

positivehorsemagic

foundation module

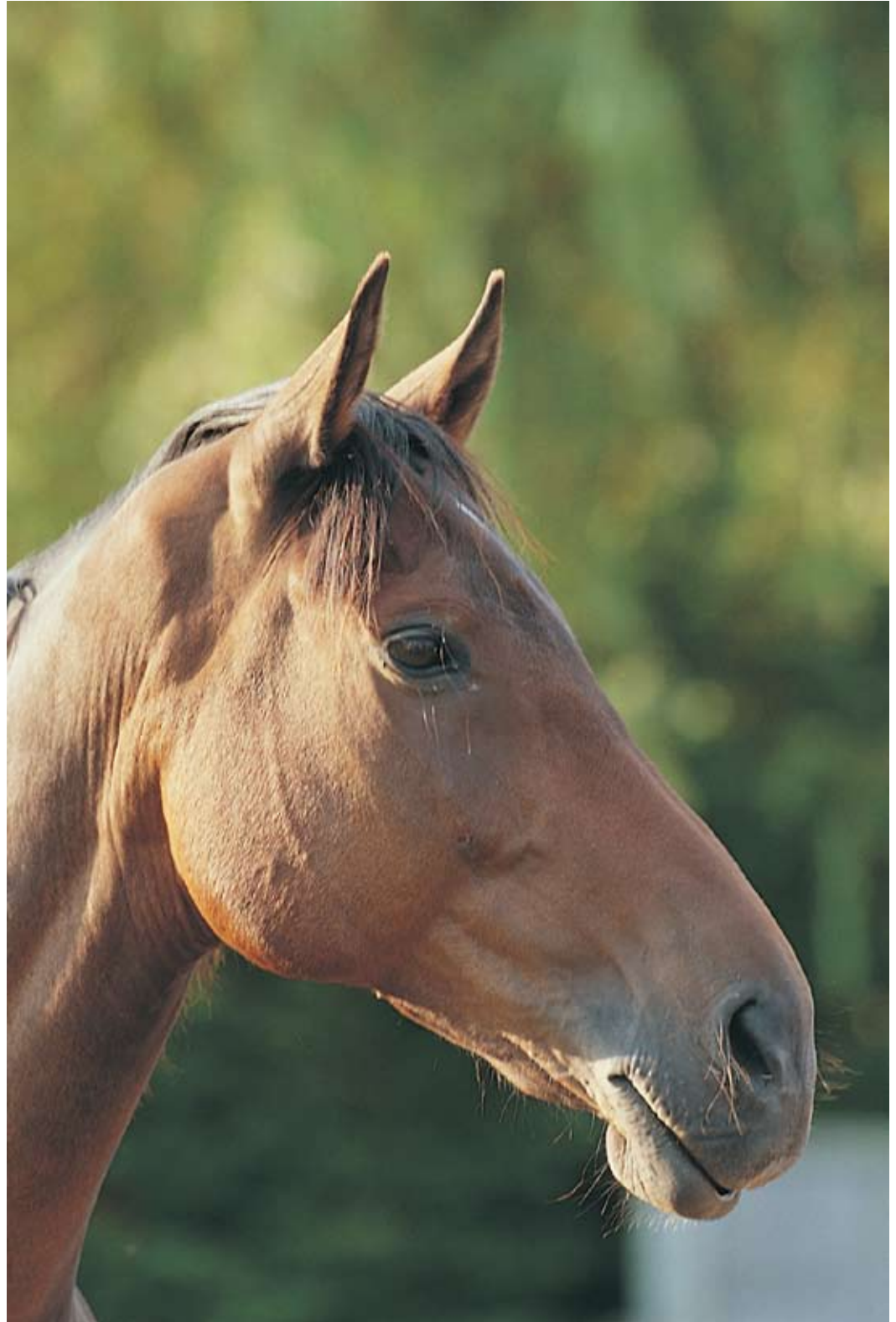


NATURAL
Animal
CENTRE

knowledge

action

compassion



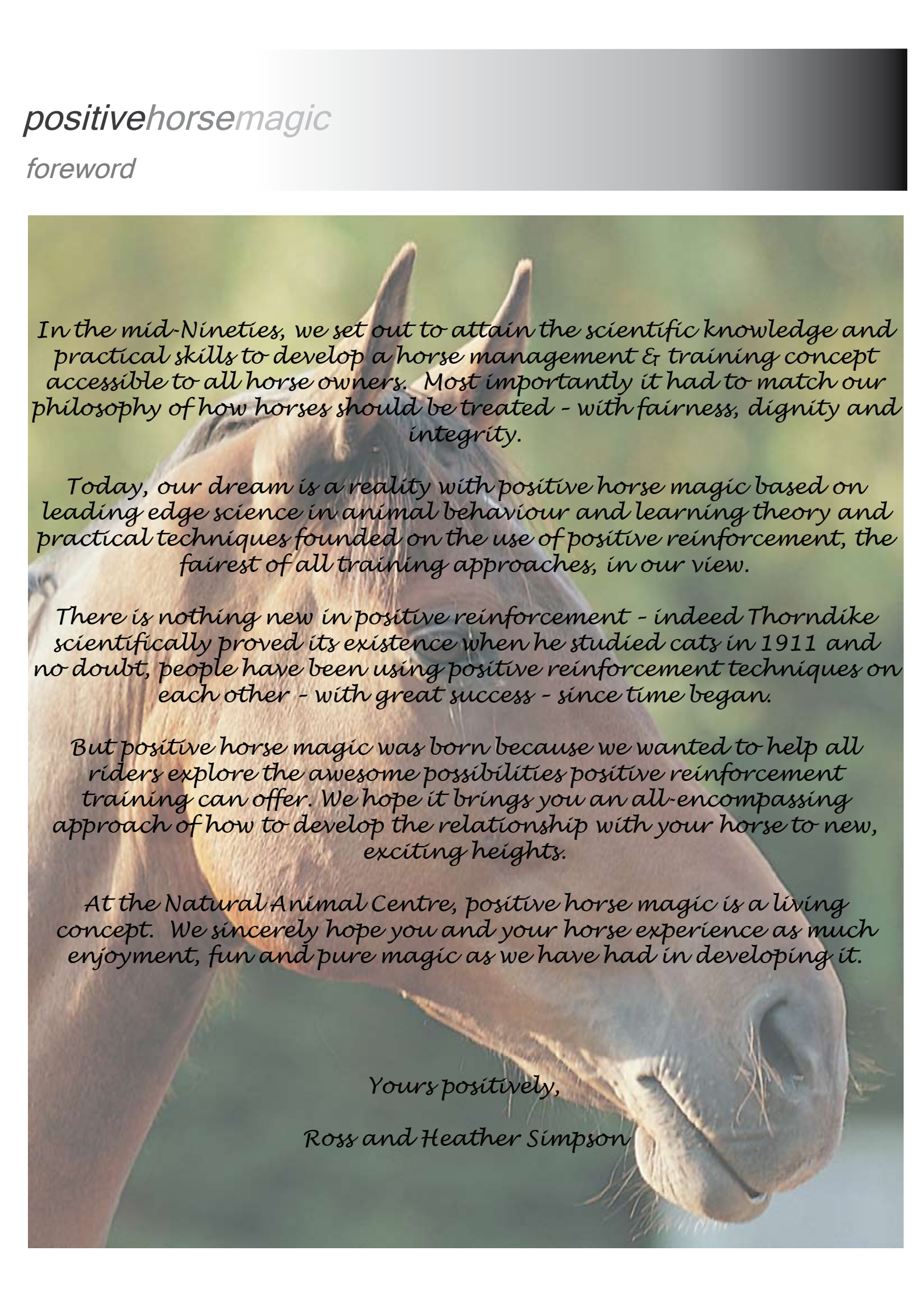
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foreword



In the mid-Nineties, we set out to attain the scientific knowledge and practical skills to develop a horse management & training concept accessible to all horse owners. Most importantly it had to match our philosophy of how horses should be treated - with fairness, dignity and integrity.

Today, our dream is a reality with positive horse magic based on leading edge science in animal behaviour and learning theory and practical techniques founded on the use of positive reinforcement, the fairest of all training approaches, in our view.

