

Keep Your Horse from Getting Bored in the Arena

By Terri Jordan · The Natural Gait

Wintertime is just around the corner. Here are some exercises and suggestions to help keep you and your horse from going stagnant during the next several months.

FORGET THE SAME OLD/SAME OLD

Some riders travel only along the rail in the indoor arena. Adding a bit of variety to the routine can help ease boredom in your horse. With a bit of imaginative thinking, you will have a better chance of keeping your horse engaged. You don't necessarily need obstacles to accomplish this; although adding trot rails, barrels, poles, or small fences, all help to keep you AND your horse challenged and focused.

A forward, focused horse comes from the rider's aids (leg, seat, and hands). These aids together provide the "rail" that the horse needs to stay straight and focused.

Let's start with our legs, which play an important part in our riding, providing some of the "push" and "direction." We all have



TERRI JORDAN, a native of Wisconsin and resident of the Grafton, MA, area for 21 years, has moved back to the Midwest.

She is presenting her teachings for horse and rider based on **Getting Back to Basics**. These teachings are designed to help owners understand

their horses, based on where the horse is at in his foundation development.

For the past 16 years, Terri's desire to become a better horseman, based on how the horse thinks, has sent her all over the U.S. searching for a way to communicate with horses in a way they understand. This drive has had her studying intensely with some of the best horsemen who base their principles of training on how the horse thinks, feels and responds to training. She has learned and shares knowledge about Foundation "for" the horse. Her intention is to teach people to train their own horses through an understanding of horse psychology.

Terri's development of horsemanship skills came largely from initial challenges she had with her own horse, a gelding named "Journey."

"I didn't understand him and it was a continual battle to be around him. I had to make a decision to continue this anxiety- and fear-based relationship or to make a change! My passion for horses led me on a search for what I was missing in my horsemanship skills and my relationship with horses in general. I'd spent 20 years learning WHAT NOT TO DO with horses. And then I made the decision 16 years ago to figure out how to be WITH them!"

Today, Terri and Journey have a relationship built on trust and respect for each other. Once a bucking, bolting, rearing 4-year-old gelding, Journey is now a reliable mount. Together, Terri and Journey put on demonstrations of understanding between horse and rider for anyone interested in learning a better way to be with horses.

Terri has a healthy respect for all disciplines. She has a particular interest in versatility training.

Please visit Terri's websites at www.tnghorsehappenings.com and www.terrijordan.info. You can purchase her E Book, entitled: "Lessons in Learning According to the Horse" at www.thenaturalgait.com. Click on the "Mercantile" link.

Terri resides at The Natural Gait in Harpers Ferry, IA, where she is available for private lessons, workshops & clinics based on foundation training.

heard, "Keep your heels down," but it is a natural tendency for some riders to push on their stirrups instead of letting the weight go into their heels. They end up pushing their legs out away from the horse instead of letting their legs rest on his sides.

Our hands hold the reins, helping to guide the horse in the direction of travel, keep him straight, and create a bend.

For now, I would like to concentrate on the leg and rein aids for the exercises below.

Your leg placement on your horse's side determines which body part the horse will move. I will refer to this placement as "your foot." Are you moving the front end? Your foot placement will be closer to the cinch. Do you want the ribs to wrap around your leg in an arc as if on a circle? Your foot placement will be somewhere in the middle of the horse's body. Do you want to move the hindquarters over? Your foot placement will be farther back on the rib cage. You will need to adjust your foot placement on your horse's side until your horse gets the message; until he does what you are asking. Experiment and listen to your horse.

Ok, now you are more aware of your legs and how to use them. You understand that the true "rail" is between your reins, your seat, and your legs, and is not the wall of the arena.

ARENA EXERCISES

To keep your horse alert, interested, and participating in the arena, versus just going through the motions, we are going to ride circles, diamonds and squares. For instance, a circle can be ridden large, small, or spiraled in and out. Squares consist of straight lines and corners or turns. You can perform these turns using the front

continued on page 9

An advertisement for The Natural Gait. At the top, it says "Do something different for the holidays. Enjoy Thanksgiving or Christmas in a cozy cabin at The Natural Gait." Below this is an image of a rustic log cabin. To the right of the cabin, it lists "Lodging Available - Log Cabins, Bunkrooms, Camping." and "Catering and Facility for Group and/or Holiday parties." Below the cabin image, it says "A holiday memory you and your family will not forget." In the center, there is a logo for "TNG Mercantile" with the website "TNGmercantile.com". Below the logo, it says "We offer a wonderful collection of unique gifts." and lists "Jewelry, Books (children, horse, nature), Home and Outdoor Decor, TNG Gift Certificates and so much more...". To the right of the logo, there is a small image of a book titled "Lessons in Learning According to the Horse" by Terri Jordan, with the subtitle "On-site horse trainer at The Natural Gait". At the bottom right, there is a logo for "THE NATURAL GAIT" with an image of a horse and rider. Below this logo, it says "You'll want to stay forever! NEAR MARQUETTE, IA (877) 775-2208 ntrigait@acegroup.cc". At the bottom left, it says "Call for event and lodging reservations or visit our website for more information!" and "TheNaturalGait.com • TNGhorsehappenings.com". There is also a Facebook icon at the bottom left.

“No More Bored Horses;” (Continued from page 7)

end and the hind end in your corners. Your horse can make a turn performing a turn on the haunches or a turn on the forehand, even at the trot! Diamonds come after your circles and squares feel good. Don't rush your horse. A diamond is a straight line with the corner becoming a hairpin turn. Look behind you, over your shoulder, keep your chin up and bring your horse with you.

A couple of simple rules to keep in mind:

- o Keep your horse soft; if he gets upset or braces, go back to the gait or pattern in which he was soft.

- o These exercises are performed at walk and trot in both directions.
- o PLEASE do not canter until trot is soft and relaxed.
- o Change it up - be imaginative. Ride a circle, then ride a square, then change the size of your circle and square.
- o Change the locations in the arena that you are riding these patterns.
- o DON'T DRILL ANY ONE PATTERN.
- o ONLY when your horse is soft, willing and quiet should you move on to the next gait or pattern.

- o Don't forget to use your legs.

By using these patterns, your horse will become more in tune with you. He will put more effort into the riding session because it will engage his mind, and you will feel him liven up, becoming more confident and willing because it is fun for him, too!

REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN!!

If you go at this with a "gotta git'er done" attitude, you AND your horse will soon become blase' and bored. But if you make winter arena riding challenging and fun, spring will be here before you know it!