



Longeing

Needs

It's often said that solid fundamentals are the building blocks to success. But sometimes in today's sport, the desire to quickly produce show-ring results means the fundamentals of unmounted horsemanship and horse training are overlooked, rushed or not properly executed.

Longeing is a perfect example.

A tool meant to provide a safe space for our equine partners to loosen up their bodies, relax their minds, learn forward motion or even allow them to play a little, has also become a way to simply tire a horse into submission.

Longeing can be a wonderful training tool for rider and horse if used in an appropriate manner with correct equipment and in a safe and secure location. It's also important for trainers to teach and enforce proper longeing techniques employed by their staff, both at home and at competitions.

The Basics and the Beginning

Shawn Thomas is passionate about starting and developing young horses. As a trainer at Spy Coast Farm's Young Horse Development Center in Lexington, Kentucky, he incorporates longeing into each horse's routine.

Born into the industry, Thomas has experience working with and around such legendary horsemen as Bobby Burke, Diana Dodge, Joe Fargis, Rodney Jenkins

A technique developed to train and connect to our equine partners has, over time, become a serious horse welfare topic.

By Louise Taylor

and Bill Steinkraus. He has also worked with a variety of breeds and disciplines, including Quarter Horses, Thoroughbreds, Hunters and Show Jumpers.

Proper technique and patience are Thomas' cornerstones when starting and developing a young horse.

"The biggest thing, I think, is time," said Thomas

of starting youngsters on the longe line. "[Having] the mental discipline to take the time to allow it to happen—that follows through into the riding part of it. It's a progression through everything."

Thomas uses longeing as a tool to teach obedience and voice commands. While longeing, he also carefully watches a horse's movement for balance and potential areas of weakness or crookedness. He considers longeing a precursor and a complement to mounted training. And while Thomas primarily focuses on young horses, his training techniques can be carried over to mature horses.

"I like the horses to be confident about listening to my voice and being calm," said Thomas. "Longeing isn't to wear them out. It's to let them get loosened up and get connected to the person on the ground, so that the connection travels to getting on their backs. It has nothing to do with wearing them out—it only has to do with connecting with them."

Once comfortable on the line and listening to Thomas, a horse's training progresses to complement training under



to Come Full Circle



TRICIA BOOKER

tack and sometimes even incorporates a rider while being longed.

“You can even start to maneuver them into feeling,” said Thomas. “That’s why the whip isn’t something that should be a weapon to chase them with, because if I want to extend out the longe whip and touch them where my leg is going to be, I can get them associated to that part of it on the ground.”

Knowing when to stop is also important, especially for young horses.

“Watching your horse is probably the most important part of it,” said Thomas. “Don’t push the horse past the physical part of it. One small step forward will benefit you the next day or the next time you do it.”

Under Control

While Thomas uses a round pen at Spy Coast to longe young horses, most often longeing takes place away from home, such as at a competition when horses have little or no turnout.

Arly Golombek, of Lake Worth, Florida, is a rider on the international show jumping circuit and vice chair of the USHJA Horse and Rider Advocates Committee. She longes her horses to keep them mentally and physically sound while competing in the United States and abroad.

“Horses are animals that are used to walking, trotting, grazing; they’re animals that move a lot,” said Golombek of equines in their natural state. “So I’ll jog my horses on the longe line sometimes even twice a day at the shows, just so I can get them out and moving a bit.”

When longeing a horse at a competition, Golombek focuses on relaxation and stretching. She also stresses the importance of teaching your horse to learn how



to walk, trot and canter obediently on the longe line, so he doesn’t associate being longed solely with play time.

“I prefer that the horses jog a slow trot, and then, as they stretch, I might push them to more of an open trot—the whole

“We’re longeing under control and for a purpose.

—Arly Golombek

time encouraging them really to relax,” said Golombek of her procedure. “I watch if they lick their lips (a sign of relaxation); I watch to see that they’re comfortable. Not to say that they don’t shake their heads and buck and play—I allow them to do it in a controlled manner, but I don’t tell them to do it. We’re longeing under

control and for a purpose. We’re not letting our horses blast out of control.”

Longeing on a small circle can stress a horse’s legs, muscles, joints and tendons. Ample space and safe footing are also important factors to prevent injury to a horse while on the longe line.

Trainer Katie Young agreed with Golombek and said the first consideration that anyone should make when longeing away from home is a proper environment. “Sometimes it’s hard to find good footing,” said Young, chair of the USHJA Horse and Rider Advocates Committee. “I would rather ride the horse if the horse is a bit fresh, but there’s no good footing.”

The area should be free from divots, holes, stones or anything else that could place excessive and additional stress on the horse’s legs.

Maria Biancone, a Fédération Equestre Internationale steward and Horse and Rider Advocates Committee member,



USHJA Emerging Athletes Program Stable Manger Anne Thornbury, left, teaches proper longeing techniques.

sensitive to soft tissue injury, because the outside leg has the longer load-bearing phase—and that tends to specifically bother the soft tissue structure, such as the suspensory ligament,” said Baus. “In general, you do increase torque on the joints of the front limb by longeing, primarily the lower joints. And the joints most affected would be the coffin joint and, secondarily, the fetlock joint and the knee.”

Education is Essential

While longeing is an excellent tool for training young horses and maintaining and enhancing the fitness of mature horses, the act of longeing has changed over time. More recently, longeing has become a commonly used tool to simply tire horses prior to showing them.

