

I personally feel that lungeing is a technique that is invaluable in the training of the horse. It is the pre-cursor to the double-lunge, work in-hand and the ridden work. I therefore use this quite extensively with any age or ability of horse.

Lungeing is a technique used for training or exercising the horse from the ground. It can also be used to aid in the training of the rider via lunge lessons. This technique is very effective and is useful for anyone at any level. It is an art and will only be perfected with practice, but the rewards that are to be gained can be very beneficial.

The principle is that the trainer stands on the ground and the horse arcs a circle around him on the end of a lunge line or rein. From this basic principle a multitude of directions can be taken from simple movements around the school, to teaching people on the lunge, to continue onto working the horse with two reins.

The Reasons for Lungeing:

- i. For exercise and/or stretching.
- ii. For the trainer to observe for himself the progress the horse is making.
- iii. It is used to begin a horse's training i.e. in the breaking in process.
- iv. It can be used to increase horses' fitness, suppleness and muscle tone.
- v. Lungeing can be used to help a horse start to jump.
- vi. It can be used to start a beginner rider or give a more advanced lesson.
- vii. It is a good way to build a rapport with your horse which is so vital for good work to follow.
- viii. It can be a fore runner to long reining and to the teaching of more advanced movements e.g. piaffe.

The Equipment needed for Lungeing:

This will vary according to which type of lungeing that you will be doing. The following, however, is the basic list of all the tack that you will need.

- i. Bridle - if the reins are to be left on then they must be twisted up safely in the throat-lash. The noseband should be removed.
- ii. A saddle or a lunge roller - when using a saddle the stirrup leathers should be wrapped around the stirrup to prevent them from slipping down whilst lungeing.
- iii. Brushing and over-reach boots - especially for the young horse or for a horse that you do not know. These are essential to avoid injury.
- iv. Lunge cavesson - this is fitted over the top of the bridle with the two buckles secured behind the cheek bones. The cavesson must be attached quite firmly as one of the causes of problems on the lunge is that if the horse pulls on the lunge line the cavesson slips round the head and goes into the eye on the outside of the circle.
- v. Side reins - these should have a buckle at one end and a sprung clip at the other.
- vi. Lunge line or rein - This should be at least 10m or 33 feet long. They come in a variety of different materials i.e. webbing, nylon or rope.
- vii. Lunge whip.

Equipment for the trainer:

The following are essential for anyone that intends to lunge.

- Hard hat
- Gloves
- Protective footwear

Location:

This will very much depend upon the facilities that there are at the yard where you have your horse. One idea is to have a lungeing ring i.e. an arena in the shape of a 20m circle with a good fence. This idea has many benefits. The first being that when you are starting to break in a young horse the last thing you

want to do is to start the lungeing process in a big field because you might have the idea that the horse will be going around you in a nice circle but nobody has told the horse this. The lunge ring obviously prevents the horse from towing you into the sunset but just as importantly it will help you maintain a light contact on the lunge rein and also by refraining from having to argue with the horse to keep it onto the circle you are promoting a stress free work environment so the horse will be more likely to offer the same work the following day. The negative point to a lunge arena is that the horse starts to rely on the fence and when you try to ride elsewhere the horse might have the tendency to cling to the side of the arena.

The next best option is to lunge in an arena. Preferably start in the corner so you have at least two sides to help you keep the horse onto the circle. As the horse starts to relax and understand that he moves around you and not that you will be following him then you can come more into the middle of the school.

Try not to lunge in big open spaces. This will invariably lead to the horse trying to drift away from you. It will possibly encourage you to have a much firmer feel along the rein than you should have.

The correct procedure for lungeing:

Before I start any horse lungeing I always make sure that he is not afraid of the lunge whip, especially if it is a young horse. The whip is an important schooling aid and at no point should the horse be anxious of it. I start by having the horse stand whilst I touch the whip on his shoulder. The horse should stand still and totally accept this action. I then proceed to touch and lay the whip over the whole of the horse's body, bringing the lash over the horses back, touching the stomach and generally confirming that the horse is relaxed when I touch any part of him with the whip.

Then you want to establish that the horse has some understanding of your voice commands. The best way to do this is lead the horse in hand. Practice halt to walk and walk to halt transitions, on both reins so that the horse is used to you working from both sides.

Key points:

- i. It is not so much what you say but it is the tone in which you say it. In general for an upward transition you raise your voice at the end of your command and for the downward transition make the command long and slow.
- ii. When practising these transitions make sure that the horse is starting or stopping from your voice and not your body movement i.e. when you are in halt give the verbal command to walk on but do not physically move until the horse has, and the same for the halt transition. Therefore when you come to lunge and want to stand still the horse is used to responding to your voice and not your actual movements.
- iii. Once again, it is so easy for the trainer to be lead by the actions of the horse. I have had many comments to the effect that somebody's horse only lunges in this or that fashion. Try and remember the golden rule - do not change your aim to suit the horse; the horse must change his way to suit your aim.

Now you have the horse confidently and correctly leading in hand. The next step is to show the horse that he can be 'brave' and start to walk a little further away from you. It has possibly taken a while to teach your horse to come to you in the field or wherever and now you expect the horse to leave your side. One option here is to carry the lunge whip horizontally in front of you in such a manner that the handle of the whip is touching the horses shoulder. The horse is in theory confidently walking on by your side and so by the use of the whip you can guide the horse to walk a few steps further away from you. This you can continue to do until the horse is walking approximately 3 - 5 metres away from you. You are now ready to start lunging your horse.

