

HORSE CONDITIONING- THE BIG PICTURE



**Please keep in mind that we all (or most of us) come with a lot of different techniques and training tools when it comes to horses. Our goal today is to share with you what works for us and why. Hopefully you leave with useful knowledge and a curiosity to learn more about equine conditioning.*

Horse Conditioning: So easy a volunteer can do it!! There's a lot to unpack in that statement....

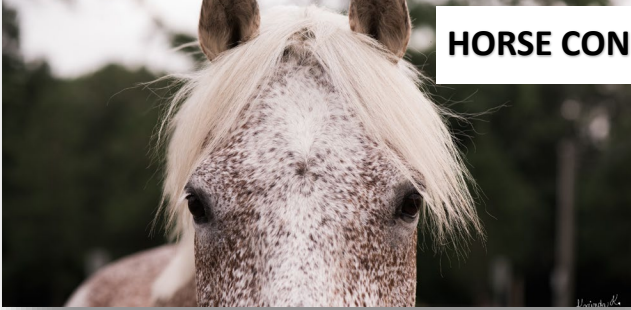
- First, I want to say that the person who originally submitted this topic was unable to join us at the conference, so we were asked to give the presentation.
- With that said, it's important for us to share our thoughts about the topic and why it's content has been adjusted
- Volunteers can be extremely valuable in the conditioning process, with the proper
 - Knowledge
 - Training
 - Desire to learn about equine conditioning

Horses are the backbone of what we do and without them it wouldn't be possible to offer these services. It's our job to keep them as healthy and happy as possible so they can do their best job.

Today we will talk about

- What is the definition of conditioning & why is important
- How it compares to human conditioning/training
- What we look for in a horse so we know what they need to be successful
- Who can you reach out to for help (who's part of your team)
- How to incorporate your volunteers with help with conditioning

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DEFINE CONDITIONING

Physical conditioning refers to the development of physical fitness through the adaptation of the body and its various systems to an exercise program

Mental/Emotional conditioning is a process of training your mind to modify your thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs to accept thinking patterns, tendencies and/or mental states to optimize positive thinking and ultimately optimize your performance. special conditioning for the tough job of therapeutic riding to avoid shut down/burnout

Equine conditioning the equine athlete involves consideration of the event in which the horse will be competing, the level of competition that you expect the horse to achieve, the time you have in which to condition the horse, and the horse's previous conditioning for the event.

Part 1

ASSESSING YOUR EQUINE

- Watch equine move at the walk in a straight line
 - Watch from each side, watch from back, watch from the front
 - Ask equine to cross under with each hind leg
 - Ask equine to back up
 - Ask equine to trot in hand and or put on lunge line (if equine is trained to do so)
 - Just because a horse moves in a certain way doesn't mean it's a bad horse or not fit for the job, its just gives us info that we need in order do what is best for it

PHYSICAL CONDITIONING

- We can all agree that a horse needs to be in good physical condition in order to have the most impact and benefit on our riders

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- A horse that can carry itself has more rhythm, impulsion, balance
- Lunge line - variety of ways this can be used ie place ground poles down, circle in/out, move your horse around the arena/make different shapes with it
- Mounted schooling
 - Does your center allow you to take lessons on their horses?
 - Work with a professional trainer that can see things on the ground you may not be able to feel (give a recent lesson example about the slight lift in my chest during canter work). Ride a variety of horses with the trainer because your center has a variety of horses with individual needs (half halt timing on a pony is much different than a qh)
 - Important to have well fitting tack for not only schooling but your riders
- Stretching (demonstrate on provided equine, emphasize how these things engage the core)
 - Forelimb stretches
 - Hind limb stretches
 - Carrot stretches
- Where does the volunteer come into play with this?
 - Depends on the volunteers and their level of horsemanship/experience
 - Can definitely help with stretching with fairly minimal experience/proper training
 - Lunging/mounted schooling: rider needs to have quiet hands, balanced seat that communicates properly, etc., we are very selective

Part 2

HORSE/HUMAN SIMILARITIES IN TRAINING

Many parallels to marathon training that incorporate both the physical and mental conditioning process.