There is nothing new in positive reinforcement - indeed Thorndike scientifically proved its existence when he studied cats in 1911 and no doubt, people have been using positive reinforcement techniques on each other - with great success - since time began.

But positive horse magic was born because we wanted to help all riders explore the awesome possibilities positive reinforcement training can offer. We hope it brings you an all-encompassing approach of how to develop the relationship with your horse to new, exciting heights.

At the Natural Animal Centre, positive horse magic is a living concept. We sincerely hope you and your horse experience as much enjoyment, fun and pure magic as we have had in developing it.

Yours positively,

Ross and Heather Simpson

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calmness is the key to enhancing learning

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* ~ minimum suggested reading prior to starting the Training module

What is positive horse magic?

When you see the magical results dolphin and agility dog trainers produce, it is truly amazing that we as horse trainers have taken so long to catch on. Great people managers are also able to motivate people to new levels of enthusiasm. The secret of all this success is simple. behaviours that are wanted are rewarded and inappropriate or unwanted behaviours are interrupted or replaced.

Positive horse magic teaches you how to use positive reinforcement when you train your horse so that you too can attain the magic. The key difference is that the horse (like the dolphin) gets to enjoy each success rather “grin and bear” discomfort until he understands which behaviour you are trying to get him to perform.

To start, you will use clicker training but as you progress, you will move beyond the clicker to other forms of positive reinforcement such as using natural horse play patterns, learning how to pace rewards differently to create higher levels of enthusiasm . . . and much, much more! As you journey through the modules, you will progress to working without food rewards (both on the ground and in the saddle). You will follow a path that will cause your horse to become calmer and more responsive allowing you to develop his athletic talent sympathetically.

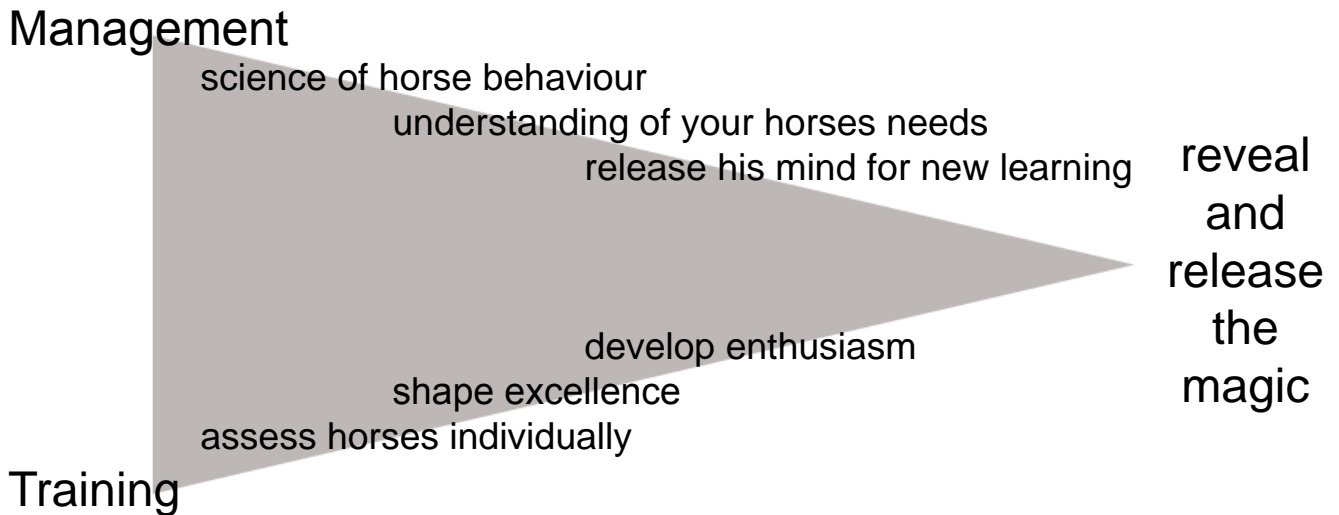
Positive reinforcement also allows you to focus on developing performance through fun. No journey ought to be without enjoyment. If at any time you find things slip off the positive path take a break to find out what is missing. Let your horse be your teacher in this respect; he will let you know if it has become a non-rewarding experience.

