

How to be a TRAINER

Part 2

Dr. Mohamed Elsherbini

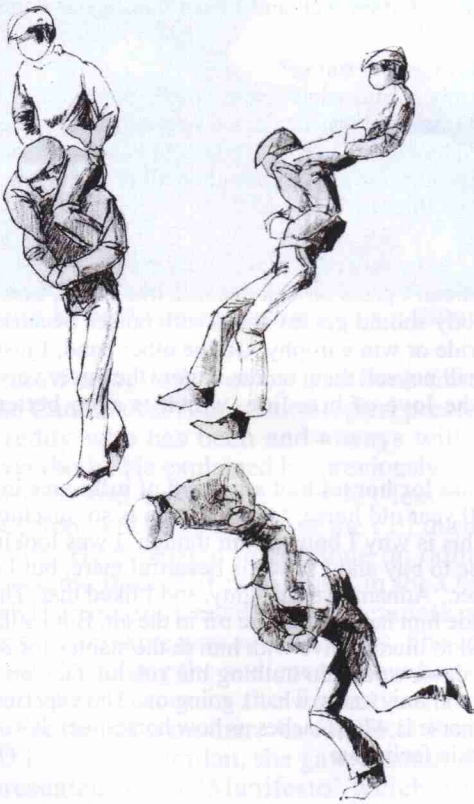


Fig. 1:
The rider's position affects
the horse's balance

Riding is not something that the rider does in isolation; it is a joint effort of 2 living creatures, the rider & the horse. In order for them to function as one, it is necessary for them to work together with as little friction as possible. It is important to know the suitable conformation and temperament of the horse for the sport. There is no point in forcing a huge cold-blooded horse with bad conformation to jump! As a trainer, you have to know about the equine nature of the horse; muscles, skeleton, circulation, respiration, digestion, senses and reflexes. In addition, a horse's training schedule must be compatible with his general health and fitness. This is important for the safety of both the rider & horse, together with success in your work as a trainer.

The horse is a herd animal. The herd unit offers it protection and security. No horse likes to be alone. This could be used in training by putting an older, more experienced horse in the lead. Horses have a strict 'pecking order', or herd hierarchy. Even in horse/man relationships, horses need to establish a pecking order. Only a rider who consistently acts in a calm, firm and logical manner will be accepted by the horse as a higher ranked being. Also remember that horses are creatures of escape; if a horse is startled for example, he will run.

The Horse's Brain:

The horse's brain can be compared to a computer that receives and stores information. Fear and pain are the most important records in the horse's memory. Try to avoid leaving an incurable bad memory scar in your training. Genetic traits (characteristics) may be inherited in off-springs like in sires of jumpers, racing or dressage horses.

Sense of Balance:

This mainly controls the position of the body and change of direction and pace. One very important piece of advice to give your students is: 'don't disturb your horse's natural balance by riding all over the horse'. (Fig. 1)

Sense of Touch:

A 'muscle memory' is built up by the horse through routine and experience. It is not often that a horse repeats a mistake. For example, knocking down a fence is a painful experience that will not be repeated again by the horse. The rider uses the horse's sense of touch to communicate with legs and hands. Riders should not over use the nervous system by sustained pressure; it dulls the impulses and the reaction of the horse later on.

Sense of Hearing:

It is far superior to that of human beings; clicking of the tongue, and terms like 'good', & 'halt' could be useful in training.

