

LONGEING 101

Clinic #1: *The round pen*; Round penning has been around for a number of years and used by a lot of people, some have used it incorrectly, some have overused it. Some people believe it has no place in horsemanship, others feel that a square pen has the advantage. Some people even have written articles on a “round pen” scaring a horse. Myself, I have used square pens, octagonal pens, round pens of all sizes, and with many different breeds. Depending on the tameness of the horse, I have found, the horse that is going to be afraid of a round pen will be just as afraid of a square pen, and when it does settle you better be able to read a horse very good or you just may end up with the wrong end of the horse, in the wrong end of your space (I am not saying that I never use one though).

The square pen can cause the horse to lose forward momentum, and that is not what we want. What we do want is forward motion that is under control of our own body language. If forward motion were absent we have nothing to work with, with our horse. Without control of this desired forward motion we have more to work with than desired.

The basic “longe” will start in the “round pen” at liberty, just as if it were a wild horse that was unable to be haltered. We will set about to ask the horse for the walk specifically, the trot specifically, and likewise the canter. All three of these gaits should be easily read from us by the horse, and the transitions should be smooth and fluid. These are the “upward” transitions, and are usually relatively easy to get, however the “downward” transition can be quite difficult, especially the trot to walk transition. But we will and must have all three upward and downward transitions happening for us with fluidity, and through the horse understanding our body language that has asked for the change.

Change, now that is the word for the next segment of “round penning”, “change of direction”. The horse will also understand our body language working off of the “driveline” to “turn in” and change direction upon our cue, if this is not happening, we still are not communicating properly, or the horse isn’t as “in tune” with us yet as it needs to be.

In short, we must have walk, trot, canter, canter, trot, and walk. Turn and face. Change direction of travel, stop and backup, all off of our body language. This a good tool to tell you very quickly whether you have your horse reading you or not, and what must be done to correct it.

It will be impossible for me to tell you just how long this one session may go, or may have to be a two part clinic in itself.