“You will follow a path that will cause your horse to become calmer and more responsive allowing you to develop his athletic talent sympathetically”

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gettingstarted

The two concepts of positive horse magic



Getting Started

Putting the theory before the horse

To help you become an adaptable and independent trainer, we offer you not just a set of techniques to master, but also the scientific logic of why they work. With an understanding of the 'why', you will learn how to adapt effectively to the many and varied situations you will face when training your horse.

The theory sections are first in the Module. Ideally, read them more than once before starting your training and they will come to mean more and more as you progress in both theory and practice.

Successful distance learning programmes depend on your ability to understand and adapt as your horse reacts. The better your understanding of the theory, the easier it will be for you to be flexible and hence successful.

The training concepts

At the very heart of the programme is the fact that calm horses learn more effectively than stressed ones. As a basic building block, calmness is a solid foundation to any and all training. The diagram overleaf shows the three key progressive levels of calmness, responsiveness and athletic movement. Each module (whether on the ground or riding) is designed to help you progress towards athletic movement.

In positive horse magic, everything starts on the ground. Each module prepares you for the next in the sequence, with the ground skills preparing you for the riding modules and more advanced and athletic ground work.

The next diagram gives you an overview of some of the tasks you will master in each module. The arrows provide an idea of how the various tasks prepare the way for subsequent modules and more advanced tasks.

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responsiveness

Solutions He stops moving and stalls. Go back to concept number five and practise getting him more forward. Ask for less bend and more forward movement. Too much too quickly will cause him to look for ways to avoid the athletic exercise. Do little bits each day and build it gradually.

He does not give me any bend. Shape the process slowly rewarding even fleeting moments of bending and he will try harder for you. Be patient and accept small steps at a time.

Concept 9: Follow me Closely

Objective To strengthen the bond between you. Teach him to follow you at the walk, changing directions and from walk to halt.

Equipment Clicker, food

Method Check that he will consistently walk at your shoulder with the rope attached. Take the rope and halter off and accelerate slowly into walk, clicking and rewarding for him staying with you. Slow down gradually to a halt, clicking and rewarding his staying at your shoulder. Think of having an elastic thread linking you together, accelerate too quickly and it will stretch a little but then snap.

Start the change of direction by turning across him; if he is on your right side then turn to your right. Only once the transitions and turns towards him are solid should you try turns away from him. When you start these, remember the concept of the elastic thread. Make the turns in wide arcs, avoiding any sudden movement that will snap the thread.

If you lose him at any stage lure him back by holding the food reward out for him. Click when he moves forward, returning to you. Then continue but shape the concept of him staying with you more gradually. Stay at the walk until you have completed concepts 10 & 11 which follow.



Solutions He does not follow you. Go back to the halter and rope and shape the behaviour of him staying at your shoulder so it is consistent (concept five).

He starts stealing food or mugging you when movement is introduced. Slow down the process if he is losing his calmness with the introduction of movement. Re-establish his calmness by asking him to touch the cone on the ground at a stand still. Go back to movement using the halter and rope to begin with and then progress to follow me closely.

He lags behind you. Keep to straight lines luring him forward with the food reward. The concept of the elastic thread is especially important for this situation. If necessary go back to shaping the exercise with the rope only applying 1 oz of contact. Be patient and reward every positive move forward and then every fraction of acceleration.

