

Praise Even Smalls Steps Generously

Retraining means not only to delete things wrongly learnt in the years before, but also developing self-confidence and trust into the rider. The work has to be planned in a way that the horse can take it without getting stressed, because only relaxed horses are able to learn.

We have reported in Kavallo 1-2/2017 on the problems which Christian Carde, former chief rider of the Cadre Noir and former dressage national coach of France, had to eliminate at the beginning of his partnership with the 13-year-old mare Milady. The challenge which a horse to retrain poses on his rider might be very different in detail. Common to all is that the horse has learnt something not classical which needs now to be deleted. But too often it gets forgotten or is considered the less serious problem that a not correct training definitely has also left certain mental imprints. But it is decisively dependent from these mental traces if a correction becomes successful which means the retraining has to focus first and foremost on restoring the horse's faith.

Here it is important to find out which exercises and for which reason the horse considers difficult or even painful or which even trigger fear. We should not generally avoid these, but prepare them very thoroughly so that the horse feels they are easy and the feeling of physical and mental overtaxing gets deleted.

During this process it is of uppermost importance to generously praise the horse for the tiniest progress and keep the demands on a level which the horse can easily take without getting stressed. Is the horse not mentally relaxed, it will not learn anything. Over all with a retraining horse only the touch of overtaxing will otherwise throw it back again in its positive development.



But retraining, correction must under no circumstance be considered as only a technical procedure, but in contrary as such which restores the horse's self-confidence and faith. For this reason it is essential to observe the horse consciously, and not only during the daily work, but in the general handling.

The general behaviour of Milady at the beginning of our partnership was rather determined by mistrust. In the stable she occasionally bite out of the blue, her facial expression was often sour and she was pretty disinterested in humans. During certain exercises she immediately showed nervousness so I had to better prepare and relax her mentally.

Today, after a year of common work, I feel especially happy looking at my mare and see that she seems more content as a horse and I think this is my biggest achievement our short partnership. In the daily handling she is more even tempered, more and more interested in the work and her eyes are more awake.



Correct Yielding

Terms like „take the contact“ or „take the bit“ are commonly known. But they say nothing more than that it is the horse itself which accepts the bit by yielding with the lower jaw and advances its ears above the bit instead of the nose being pulled towards the breast by the rider. Due to correct yielding of the lower jaw the communication with the horse gets refined. It is important that the yielding of the jaw precedes that of the poll. But Milady had not learnt this procedure correctly and showed little faith in the rider's hand. That meant that I first had to show her the correct yielding and then to ride her in the softest and most comfortable contact. A horse's correct yielding requires a rider who himself yields in exactly the right moment to positively reinforce the horse—ideally this means that the rider senses the moment the horse yields and yields himself a fraction of a second before the horse does. I taught Milady the correct yielding first in halt, even though yielding should usually happen

out of forward movement. But to show the mare the procedure itself, it made sense to request it first in halt. For that you stand on the left side of the horse, take the shortened reins in the right hand and position them relentlessly and high enough against the horse's neck. That way it gets animated to yield with the lower jaw.

This exercise can also be practiced by taking the reins in both hands, but one has to take care the tension of the reins is even then.

Because Milady did not yet respect the hand enough, she first started to walk backwards instead of yielding which is a typical reaction. With such it is decisive to maintain the tension of the reins by quietly walking backwards with the horse until it halts and yields correctly.

As soon as horses have understood this procedure one can later start requesting the yielding in walk and trot.

Make Sure the Contact is Soft

After Milady had learnt in hand not to fight the rider's hand and to respect soft aids, I

was able to ask the same while riding. If I want a horse to have a relaxed and due to it quietly chewing mouth, a horse which respects the rider's hand with trust and a round neck, I have to choose the tack which allows it, over all a correctly fitted noseband. A noseband is not there to mask a rider's bad hand and should rather have a decorative purpose. In the classical French approach the yielding of the poll is a result of the relaxation and yielding of the mouth. To obtain it the lateral flexion, the yielding of the horse in the mandible left or right, plays an important role. Exercises which foster the correct lateral flexion animate the horse to take the bit softly and to take an even contact. This is the reason why at the beginning of each ridden training I start going on a bigger volte in walk and take the inside rein a bit shorter and deeper than the outside one. At the beginning of our partnership, Mimi was so stiff to the right that I was forced to lead my inside hand slightly to the center of the volte to animate her to yield. And a rider should not shy



away from this as long as his hand is not acting backwards. Now a small impulse with the fingers of my inside hand is enough and Milady yields which should be the goal. It is important to allow the horse to stretch forward and down as soon as it yields. At the beginning this was difficult for Milady because she had not learnt to trust and follow the rider's hand. Long and low does not only take care the horse relaxes mentally and the muscles, but it is also a good indicator how much a horse respects the rider's hand and follows it progressively or if it pulls the reins jerkily.

I repeat this „warm-up exercise“ also with advanced horses several times on both leads and continue by riding lateral movements along the circle-line. The change between shoulder-in, travers and renvers, partly executed in counter bent, requires a constant change of flexion and fosters the suppleness. Not very known anymore, but also very useful is the shoulder-in across the diagonal.

One has to consider all I said about retraining as offers which we make to the horse. It is normal that it won't take them

immediately. Great patience is required because a horse which has not learnt to have faith in the rider's hand but to resist due to pain, needs over all a lot of time.

