the same as a change of direction and have nothing to do with it. Flying lead changes are the horse changing both the front and hind leads at the same time. Not changing in front then in back or visa versa is not a flying lead change only when the horse changes in both the front and the hind have they successfully completed a lead change. So how do I get my horse to do flying lead changes. Sometimes you start to wonder if this great secret is revealed only to a few and the rest of us left to suffer. Well I hope this article will help you learn how to gain control over your horse's body in order to execute a flying lead change. This maneuver is essential for western riding, reining, over fence classes and of course level III. This will be a two-part article. I will give you two exercises to start practicing and then in next month's newsletter give you two more to perfect and flying lead changes will become easier.

### The Basics

The two basic elements of changing lead are:

- A horse has to be positioned correctly to make the change, so a lot of the work has to be done establishing the correct position in the horse.
- The rider must understand how to communicate to the horse when and where he wants the maneuver performed.

The following exercise will build the riders ability to apply the cues and feel the horse's body move, which are essential for setting up a horse in the correct lead-change position. They will sound complicated but it is really fairly simple. You have to be able to control your horse's body parts separately. In other words you must be able to move the horse hip without moving the shoulder and the shoulders without moving the hips as well as move the rib cage left and right. You need your hands to control the shoulder, head, and neck; and your legs control the ribs and hip.

You also need to be able to take hold of the horse's face, or mouth and have him give to your hands. Its best to start in a snaffle bit riding two handed to develop this.

### Exercise One: Two Track

The two track is a dressage-type of exercise. You are able to work on body position, handling the horse's face and establishing collection with it. The two track asks the horse to move forward and laterally with a slight arc through his body while keeping his head and neck out in front of him. You gain control over the hips, ribcage and shoulders by doing this. You must use your reins to keep him traveling in the direction you want and to help him travel in frame without throwing his head up. Your horse will need to collect somewhat in order to cross front and hind legs in this exercise.

Start at the walk and ask your horse to move forward while his body tracks in a diagonal line. Your horse should have a slight arc to the right when going to the right and a slight arc to the left when going to the left. You will want to perfect this at the walk first then when it is mastered at the walk move on to the trot. Be sure when working at the trot to keep forward momentum. Your horse will want to stall out on you as he is trying to figure out what you're asking for. Keep him moving forward and diagonally (not just forward and not just sideways).

### Exercise Two: Hip Out

For this exercise start at the walk on a circle use your inside leg and push your horse's hip to the outside of the circle. In order for you to do this and to perfect flying lead changes your horse must know that your legs do not mean speed up. If your horse associates your leg pressure with increasing speed they will rush through your lead changes and charge off. You should use body position and your seat to ask your horse to change speeds. In this exercise your horse should float it hip out and maintain a slight arc. He should do this with no resentment and move away from leg pressure (notice I said leg pressure not kicking just press your heel against the horses ribs if he does not respond bump him with your heel until he does). This maneuver is what your horse does when asked to do a flying lead change only you are practicing it at the walk first. Work on this both directions. Be careful your horse does not

dump his shoulder down they can do this at the walk just as they do at the lope. You need to keep the horses shoulders up and again maintain forward momentum. In order to do a lead change a horse must be moving forward do not let them suck back when you take hold on their face make them give to you and keep moving forward. You will work this exercise both directions at the walk. When your horse moves away from pressure easily move on to doing this exercise at the trot.

Ok work on these exercises until your horse and you have perfected them. Remember flying lead changes will not just come to you without practice, hard work and commitment. They are an advanced maneuver that requires patience and timing. If you get frustrated take a break and come back to the exercise the next time you ride. Next month I will give you the final two pieces to the puzzle and you will be well on your way to accomplishing flying lead changes and getting ready to pass the level III riding test.

*Portions of this article were taken from the article "Lead Change paranoia-- Get over It!" by NRHA professional Bryant Pace in the December 2001 NRHA Reiner magazine.*