Key point :

When you start to lunge your horse never step back away from him. Always invite the horse to move away from you. Quite a few people get into the scenario of trying to commence lunging but because they step back the horse follows them in and they end up giving up or worse still chasing the horse away from them with the whip and the horse runs away. Just stand your ground and invite the horse to step away from you out onto the lunge circle.

So now you should have started your horse lunging. The correct stance for

how to lunge is very important. The idea is that a triangle should be formed between the horse, the lunge line and the lunge whip.



The horse makes the base of the triangle, the lunge line is one long side and the whip is the other. If you move more in front of the horse then there is a possibility that the horse will stop and turn in on you. By standing a little more level with the quarters you will be in more of a driving position to help encourage the lazier equine to proceed more forwards. Always keep the whip up and pointing towards the tail at the same height as you are carrying the lunge line, this aid replaces your leg aid when you ride. I think of when I am riding and have the elbows bent at right angles - this helps keep the shoulders relaxed and the line/whip at the same height. Once you have started and the triangle is formed, **STAND STILL**. So many people start problems by moving around.

The horse never gets to arc a correct circle and will possibly learn to lean on the person lunging and try to pull away to a bigger circle. Also if the horse will not go forwards as he should be careful how you step nearer him. If you move towards him without shortening the lunge line then he will simply move further away from you, nothing has changed. If the horse is being lazy, shorten the lunge line as you move nearer to him such that the horse stays on the original size of circle, you move with him and wake him up, trying to move back to your centre point as soon as you can. The next major point of view is that the horse must comply with the trainers request. This is not only for the correct technical work but also for safety reasons. What I mean here is that the horse should now be expected to work or to be exercised. You must exert a positive body language or you might find that the horse decides when it will trot or break to walk etc. Be in control and be assertive, this does not mean be rough or 'whip happy' but simply when you ask the horse a question make sure that you get the right response.

So by this point you should have a horse that will confidently walk in hand next to you. He should quietly walk out away from you on to the lunge circle. He will be attentive to your voice aids and will not be nervous of the lunge whip. You are now ready to gain the best possible results from the art of lungeing. From here there are various options. This will probably depend upon why you are lungeing, whether it is for exercise or for work. Transitions are always a good starting point.

Start with the trot to walk and through to trot transitions. Pay attention to what the horse is offering. The first point is that when you ask for the transition you do actually get a response. Again, do not change your technique but just have the patience to keep repeating the exercise until you get the desired response. On the more technical side look at the quality of the gaits in between the transitions. The walk should be purposeful without rushing, have a clear 4 time beat and the horse should be over tracking. The trot should be tracking up with a clear 2 time beat. Both paces should be giving you the impression that the horse is moving forwards in a workman like fashion. You should not be having to remind your horse every step of the way to go forwards, once you achieve the pace you want the horse should learn to maintain it. When you then ask for a walk to trot transition, the horse should move crisply up into the trot without raising the head and neck. Look at the length of stride that the horse first offers. Normally the horse will take a short stride and gradually build up to the trot that you want, (look at the footfall to ascertain whether this is happening). In this case the horse is under-utilising the hind quarters, try and encourage the horse to make the first stride of trot the same as the second and third and so on. This will mean that the horse is pushing himself more through the transition. With regards to the trot to walk transition the horse will probably try to take shorter steps leading up to the point that they change the trot sequence for the walk sequence. This means that they are not carrying the weight of their body onto the hindlegs through the moment of transition and so cannot push properly into the walk. Take time to observe and repeat these transitions to achieve these aims and you will find that you can commence to encourage your horse to start to use the hindlegs a little more.

Side reins.

When the horse is being lunged for exercise side reins are not necessarily needed. With the emphasis being more on working the horse to improvement on the lunge then side reins can play a beneficial role, when used correctly. There are three main types:

- i. Complete leather
- ii. Leather with a rubber ring insert
- iii. Leather or webbing with an elastic insert

I personally prefer the type with the rubber ring insert. The complete leather variety have no give in them and so the horse can learn to set against them. The elastic insert type encourage the horse to 'bounce' on the contact and will then try to bounce on the riders hands when they are carrying the reins.

Key point :

The most important point to remember when using side reins is that their job is to place a contact that the horse is encouraged to work into, they should never restrict or fix a horses outline.

People always ask the question "how tight should I fix the side reins?" The answer to this very much depends upon the level of the horses training. The concept with all of our work is that the horse is encouraged to move forwards and seek the riders contact. Then and only then can the whole of the top line of the horse stretch out and the full extent of the movement of the horse be utilised.



Too often a horse goes with very short, choppy strides with no flexibility through the back or hind legs and this is because the horse was pulled in at the front and then sent forwards - it does not work. When starting a young or novice horse off the idea is that they are taught to look for the contact, so the side reins are adjusted such the horse moves with the nose in front of the vertical line. The more established the horse the nearer the nose can come to the vertical.

Key point:

During the early stages of training I try to get riders to think more along the line of working the horse to the bit as opposed to working on the bit. The emphasis being more on placing the head and neck out in front of the horse and working the back end forwards to the front end.

Once the side reins are attached carry on lunging. Work through more transitions and maybe vary the size of the circle. You are looking for the horse to stretch out to the contact. If in the first instance the horse just goes around with the head up in the air or backs off the side reins try to gently feel along the lunge line so that the horse looks a little to the inside and immediately back this up, almost simultaneously, with a whip aid. This should encourage the horse to give to you. Be careful not to exaggerate the flex to the inside or the horse will just learn to swing the quarters out.

When this work is established your horse should be more attentive and obedient, supple, forward going and should have started to use the hind legs. You should notice a difference in the way that the horse goes for you when you ride your horse.