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I use marathon training to strengthen me to work with horses, and vice versa work with horses to crosstrain for marathon running!

- Not exactly what one's first choice would be to do for "fun" ...

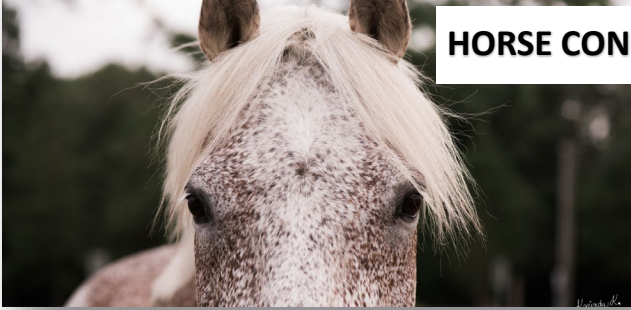
Same for horses- being ridden is not on their list of priorities...Especially by a strait line thinking predator: the human! We must make ourselves trustworthy enough, and the exercise interesting enough to convince them its a good idea to enter into a working relationship with us!

- A disciplined process that calls for consistency and variety- goals and exercises to help stay motivated and interested for the long haul- same for horses and TR

examples:

- the first mile is the toughest, in training and on race day- Brain is not yet engaged in the rhythm that brings on relaxation- need space and time
 - *grooming with purpose, calm energy and rhythm, mild stretching, walk/trot in hand, exposure to the props we use, helping them be curious about things, stimulating their thinking brain to make choices.*
 - *That is also where more successful connection happens, for both humans and equines*
- same for horses in TR- when start working whether in hand or lungeing, don't usually get immediate cooperation! Allow space and time- It takes process time to be aware and settle into the rhythm it takes to promote migrating from anxious primal seeking brain to the thinking part higher functioning part of the brain= it better regulates emotional, mental and physical elements at a higher level.
- variety in marathon training as in horse training and can be done in hand/on the lunge line/mounted!
 1. shorter longer time and distances/workout-physical
 2. intervals-varying speed-physical and mental ie: walk/trot
 3. varying terrain (hills!)-physical
 4. pushing thresholds- improve performance-physical and mental- training of the mindset. Developing resilience to push through when the going gets tough.
 5. crosstraining- physical and mental. Imagination. Tasks that prepare in different ways than the actual activity. ie: easy days/hard days (blow their mind when we don't ask much-reward the

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slightest try), working with props/toys we use in class. seek and touch. Liberty in round pen. etc.

6. Keep an element of surprise to keep the brain thinking actively.

1.especially with the mental aspect, initiating the experience of moving them rhythmically from their primal seeking/reacting right brain to their higher thinking left brain, giving the horse a variety of things to focus on, etc.

7.(example: acclimating Sunny to the water balloon game rather than a lunge in side reins)

“Familiarity breeds contempt.”

- A marathon is 20% physical- 80% mental strength- so is TR!
 - 26.2 miles is only actually run on race day. Only one 18-20 miles training run is the max: avoid burnout and injury from the repetitious nature of running. Same with TR!
- Create interesting smaller challenges- ie: I will sprint for 1 block. horse: trot from point A to point B
- Break up each mile differently- ie:
 - 1st .25 mile slow/ .50mile marathon desired pace/last .25 threshold sprint. Repeat or change the numbers. for Horses: in hand or ride-trot 5 strides walk 5/ change to 5/10 or whatever number. Sit trot for 5, post for 10, etc.
- Keep changing it

Part 3 Wrap Up

CREATE A TEAM OF SUPPORT

- Feed representatives
 - We work closely with Nutrena
- Universities/schools
- Veterinarians
 - Find a sports medicine focused vet that has a focus on lameness evaluations

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- Websites/blogs/social media
 - Dressage today, TRT Method, Horse Network, How To Dressage
- Farrier
 - Have your farrier watch your horse move periodically to assess how they are landing and placing each foot
- Trainers, peers in the equine industry
 - Always being open to try new methods to see what works for the horse as an individual