

Enlightened Fitness for You and Your Horse – Part 2

By Paul Dufresne



Pushup with Ljibbe on box.



Lat stretch using rope at fence



Pec stretch



Squat using rope at fence to facilitate posture



Leaning back on lats, seated rowing exercise

Last month's article described how you can exercise to ride better by mixing horse time with exercise and have fun with it!

We started by moving around the arena, inviting your horse to join you and to move beside you so you can see the horse in your peripheral vision. The objective was to focus primarily on yourself and just allow the horse to walk with you, with minimum corrections to reposition it. As the connection developed you would focus on the variations of your walk and jog, focusing on relaxation and fluidity in your movement... and "b-r-e-a-t-h-i-n-g" without tension. After a good warmup and stretch of the major muscle groups of the legs, arms, shoulders and torso we can progress to the next part of the workout.

With a good fence to hang onto, put a towel around a post or solid rail and hold each end of the towel with your hands. Then with your knees bent, allow yourself to fall back away from the fence in a rowing action with your own weight and then draw yourself back towards the fence. If this is too much resistance you can do this on your knees or even do it with surgical tubing. This will help develop the large muscles of the back – the lats, biceps, posterior deltoids, as well as forearms and wrists. For the opposing muscles you can stand up, leaning against the rail with your feet a couple of feet away from it or a more upright push-up position. You should be able to do over 10 repetitions so you are developing endurance primarily and then strength. Initially more repetitions with less resistance is not only safer to avoid over straining, but will burn more calories. After these two exercises you should do a lat stretch by standing in a wider-than-shoulder stance and reaching over with your arm to the other side. From this position you can also press your elbows back to stretch the pectoral and anterior shoulder region as well as a triceps stretch.

For the major muscle groups of the legs you can do a high knee swinging the leg to the outside and forward carefully going to a side lunge. Go down into a lunge, press up, then step up together and repeat to the opposite side. This will exercise the large muscles of your legs include the glutes (butt) and groin. Care should be taken not to take too big a stride and not bend too deeply – never go past a 90 degree at the knee. Step up

and repeat to the other side. Again you are looking for over 10 repetitions on each leg but should be happy with less if you are not in shape. More reps can be done as you get more fit. After this you could do a groin stretch, hamstring stretch, quad stretch and calf stretch.

Another great major leg exercise is the squat; you should only go as far as you are comfortable, with a stance just slightly wider than your shoulders and with your knees never bent past 90 degrees. You should keep your back flat and upright. You are still looking to do over 10 reps unless this is too hard for you. If necessary, start with less and build it up over a couple weeks or more and do not go as deep in the squat. Later (after a few weeks of regular training three times a week) you can jump up from that position to develop a bit of power, which the horses like to do and is useful in jumping in two-point. Stretching the muscles of the legs in the lateral lunges once again is a good idea after the exercise.

Lastly we could do some balance and core exercises. Most equine facilities have a plastic barrel, box type pedestal, or if you have a big exercise ball you can practice sitting on your ischeals (two bony butt bones you find if you sat on the very edge of a chair). Practice balancing with your legs just slightly up or even practice doing leg crunches one side at a time. If you are quite strong you can do both legs together with opposite arms. This exercise should only be done if you can balance with the back flat. If you have trouble keeping your back flat, go back to the exercise of contracting your abdominals with your back flat against a wall or fence, as previously discussed – relaxing and repeating until your core becomes stronger.

These are suggestions for exercises that would improve your fitness in terms of flexibility and muscular strength. You can do fewer repetitions in one set of exercises if you are finding it is quite difficult. Later you can do more sets of each exercise, building it up progressively over a few weeks. Even your cardio can be improved in the walking and jogging, with a minimum of 15 minutes in your heart rate target zone. Heck you could even mix the large muscle endurance exercises and the walk/jog section and turn most of the exercises into cardio/endurance mix or add some cavaletti which would probably keep your

Enlightened Fitness, cont'd



Knee raise,
turning out to
side lunge



Balance on Ljibbe
twisting crunch



Balance on barrel, single
leg tuck crunch



Running light like
Passage with Ljibbe



Doing leg knee
raises and strides
with Hurrigan



Doing squat jumps with
Hurrigan

horse more enthused and you more fit. Again, if you want to influence your horse, make sure you focus on how effortless you can move while staying relaxed and not pounding your body. Many more exercises can be done, but people have a lack of time, so if you can focus on a minimum that develops the major muscle groups as well as riding fitness, you might be more inclined to give it whirl – especially if you are entertained by your horse interacting and improving with you – and they will! When we are relaxed, the horse knows. When we focus energy, the horse also recognizes this. When we move with the least amount of tension possible, the horse joins us, as there is room for them with little expectation. Sometimes you get more when you ask less. Let me know how it plays out.

Paul Dufresne is a writer, performer, trainer and clinician in Kelowna, BC, who educates in Natural Horsemanship; Classical Arts; Liberty and Circensic Dressage. He teaches people to understand horses, but more importantly how to tap into their relaxation reflexes in ways seldom seen in North America. In doing so, he is able to guide people in creative experiences where the human learns to be an effective, safe leader. The horse learns to be more emotionally secure and will respectfully follow while developing athleticism in a mutually courageous manner by having a deeper understanding of how they affect each other.