Sense of Vision:

It is not true, as was previously thought, that horses see only black & white. It has been proven that horses can see yellow & green easier than blue & red. Focusing is difficult for the horse; it has to change the position of its head to get the best image on its retina. Horses seem to judge the height of a fence better than its width. If the horse stands still, there is a dark unseen area from below its nose to the ground and underneath its body. That is why you have to accept the horse lowering its head when passing over cavaletti. (Fig. 2 & 3)

Reflexes:

The head & the neck are the balancing equipment of the horse. Raising the head will lower the forelegs, while lowering the head & stretching the neck during jumping will invite the forelegs to bend. This adds to the success of jumping mechanisms (Fig.4). ■

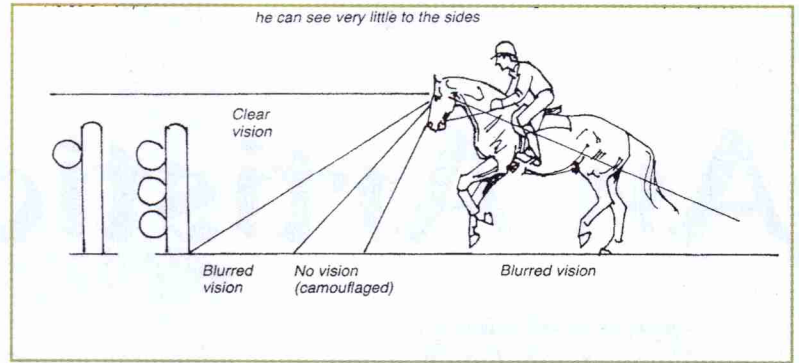


Fig. 2

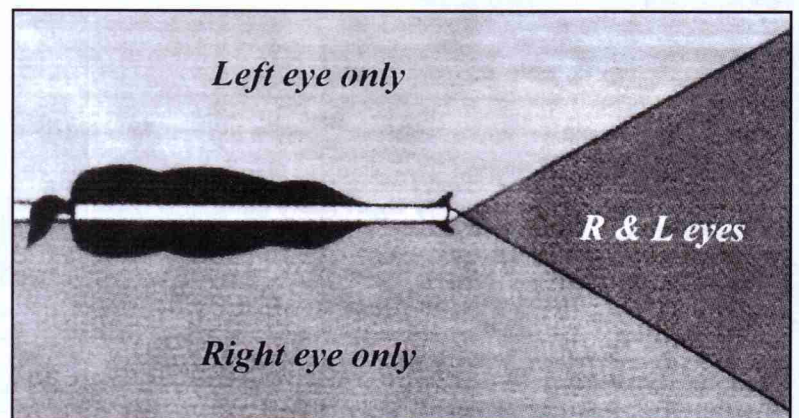


Fig. 3: Black area not seen by the horse

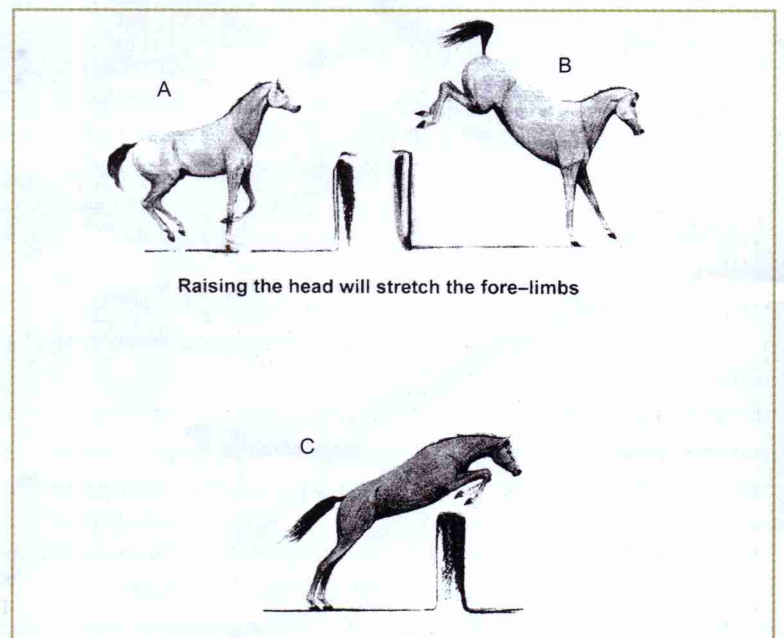


Fig. 4: Lowering the head will fold the fore-limbs