

EQUINE SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL

# WARMING UP YOUR HORSE

BY CARLIJN PONTENAGEL

© Cymon Taylor

“THE PRINCIPLES OF RIDING” IS A POPULAR TERM IN THE EQUESTRIAN SPORT. WHAT EXACTLY ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF RIDING AND HOW ARE YOU ABLE TO IMPLEMENT THEM INTO YOUR TRAINING TO IMPROVE BOTH YOURSELF AND YOUR HORSE?

In this series of five articles, we guide you through the principles of riding. This series helps you master the basics of your riding because the basics are more challenging than whatever comes later.

The series of five include :

- Seat and position of the rider
- Warming up the horse
- Speed control and control over the position of the horse
- Straightening training
- Collection

The article in the 55<sup>th</sup> issue addressed the position and seat of the rider. When you meet the prerequisites of a good seat, it is time to continue to the next step of the training principles:

## Warming up the horse.

You have a job, a family, and a social life and next to all that, you have your own horse who you want to care for, train and have several goals with.

After your workday you hurry to the stable, ride your horse, hurry back home, eat with your family and bring the children to bed.

In short, you have more activities than you have time in one day.

But give a moment of thought to the warming up of your horse. Do you take the time to properly warm up and cool down your horse? Or does this get lost because of all the other priorities you have? It is often the case that you focus on your training goals and the warming up gets neglected due to **time pressure**.

However, by doing this, you do not give your horse the chance to perform at his best. There are several processes that start off during the warming up.





## Why warm up?

First, the metabolism in the horse's body increases. By this, energy becomes easier and accessible for the muscles.

Second, the amount of oxygenated blood that goes to the muscles increases. Not only because of the widening of blood vessels, **the heart volume increases as well**. In rest, a horse of **450 kilograms** approximately circulates per heartbeat a volume of **900 millilitres**. When exercising, this volume may increase to a maximum of around **1700 millilitres**, which is almost the double volume. Next to the stroke volume the amount of heart beats increase. **In rest, a horse's heart rate is around 28 and 40 beats per minute**. At a maximum effort, the heart rate may run up to **245 beats per minute**. So a horse in maximum exercise state may circulate a total volume of **416.5 litres of blood**, **this is comparable to 35 buckets filled with water**.

By this expansion, the amount of oxygen supply to the muscles and the disposal of carbon dioxide increases, this means the production of lactic acids reduces.

Another advantage is that both the total body temperature and the muscle's temperature are rising and are getting ready to perform.

Furthermore, the sensitivity of the nerve receptors increases. This means that the impulses of the nerve reach the muscles and tendons smoother. And the elasticity of the muscles increases according as the blood circulation in the muscles increases. **This explains why riding a shoulder-in during the warming up feels less coordinated and flexible than the same exercise after a good warming up.**



© Cymon Taylor

## 3. Seat and position

Always check your own seat in position before you continue riding. Know your weaknesses and try to work on one of them when warming up your horse. For instance, roll your shoulders every round, when you tend to stay stiff in your shoulders.

## 4. Turns

Vary in riding turns, start with the bigger turns like a large circle and gradually introduce the sharper turns. Straighten your horse consciously when riding a straight line and bend him when riding a turn as much as the turn is 'round'.

Be creative and regularly try out some new exercises!

## THE TRAINING FUNDAMENTALS

There are several training fundamentals related to your riding. That is the increase of muscular strength, the increase of endurance, the increase of flexibility and to improve the coordination of your horse. The higher the intensity of the training, the more important the warming up and cooling down are.

Every discipline demands other conditions of the horse's body and of the different training aspects mentioned above.

You can compare it with the different sports people practice. For instance, you are preparing for the marathon of Amsterdam. The day of the marathon, you throw on your running gear, lace up your shoes and get out for a short run of approximately 6 minutes of jogging and some stretching. The longer the run, the more efficient you should manage the availability of your energy resources. The beginning of your run probably counts as part of your warming up. Comparable with an endurance competition of a horse.



© Cymon Taylor

## YOUR RECIPE FOR A PERFECT WARMING UP

You should keep in mind two things when training your horse or doing a warming up. Firstly, the discipline you're training for. Sport specific training means that you simulate the competition as far as possible. **For example, if you are an endurance rider, you probably train in different weather conditions and on different surfaces.**

Secondly, you should be sensitive to your horse's weaknesses and strengths. For example, a certain difficulty of the conformation such as 'to high at the croup'. With a horse that is high at the croup you probably focus more on the horizontal balance than with a horse that is tall in the front.

### 1. A contact rein

Taken by the rider and accepted by the horse. When warming up and during your training you always strive for a smooth connection and that your horse is willing to follow your hand.

Exercise: vary in the neck position of your horse in walk, trot, and canter. Try to make him 'kiss' the footing, and lift him up to knee height.

### 2. In front of your leg

Make sure that your horse stays attentive and in front of your leg.

Exercise: ride many transitions within the gait and between gaits. Make sure you change reins every once in a while.



© Cymon Taylor

© Cara Grimshaw



However, if you warm up for a gymnastics competition, you alternate dynamic and static exercises. You, for example, jog a few minutes and swing your arms forward and backwards. After that, you do several stretching exercises where you stretch several body parts to the limit. This is similar to a dressage competition.

## THREE TIPS TO PREVENT MUSCLE ACHE:

**1. Start with a 10-minute walk**, stretch the topline with a longer frame and stretch the horse down. Flex him to the right and to the left and maintain the forward walk steps.

**2. Canter in the warming up** helps the horse to become loose and supple.

**3. Regularly stretch your horse down** and lengthen the frame of your horse during your training in walk, trot and canter.

## MISCONCEPTIONS OF WARMING UP

**1. Search for the right tempo.** Warming up your horse doesn't mean that you have to jog your horse. Find out where your horse shows the largest stride, from there you start working and riding transitions within the gait.

**2. You may work your horse in all three gaits** and stretch him, so in a manner of speaking don't hold your horses too much.

**3. Don't let him walk in his own frame**, "so he can warm up". By not influencing his frame a lot of horses tighten their back and lift up their head. So take the control over the frame of the horse from the beginning on.