



Horse Breather

Equine Breathing ezine September 2016 issue 67



www.equinebreathing.com

Soft start 1N for horses that find 1N difficult at first

There are two factors that can contribute to a horse finding it difficult to start 1N. One is psychological, the other physiological. The horse may be affected by one or the other, or a mixture of both.

Psychological

The psychological factor arises from the need of some horses to take charge - to look after their owner. Horses that take on this role are reluctant to relax as it would mean going off duty and leaving the herd (owner) unprotected. Horses are quick to recognise that 1N is inherently very relaxing and therefore want to avoid it if they are anxious about going off duty.

Horses that feel the need to be in control may refuse to allow the owner to do any 1N at all, or they may happily do 1N for several minutes but then just as they become drowsy, start to fidget or resist. Or they may do a whole session very happily but then the next time, knowing that 1N equals relaxation, they fidget or resist.

Horses with this need to look after the owner may show some of the following behaviours;

- Fidget rather than being calm
- Explore and mouthe or bite new objects or any objects in the vicinity
- Often stare into the distance as if looking for threats
- Spookiness, over reactive to new stimuli, sights and sounds
- Whinnies or neighs when owner arrives and or leaves
- Constantly follow the owner with their eyes and get anxious if the owner goes out of sight
- Lag behind when led or rush on ahead rather than staying in position on a loose lead rope
- Require lots of attention
- Regularly invade the owner's personal space, nudging them for titbits, walking across them, turning the haunches toward them, nippiness etc
- Have difficulty staying focussed in training situations, poor attention span
- Ignore owners requests or have a slow or erratic response to requests

What to do – Control of Movement exercises

Fortunately these simple and quick exercises provide a clear way to convince your horse that you are competent in horse terms to take over the role of leadership*. The horse is then relieved of that burden and can feel safe to go off duty leaving you in charge, and can let go and relax. If you're precise and your timing is ok, then these exercises are surprisingly effective.

Control of Movement Exercises are based on pressure and reward.

- Ask the horse for a simple movement by gentle tension on the headcollar rope.
- Release the pull IMMEDIATELY the horse complies.
- Rest the horse for at least 15 seconds as a reward

Examples

- One step forward or backwards or to the side
- Head down.
- Leading is a very useful exercise.

Walk forward and expect the horse to follow. If they don't they will get a pull on the headcollar which releases as soon as they step forward to be beside you. When you stop, if the horse continues, they get a pull from the

[free instructions for 1N](#)



*Some people dislike the use of the term "leadership" but I am using it simply to denote any actions by, and or energy of the handler that enable the horse to feel safe and protected and therefore to let go and relax.



headcollar. If they don't step back into position beside you, then ask them to do so before giving a reward of a rest. When the horse always stays in position beside you by following your movement with no need of the lead rope, s/he respects you as the leader in horse terms.

If you consistently lead in this manner whenever you handle the horse s/he horse will become used to thinking of you as the leader and will find it easier to relax and enjoy Equine Breathing sessions.

A good test to see if your horse has fully handed horse leadership over to you is to stand facing the horse's neck and then step towards the neck. If the horse doesn't move and you bump into the neck then a bit more practice of the exercises is needed ☺ If the horse now sees you as being the leader in horse terms, s/he will step sideways out of your way just based on your intent and movement, without you having to specifically ask.

Control of Movement exercises are effective for psychological issues but may also help to some extent if the horse's difficulties are more physiological, so they are a good place to start if your horse is having difficulties starting 1N.

Physiological

Physiological factors involve discomfort such as tickling or strange sensations due to the change (improvements) in the physiology resulting from reducing the over breathing. Physiological changes can occur almost immediately when the breathing starts to be improved and even though 1N is a very mild form of breathing training, for sensitive horses or horses with bad over breathing it may be too powerful for comfort in the beginning.

What to do – use 'soft start' 1N [watch video](#)

If conditions are very hot or your horse is sensitive you may need to start 1N very gently. The simplest way to do this is to leave a gap when you cover the nostril. If the horse has had difficulty with normal 1N, try covering only half the nostril until the horse is fully relaxed. After a couple of minutes then gradually cover a bit more of the nostril, but only if the horse remains relaxed. If the horse starts to fidget return to the half nostril for a while before gradually reducing the gap once more.

The second method requires a bit more coordination. Watch and listen to the horse's breathing to identify the in and out breaths, and then cover the nostril completely but only for the out breath. Release the nostril completely for the in breath.

The horse's breathing may be quite variable to begin with but try to follow his pattern and not block the in breath at all.

Try to continue to block the out breath through any irregularities and even through snorts.

At some point his breathing will become more rhythmic and less strong and then he will relax nicely. Once he has achieved this better state for a couple of minutes you can start to keep your hand over the nostril for the start of the in breath if he continues to stay relaxed. As he remains relaxed through this then you can gradually work towards keeping the nostril fully covered through the in breath as well as the out – in other words, regular 1N. But if he finds it difficult at any time return to covering the out breath only.

These soft start methods are likely to be ineffective if there is a 'leadership' element to the horse's difficulty with 1N. So in this case do Control of Movement exercises first, and then try regular 1N which is more effective more quickly than soft start 1N.

1N with a constant gap



block out
breath only



release for
the in breath



[watch video](#)



Other tips

Walking the horse between attempts at 1N or soft start 1N can help a horse to relax. It stimulates metabolism which can help relieve strange sensations and just the act of walking can be calming. Combining the walking with Control of Movement leading makes the walking even more effective.

Hot conditions make it harder for a horse to reduce their over breathing. This is because horses use increased breathing to cool themselves. Ideally it's best to start 1N in cool or moderate conditions but if this is not practical then wet the horse or use a fan to cool them. and if necessary use the soft start 1N

Use of glove or towel. If you have a big horse with large nostrils, and your hands are not large enough to adequately cover them, you can use a glove or a towel.



And as described in the 1N instructions, for your first attempts at 1N make sure the horse is in the conditions that are most relaxing for them, eg with their friends, with music if that relaxes them, and with relief from fly worry or any other irritation and so on. You may like to do some relaxing bodywork such as [Jim Masterson's TMJ release](#)

So to summarise, the best place to start is with the Control of Movement exercises and if necessary go on to use the soft start techniques too. The aim is relaxation so let your horse be your guide and progress through the soft start 1N techniques at your horse's preferred rate until s/he is able to fully enjoy and benefit from regular 1N.



Denise LaCroix with her 17.2h
Percheron x Quarterhorse,
Titan

[If you have any questions
please ask](#)

The contents of this ezine are not a substitute for veterinary advice. If the reader has any concerns they should seek independent professional advice from a vet.