

ADVANCED LUNGING TECHNIQUES

Advanced Lunging Techniques and Suggestions

by Joe Fargis

Preparation for Advanced Lunging

Lunging should be done not to tire the horse but to communicate with him and to encourage obedience. Exceptions are for safety's sake if the horse cannot be turned out or if the horse is cold-backed. Lunging can also be a useful method of checking the horse for soundness unimpeded by a rider trotting both ways on a circle.

The lunging area should be enclosed by a fence or other boundary for safety's sake and to establish a point of reference for the circle. The area for lunging should be large enough so the horse can move forward in a comfortable circle. Small tight circles can be physically abusive.

Horses respond to the lungers' tone of voice and body language. Use a plain snaffle for lunging with an all-web lunge line. When the horse is relaxed and responsive on the lunge, the line can be hooked directly to the bit ring, but initially the lungers might want to put the line through the bit and over the horse's head for better control. All equipment should be neatly fastened, with nothing flapping. Bell boots are advisable.

Start with a loose, relaxed movement until the horse is warmed up. It might be helpful to review Lunging Techniques section of the TCP manual.

The Aids for Lunging

The whip represents the rider's leg, and the lunge line is the rein to the rider's hand. The voice and the position of the lunger on the circle are both important aids in lunging.

Use of specific words to communicate gait and speed are desirable: Walk, Trot, Canter, Slow, and Whoa, with the cues for slowing given in a soothing, quiet tone.

The Level of Competence of the Lunger and the Horse for Advanced Lunging

The lunger should be an educated, advanced-level horse person with experience riding on active contact and should have an idea of intermediate/advanced schooling objectives.

The horse should be schooled under tack to at least the intermediate level, and should be at least five or six years old. He should be mentally and physically stabilized on the lunge line and cooperative with the lunger. A careful evaluation of the horse's training needs should precede any advanced level lunging. On this level, an uneducated lunger with a trained horse or a young/uneducated horse pressed by advanced lunging techniques is a "razor in the hands of a monkey," and can produce an abusive or unsafe situation as well as risk permanent damage to the horse.

The humane treatment of the horse when lunging is the trainer's responsibility. Excessive lunging can cause pain to the horse and risk a long-term or permanent injury.

Reasons for Advanced Lunging

Correctly done, advanced lunging can be especially useful in training the advanced equitation horse and the advanced jumper. It can help the horse understand steady contact without the efforts of the rider.

Lunging for short periods at a trot can provide a good way to evaluate a horse's soundness, and, if done correctly, can be used to condition and stabilize a horse where turnout is not available. It can also be useful in reclaiming an upset older horse if the trainer starts the lunging at the beginning as with a young horse, i.e. teaches cooperation and mental and physical stability.

Lunging in Side Reins

1. Positioning the Side Reins: “Bit to Hip” is normally the rule. The side reins with an elastic piece should simulate the feel of the bit to the hand of the rider and should therefore normally be attached to the surcingle on a higher ring to simulate the position of the rider’s hands. If lunging in a saddle, the side reins should be attached higher rather than lower on the billets.
2. Adjusting the Side Reins:

The lunger should normally start with the side reins loose before gradually adjusting them shorter. It is a mistake to start with side reins too short. The horse must first be mentally and physically stabilized on the lunge without side reins or with loose side reins before beginning advanced lunging. The one exception to this rule may be a young frisky horse where no turnout is available. After the frisky horse is settled, begin to loosen the side reins before moving to serious contact work on the lunge. Adjustment of side reins requires good judgment on the part of the lunger.

Start and finish long until the horse is mentally and physically stabilized. A common error is to start and finish too low and too short. This will cause the horse to be bent at the crest of the neck and have the nose too close to the chest. The “too short and too low” adjustment can cause pain to the horse and risk a long-term or permanent injury. Keep in mind that the horse moves in a dynamic balance, as do other animals, with a constant loss and regaining of equilibrium forward. He does not move in a frozen frame as though in static balance.

The horse should reach for the plain snaffle bit when worked in correctly adjusted side reins. The full engagement of the hind leg moves the energy from the hind end to the neck and to the mouth.

Advanced Longitudinal and Lateral Lunging Exercises

1. Longitudinal Exercises: Start with stabilized transitions on a large circle: ordinary trot - short/slow trot - ordinary trot. Walk - halt, walk - trot, and trot - canter transitions can also be used.

Next, add transitions at the trot with more energy/impulse: ordinary trot - short/collected trot with impulse - ordinary trot. Then proceed, if appropriate, to the spiral in and out exercise.
2. Lateral Exercises (Spiral In and Out): The educated lunger and horse can develop the above transitions by making the lunging circle smaller when doing the short/collected trot for short periods and making it larger when returning to the ordinary trot for longer periods. Be sure to change direction frequently in addition to changing the size of the circle.

Lunging over Jumps

Lunging over jumps is not recommended, as it can end up pulling the horse's mouth. The horse tends to increase speed over the jump and wants to go straight afterward, and it is not easy to keep him on the circle without pulling. Lunging over rails or raised cavalletti are appropriate exercises.

Draw Reins and Chambons

Today, it is generally believed that lunging in draw reins or a chambon should be avoided. Many horses have been ruined by the inappropriate use of the chambon and draw reins. An educated trainer applying appropriate schooling techniques in progressive stages should not need to resort to lunging in this equipment. Side reins are preferred.

Long-Lining and Lunging the Rider

Long-lining can produce good results with a competent trainer. It is another way to connect the horse with the human and is useful in teaching going forward and halting.

Lunging a rider can be very helpful, as the rider only has to worry about his/her own position and balance.