

The Passenger Lesson Part 2; Refining the passenger lesson.

By Dolores Arste, 2004

In the initial stages of the passenger lesson, the goal is to simply install brakes and a gas pedal that work 100% of the time no matter what distraction or movie is playing outside you and your horse's bubble.

But, there is much more that can be accomplished. As Alex says, you never know what develops out of an exercise until you spend enough time with it. Due to Cadbury's explosive tendencies, I spent one heck of a lot of time with it. And, I still do.

Each and every time I get on a horse, I spend at least a few minutes in passenger lesson. Part of the value I learned from this lesson is that turning loose allows you and the horse to feel each other. I don't have a perfect seat, or a perfect body. I will never be able to ride like Bettina or Clinton Anderson. My legs are simply too short. But, horses can learn what you feel like when you ask for something. And, that's the goal. Turn loose and begin to feel each other. But, be sure to have installed the toolkit in yourself and your horse to stay safe. You will appreciate it and so will your horse.

If you are just starting passenger lesson and your horse feels hot or you nervous the bend to a stop can be just that. Bend that nose around and wait for the feet to stop. As you are panicking in your heart, you don't need to think of anything else. Your horse is probably feeling the same panic. Also, as you are riding along, feel free to hang onto mane, saddle neck rope whatever you have handy. You'll know you are beginning to relax when you begin to let go of your handle. Feel free to grab onto mane or saddle at any time. Allowing yourself this privilege is especially handy as you are trotting toward the wall and you do not know which way or when your horse will choose to turn. There are no set number of steps that are required. If your stomach jumps into your throat at one step, bend to a stop, click/treat. That's the reset and then off you go again.

Pretty soon, when you begin to panic, your horse will already be slowing down for you. This is because every time you felt panic, you bent him to a stop. He's now able to help you because he's now learned the feel of you and your needs. He'll be happy to help. I think they are happy with this new responsibility.

If you've been going along for a while and you are both relaxed, a funny thing will start to happen. You haven't clicked yet and you are still walking or trotting. Your horse will begin to experiment with offering you things that have been clicked before. He'll offer the things that have been most reinforced at other times such as head-down or flexing at the poll. At first you may be stunned and surprised when this happens. If you like what he offers, click it, stop treat and start over. But, do not start again unless YOU have asked for forward. And, after each and every time you stop, ask for the lateral flex.

At first when you bend, you may be bringing his head all the way around to his rib and locking your hand on your hip to get the stop. This is great for an emergency but not for performance. For a further explanation about flexing the neck, refer to Alex's *Step by Step* book. Unless it's an emergency, just as you are about to bend to a stop, sit and stop riding for a count of 1001 - 1004. If he stops before 1004, C/T he has just begun to "read" your body language. Now you can begin to refine the bends.

Before you leave the mounting block every time you get on, you will ask for a "give" on both side. If his feet have remained still you can refine the "give" you ask for. If his feet move, bend to a stop. Each and every time the feet move without being asked to go, bend to a stop. This may take many, many repetitions before you ever take your first step. Eventually, he may offer you head down in between each request to "give". I c/t this offering.

When I mention refining the "give", I am referring to John Lyons "give spots". I believe these are also in Alex's *Step by Step* book.

So, now there you are standing stock still and relaxed at the mounting block. You can now slide down the rein and ask for a refined give.

For Cadbury, who has done a lot of lateral work, I ask for a give all the way back through to the hindquarters. This means that his nose bends around, his poll rotates on the vertical, his neck bends in a nice bow shape,

his withers lift and his weight is shifted to his hindquarters. When he shifts his weight to his hindquarters they may move to square up. This is not forward movement. Be sure to notice the difference. Now this expectation is at home. If you are in a new and exciting environment, you may decide to relax this expectation. For example, at Equine Affaire in MA, Cad had no problem giving all the way through. But, at Equine Affair in OH, I could only get thru to the bow in the neck and perhaps a whither lift. After the demo, we got it all in the practice ring. So, you need to be adjustable on this. It's a matter of building trust.

Harvey is only 5 and has not done nearly as much lateral work. When I work with him on the ground, I ask for lateral work and a give all the way through. But, his balance is not such that I can ask for this level of deep bend under saddle. So, I accept and click for the nose and bow in the neck. I'll go back to work on the ground to get the poll. Then, it will carry over to the saddle.

Having done all this work without even leaving the mounting block, you can now begin to ask for the same level of refinement every time you slide down the rein. Remember as you work thru this pretty stuff that if lightening crashes or the wind howls, you may always fall back on bend to a stop – simply stop the feet. Keep the pretty work for experimenting with when all is going well and the horse and you are calm.

This work leads naturally into the “hot-walker” exercise. Because, now you can begin to ask for the give and for the feet to continue forward. Never loose site of “no unrequested forward”. He must never offer you a faster gait or a faster version of the same gait without your requesting it.

Depending on the level of you horse's training any or all of these passenger lesson refinements can be added at any time. So, if you've already got a great shoulder in bend, be sure to incorporate it when you ask for the nose and hip in the one-rein stop.

Don't worry if you don't have these things built in. You can start at any stage in the horse's training to build this “dance partner” like relationship. For a horse that is just being backed, you never need to leave the mounting block. For a baby, not yet backed, they can learn the work on the ground. You can just work on the “give” part. If you really get the “give” refined before

you ever leave the mounting block the first steps forward will be balanced and controlled. I have seen a baby foal, just weaned, take responsibility for keeping his lead rope centred on his back with float in the rope to the halter. As he experimented with the balancing of it he balanced himself. What a treat it will be to ride him the first time. If he lost the rope, it was quietly replaced for him.