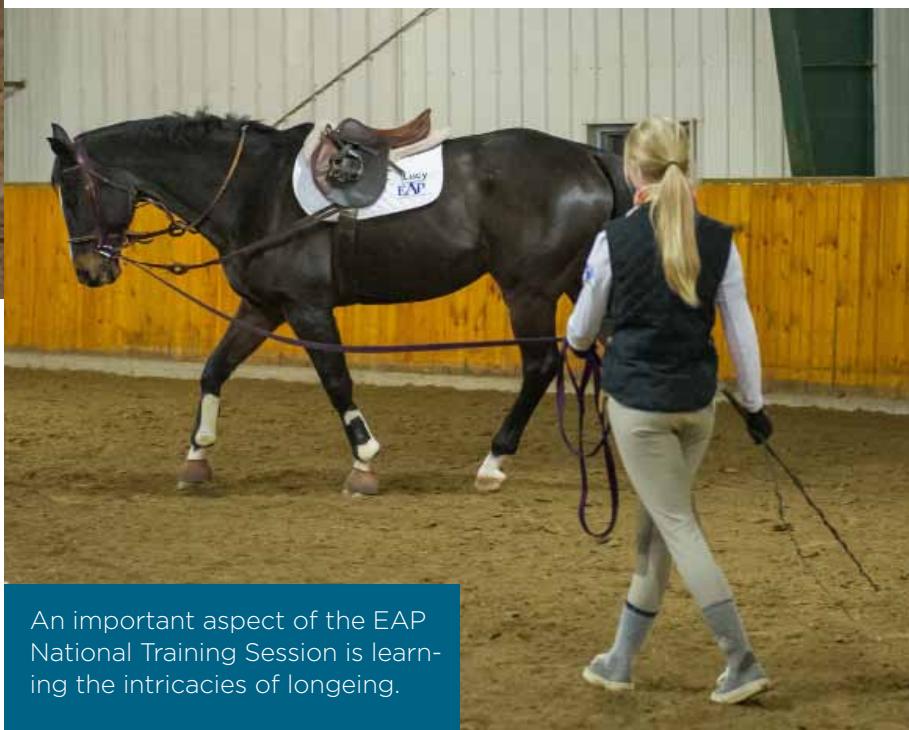
“As a steward, we get people who come up to us with videos of horses being longed poorly. Usually, we just go and

recommended asking the horse show steward or competition manager to drag longeing areas if the footing is in poor condition or overworked. Biancone, who hails from Roseland, New Jersey, noted that most competition managers should accommodate your request.

“The second consideration would be space,” said Young, who prefers the use of at least a 30-foot longe line. “Tight circles put a lot of stress and torque on joints and soft tissue.”

In assessing the stress on a horse’s joints, ligaments and tendons when longeing, Mark Baus, DVM, of Grand Prix Equine, a veterinary practice in Hawleyville, Connecticut, noted that the horse’s front legs are of primary concern. Excessive and improper longeing techniques are associated with injuries, and over time, wear and tear contributes to chronic unsoundness.

“The outside leg (on a circle) is more



An important aspect of the EAP National Training Session is learning the intricacies of longeing.

Baus sits on the United States Equestrian Federation Veterinary Committee, the USHJA Horse and Rider Advocates Committee, and is on the Board of Directors for the American Association of Equine Practitioners. He stressed that when longeing, trainers and their staff should use common sense and individualized attention based on each horse’s fitness and personality.

talk to the groom or talk to the trainer,” said Biancone, noting that some individuals have wanted to post videos to social media to call out the trainers for poor horsemanship.

“I think a lot of it is education,” said Biancone. “I think trainers need to send a horse out with someone who is qualified to longe. Many people aren’t educated or qualified to longe, but trainers tell them

PHOTOS BY TRICIA BOOKER

Shawn Thomas works with a young horse at Spy Coast Farm.



MATHEA KELLEY

‘go longe this horse for 30 minutes.’”

Teaching staff to longe a horse properly is just as important as longeing the horse itself, said Biancone. “It takes time, and it’s hard when there’s staff turnover—but I think trainers need to take responsibility for how their employees longe, and take the time,” she emphasized.

Golombek added, “We have our grooms and staff doing something that is as equally important as riding or jumping, because it’s a precursor to many things that come after it. So I do think it’s important that we give a lot of encouragement in a positive manner, because it’s a very positive tool.”

The topic of longeing comes up frequently during USHJA Horse and Rider Advocates Committee meetings. Education is clearly a critical step to ensuring the welfare of the horse during longeing. Therefore, the committee members hope to create educational materials in English and Spanish for USHJA members to utilize when teaching their staff members

Longeing is a training tool that can help you really get connected to your horse.

—Shawn Thomas

how to longe properly.

“A lot of people don’t know how to hold the line, or the whip [becomes] more of a weapon, as opposed to an extension,” said Thomas. “Start slow and be patient. And if you’ve never longed a horse before, then you should have a horseman or horsewoman there to assist you with starting out.”

As for Biancone, she encourages riders, owners and trainers to take responsibility for their own horses. “Don’t be in the dark about your horse ... speak up. If you feel strongly, say something or have a discussion with your trainer. But be aware

of what’s going on with your own animal and educate yourself.”

Baus added, “I think that we tend to longe horses excessively because we’re fearful they might do something [bad], rather than simply using common sense and dealing with that risk head-on.”

Building a Connection

Thomas, who found his passion was starting young horses rather than showing them, sees the benefits and results that longeing provides when done correctly.

“Longeing has a bad reputation because you see a lot of people out there just chasing horses around, and they’re just running. I wouldn’t call that longeing,” said Thomas. He believes that longeing needs to return to its roots and that people need to remember why it was created. “Longeing is a training tool that can help you really get connected to your horse and train your horse, as far as its balance, muscle development and moving correctly [are concerned].” 