

Whoa- Riding to a stop

Part 1 'Coasting to a stop'

Delores Arste

Prior to beginning this exercise I would like to have in place the bend to a stop explained in passenger lesson. However, if you haven't done the passenger lesson, it can be built out of the ability to turn or preferably a give and a yield of the hip. In a turn towards the wall or rail there is a moment where there is a stop. In a green horse, this may or may not be accessible. It depends on the level of excitement in the environment and the clarity and precision in riding and the level of understanding of the horse.

Now, you can spend your time riding to a halt. A single cone will do for this. Ride towards the cone. When you reach the cone - stop riding. If enough time has been spent in passenger lesson the horse will feel that you have stopped riding and stop. C/T.

But, due to the conditions of the day, the excitement of the horse or tension that still exists in our bodies the horse may not stop at this point and the horse will continue past the cone. As he passes the cone, look back over your shoulder and slide down the rein to guide him in a fairly tight turn back towards the cone. By looking back at the cone, your body will be asking him to yield his hip. As soon as you turn, lower your energy again and stop riding. You'd like him to feel that you are not asking for forward. If at any time, he stops, allow him to do so and be still for a few moments. At this point, you may mark and reward him for standing still relaxed. And, remember "no unrequested forward" .He may still not stop even after passing the cone a second time. As soon as you are past the cone again, look back and slide down your single rein to turn towards the cone again. Continue to repeat the turns until the horse stops. In the

beginning, feel free to C/T anytime he stops. If he hasn't stopped at the cone, go ahead and start again after a short stop.

Your goal will be ultimately to stop at the cone by him reading the drop in your energy. So, if he does stop by the cone, C/T. If you have been clicking and treating the stops that did not occur at the cone, be sure to jackpot the stops at the cone. The cone will give you something to focus on in riding back towards it. And, riding back towards it will shift his weight onto the hindquarters to complete the turn. As you look over your shoulder to shift your weight and body position, use your rein as if it was attached to the cone and the cone is gently pulling him in towards it.

I do not attach a cue to the stop at this point. You are riding along and the horse discovers the dropping of your energy, and the turns encourage him to drop his energy. I could call this "coast to a stop". You are not asking for forward. But, neither are you asking for stop. The horse finds the stop in you and in himself. And, you click/treat him for the finding of it. There is precision to be learned in ourselves in riding this pattern. How long before the cone do we need to stop riding so that when he arrives at the cone his energy will have ceased. What is his "coast" time? Each horse will be different. Some horses will stop as soon as we stop riding. In other words, they may stop before we get to the cone. Others might roll right on by the cone. For each the goal is still to stop at the cone. Adjust and try again. For those that stopped before the cone, off you go again forward. For those that rolled on by, turn and ride back to the cone again. Eventually, you will find the balance point. I'll try. When you are riding along your body is engaged in the movement. You are following your horse or your horse is following you in the

dance. Your body tells him "we are going now". It can be and should be a shift from your center. I think one way to think about it to send your energy forward and out from your center. Your horse will, once he learns how, move forward in an effort to bring the energy you sent forward under his center. I've heard several images that work for me. One is to quietly march forward. Your body swings and moves in the rhythm of the horse. This comes from Peggy Cummings. Another is to sit in a seat with the thought that at any moment the starter gun will fire and you'll have to sprint out of that seat to win the prize. Credit to Linda Parelli. Feel how that set up feels in your body. Another is to send your energy along a ribbon of light in the direction you want to go. Credit to Susan Harris. So, given all of these forward thoughts the thought of stopping will have you relax your body posture. Try this in your chair as you read this. Get ready to sprint off the chair, then sit back and relax. Feel how your center lowers and your body relaxes. This is how to stop riding.

By teaching the stop in this way and by using the bends you will teach your horse to stop without a brace. If we close our hands without having first taught the horse to "coast to a stop" we run the risk of having the horse compress his spine as he hits our closed hands. And, even if the immediately rocks back and steps back onto his hindquarters to back up, he will have that moment of brace and compression that does him no good. If he has not yet learned to carry himself there will be a momentary hollowing of the back and his head may come up if ever so slightly. I think we should never close both hands at exactly the same time - ever. Because straight is the perfection of left and right. However subtle the horse, it must stop one foot at a time. Try this yourself. Walk along and then stop. You must stop one foot and then the other. And, to stop square, you must stop a foot and bring the other to a

stop by squaring it up to the other. Sharon or Alex could probably comment more on this. Our goal in first teaching the "coast to a stop" is to allow him to find his stop with his head, neck and back remaining in its normal comfortable position. Later as you refine these things, he will learn how to lift his back as he stops. Each time you turn back to the cone you are teaching him to round and use his hindquarters to stop.

What if I closed my hand on the outside rein at the same time as the exhale/relaxed sit-back method...is that cheating?

In riding back to the cone to a stop, yes this is cheating. You are trying too hard to "get the stop". When I first learned this from Alex, I found it just impossible to not try to stop at the cone but to allow the stop to come. If you continue to ride back to the cone the horse will stop eventually. Teaching a whoa is one of great patience. You can always get the stop via the one rein stop. It is the teaching of the horse to feel your intention to stop that takes more time. And, to teach him to stay with you. This is not a one lesson or one day thing. So, ride to the cone. Stop riding. If she doesn't stop at the cone which she probably won't, look back over your shoulder and turn back to the cone. Keep turning back to the cone until she "offers" you a stop. If you are not actively riding, she will eventually stop which you can then c/t. Then, keep trying to stop at the cone by riding back to it. C/jackpot.

I think that I read somewhere that you are supposed to close your legs and hands on the reins as you ride to a stop...any more thoughts on this?

And, yes, you are correct here if you are riding your horse up into to a stop. When you do this you are actively "asking" for the stop. More on this in "whoa part 2". Be patient. This post is coming. The

words are having trouble coming out. When you do this you are actively "asking" for the stop. This is different than the cone exercise of riding back to a stop. In order to separate the two let's think of the first post or cone exercise as "coasting to a stop".

In a lot of riding its hard to "let go" to stop trying to influence our horse and let the horse "feel" us and offer to us what he feels. Yet this is what teaches him responsibility. It's what gives him the ability to stop or slow down if he feels us get unbalanced.