

## **Proper Longeing of Horses**

Our topics for this week are:

- **Advantages and purposes of longeing horses**
- **Free and long line longeing**
- **Common longeing mistakes**

Longeing is from the Latin word *longa* meaning “lengthen”. It is often pronounced as lunging which is incorrect.

Longeing is an exercise that helps a horse stretch out and expend initial excess energy, “freshness”, before riding or working with the horse. Longeing a horse aids in assessing a horse’s attitude of the day. It is also training to respond to handler’s body language and voice commands. Other reasons for longeing include examination for lameness, physical rehabilitation, and warming up exercise. Longeing should not be used to physically exhaust the horse. Splint boots, brushing boots, or leg wraps should be used on horses when they are longed to protect their legs during sudden turns.

Longeing can be done as free longeing in a round pen, or long-line longeing on a 25-30 ft lead line. Short lines of 16 ft are safer for either handlers or horses that do not have much experience in longeing. Halters or a longeing cavesson can be used to attach a long line to. However, attaching to rings on the side of a cavesson will prevent the option of having the horse change directions without reattachment of the long line. This is undesirable. Only midline rings should be used. It is also preferable to use a longe line without a metal clip as these will tap the horse’s face or bump its jaw during longeing distracting or irritating it. Tying a longe line with a double sheetbend is better. Longeing should not be performed for more than 20 minutes, and should be less than 20 minutes, if the horse is under 3-years-old.

Round pens for free longeing should be 40-50 ft in diameter. If used for mounted training, round pens should be at least 60 ft in diameter. The pen gate should only open to the inside and abut the post gate to prevent it from accidentally opening if the horse bumps it. Solid walls, 6 to 8 ft high that slant outward are much safer for the horse than modular steel pipe pens. Solid walls also eliminate visual distractions during training. However, because of all the openings between horizontal rails, modular steel pipe pens facilitate emergency escapes by the handler if attacked by an dominance aggressive horse. Horses should be allowed 20 minutes alone in a round pen to acclimate to the surroundings before free longeing begins.

When line longeing, the handler should point the direction for the horse to go with the hand holding the lead line and reinforce command by raising a whip or flag on a stick in the other hand. To move the horse to the handler's left (counter clockwise), the lead line is held in the left hand, the left hand is raised to the 10 o'clock position, while a whip or flag is held in the right hand. If the horse is reluctant to move, the handler should raise the whip or flag with his right hand. If this is insufficient to get the horse to move, the handler can escalate the pressure to move by slapping the whip on the ground. The whip is also used to psychologically push the horse away from the handler if it gets too close while circling by pointing toward the horse's near shoulder. The lead line and whip must be switched if the direction of movement is changed to the handler's right (counter clockwise circles).

The handler must be careful to avoid coiling the lead line around his hand or arm or letting it get wrapped around one of his legs. The handler's eyes should always be on the horse, focused on its near shoulder. Talking with observers or others on a cellphone should not occur while longeing. Only verbal commands should be given to the horse. Longeing should not be done in an arena with dogs or children present and not with others riding horses.

Longeing should begin slow at a walk, eventually a trot, and finally a lope. When the horse has calmly executed each gait in both directions, it should be asked to often change pace and directions. An advanced longeing technique is to gradually shorten and lengthen the longe line to slowly have the horse spiral in and out, bending more and then to slowly straightening out as it goes around the handler. When free longeing a horse, cutting horse trainers prefer to have the horse turn its head toward the fence and pivot more sharply when turning. Most other trainers prefer the horse to turn toward the handler when turning rather than turning its rump toward a handler.

After the horse has performed well, it should be stopped and allowed to relax. The horse should never be allowed to run out of air from exertion or excitement as this can result in horse panicking, becoming uncoordinated, or acting resentful. The horse should turn toward the handler during rest but not approach the handler unless invited. If uninvited movement occurs that could invade the handler's personal space without invitation, the horse should be stopped and backed up.

When longeing a horse in a regular halter, a change in the horse's direction just requires a switch in the hands in holding the lead line and whip while simultaneously stepping ahead to the horse's shoulder and slightly backward. When the horse changes directions in a fluid movement without heightened excitement, its attitude indicates a safer mental state to be ridden and that continuing to longe is unnecessary.

### **Long Lines**

Long lines or long reins are 2 lines more than 8 ft long that run from a bridle through rings in a surcingle around the horse's chest or through stirrups on a western saddle. They are first used with a horse in a round pen. The handler walks a safe distance behind the horse and directs its movements with the long lines. Long lines are used in preparing horses to go under saddle, i.e., be ridden, with proper responses to rein pressure. They are also used in the training of horses to pull carts or wagons and to perform tricks. The Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria uses long lines managed by a handler while assisted by a second handler with a whip to train their famous Lipizzan stallions.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Longeing permits mild exercise and stress relief, examination for lameness, assessment of a horse's attitude, and a means of rehabilitation.**
- 2. While longeing a horse, all distractions should be prevented or avoided, such as dogs, children, cell phones, conversations with observers, and nearby horseback riders.**
- 3. How a horse being longed acts when asked to stop and change directions is the best indicator of its mental readiness to be ridden.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 250 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.