Concept 10: Trot on Cue

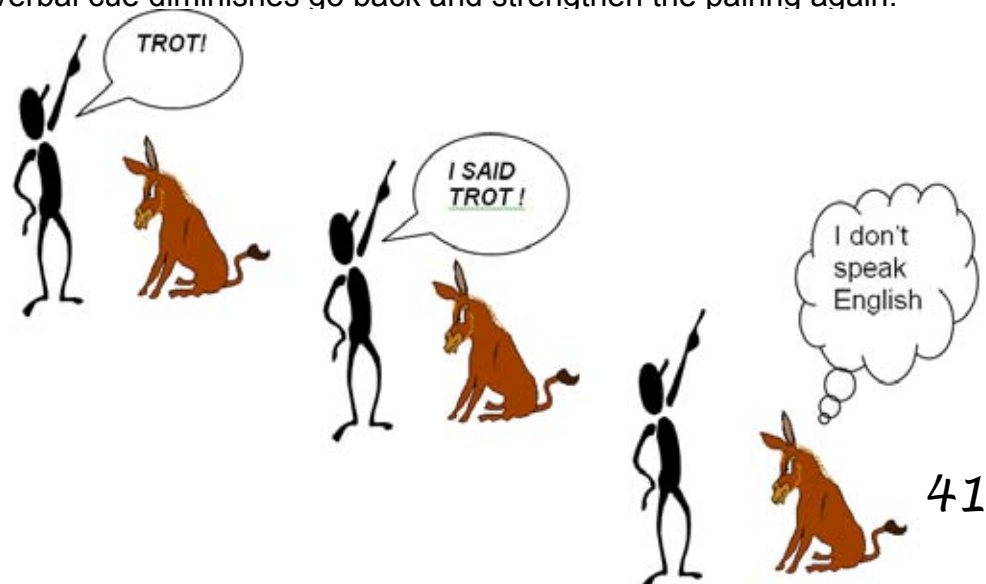
Objective To teach him to trot (consistently) when a verbal cue is given. This is a building block for many subsequent exercises.

Equipment Rope halter and 12' rope, clicker, food

Method Check his responsiveness to staying at your shoulder at the walk and then for transitions from walk to halt and back to walk. When he staying consistently at your shoulder, start by walking a little faster and click and reward him for keeping up with you. Keep increasing and decreasing you speed within the walk until he learns to stay at your shoulder. Then walking faster, lift your energy and start trotting yourself. Wait until he takes a single step of trot and click and reward him. Shape the behaviour until he is trotting consistently when you start trotting.

Now you have the behaviour occurring predictably you can pair a verbal cue "trot" to the transition to trot. As he starts to trot give the verbal cue once and click and reward. Keep the lifting of your energy as the main cue, until the pairing of the verbal cue to the transition is strong, gradually phasing out the lifting of your energy as the main cue. If the strength of the verbal cue diminishes go back and strengthen the pairing again.

Verbal cues are secondary. Set them up and 'recharge' them using a physical cue like your energy or a target stick



Solutions He does not follow the stick out onto the circle. Check he is touching the stick consistently and that he understands to touch the loop on the end not just anywhere on the stick. Now start by shaping just one step at a time in a straight line.

He turns in for the food reward rather than staying on the circle. Spend a little longer teaching him to follow it in a straight line and then move onto curves and then circles.

He does not stay with you. Go back to the follow me closely concept and get it more solid before coming back to this exercise.

Concept 12: Jumping without halters and ropes

Objective To teach your horse to jump without the complications of a rider on his back. This exercise will test the strength of your bond and get you and your horse to have some fun. Teach your horse to jump a 2' jump and return to you without using a rope.

Equipment Magic target stick, clicker, food

Method Start by asking your horse to follow you over a pole on the ground. Holding the magic target stick in your leading hand 'lead' him out and away from you (as he follows the loop) and over the pole using the magic target stick as you did in teaching him to circle you. Bring him back to you and reward the sequence. If he is finding it difficult, then break it down until he succeeds at just small parts and then build them up into the full behaviour. Shape the behaviour of jumping higher jumps and different obstacles progressively until he will jump a two foot jump and stay completely calm.



Horses that rush at the jump or run off afterwards are not calm. If your horse gets excitable when jumping then go back to the calming exercise with the cone. Place a cone on the ground close to the pole and shape his behaviour until he is consistently touching the cone. Then place the cone a little closer and ultimately get him to follow it across the pole when you put it on the far side of the pole. Be patient in teaching him calmness. The more experience he has had in being excitable around jumps the longer it will take to change his attitude to them.



Once you have the previous exercise secure you can use it to get him to all sorts of things from standing on boxes to walking over plastic to walking under tarpaulins. Use your imagination.