

Group Riding – Fun Patterns to Help Everyone’s Horsemanship

Editor and Author’s Note: This is the first in a series of articles that are intended to give practical exercises for aspiring horsemen and women. Four huge topics will be covered over the next 12 months, each presented in a series of three articles. Each piece will build on skills presented in previous commentary. Our hope is to give you a monthly lesson plan on which to work. It’s a clinic in a magazine! By the end of the year you will have made great progress with “The Art of Developing a Willing Partnership”.

Group riding... Military riding... Herd riding... Quadrille... They are NOT just for the Spanish Riding School! There are so many benefits to riding as a group that can aid all types of disciplines and are down right FUN to boot! As winter approaches and most of us are forced to indoor riding, it is a great time to gather a small group of friends together to apply some “Group Riding” exercises. Over the next three months in NWHS, we will be exploring a number of patterns for riding together as a group to achieve many positive attributes for both you and for your horse. These exercises are great for almost any level of rider or horse. It can help a more timid horse and rider team become more bold, and a bully to become humble. It is a mental and physical break for those of you drilling for very specific performance. Add a little music and it’s a dance with multiple partners...What could be more fun?

First, let’s talk about some of the benefits to group riding: **Socializing & Teamwork** – For the human it is an opportunity to come out of your shell (or comfort zone) and be part of a larger dance troop. For your horse, it allows him to be part of a herd, still following directions from you, but learning from his own instincts, that for many horses have long been abandoned. He will develop bravery and confidence, while following your leadership skills. Like a Blue Angels pilot and his plane, except your aircraft is a thinking, feeling, horse!

Timing – In group riding, the benefits of timing are critical to the success of the pattern. You will develop an instinct of “when” to ask the horse for the skills you have been practicing all along. Herd riding teaches your horse to rate (slow up or go faster, within the assigned gait), but it also teaches him to “wait”. You might say group riding helps both horse and rider to develop patience, which is certainly an aspect of timing.

Rhythm – Our dressage friends will tell us that rhythm is the base of all training we want to develop with the horse. It is the foundation we all should build upon. Group riding can aid you and your horse to achieve rhythm in that the pace, speed, and consistency are critical for a beautiful group dance. I have witnessed this wonderful transition of achieving group rhythm time and again in my clinics. With a horse in front, behind, and beside you, somehow the energy melds into one, particularly when music is present. Magically you are riding as ONE group in rhythm.

Purpose & Focus – As we have discussed in many past articles, having a game plan and focusing are part of the “Horseman’s Protocol”. (See NWHS 101 December 2006) In group riding they are equally important, but seem to happen a little easier. You know the pattern and you have to focus ahead or risk getting run over! If you mess-up...it’s not a big deal! You hop back in, forget your past mistake, and move forward to the next skill. You can’t emotional or mentally beat yourself up, because the team needs you in the PRESENT! For both horse and rider the purpose of the skills you have been practicing now become *applied*. The human thinks less about HOW to accomplish the task, and simply does it. Group riding gives purpose to all the practice.

Ok, I think I have you convinced – group riding sounds really fun! Are there any prerequisites? Equipment doesn’t really matter, as long as it is safe and fits you and the horse well. As you already know, I don’t advocate the use of tie-downs or draw reins and the like. If the group you will be riding with requires these types of equipment, along with shank bits, I would run the other way and start my own group. Both you and your horse should be in good condition, or at least plan on building up to riding for 10 to 20 minutes at a walk and trot. Most of the patterns I will be sharing are NOT done at a canter, as is typical in many western drill teams. I am looking to get the benefits described above, and these are best found at the walk and trot. Finally, you should have a basic understanding of how to politely direct and control your horse. Review the many skills we have presented in Northwest Horse Source articles, found at: www.tnhorsemanship.com/articles.



Riding in a group as pairs is not only fun for both horse and human, it is a great teaching tool. Jeanine and Paul ride their Andalusian cross horses, with Jeanine on her filly’s second ride!

Sample Group Riding Patterns & Maneuvers

Column of Two's	Divide the Column	Come About	Split the Column	Serpentine
Chevron – Nose to Nose	Chevron – Haunches	Outside around In	Flank Turn	Inside around Out
Flank Turn to Chase the Tail	Group Circle – Outside rides	One Gait Faster	Ride Squares	Pin Wheel
Weaving drills – With both Columns moving	Weaving drills – One column stands & One col. weaves between			

NOTE: *These are not official names! You can call them anything that makes sense to your group.*

Getting Started: Here are some recipes for successful group riding that have helped during my clinics:

Selected a human leader. This person will be responsible seeing that:

- Everyone is acquainted with the patterns and maneuvers you will be riding
- Double-checking the with all participants the safety concerns (Equipment is safe; Horses are relatively conditioned; Everyone is riding not only their own horses physically, but aware of the horses around them; Spacing is important...If you can not see all four feet of the horse in front of you, you are a bit close; Don't be afraid to ask questions or to make mistakes!
- The Leader will be responsible for calling out the maneuvers; (I suggest you try something like: "Prepare for a Flank Turn" then pause so everyone gets the picture in their mind's eye, then "Flank Turn"
- Selecting music that might enhance the patterns, and keep everything FUN!

As a Team Player, you are responsible for:

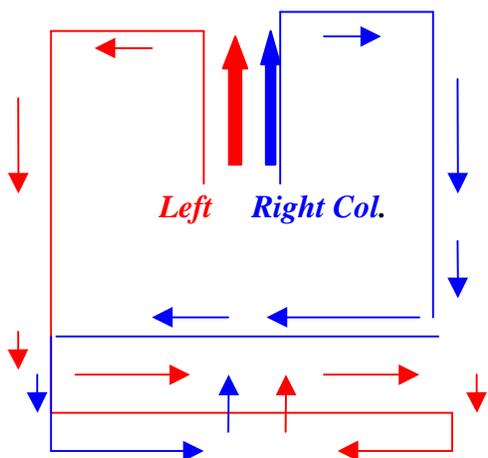
- Checking your equipment
- Making sure you and your horse are in condition, and be willing to pull out if you are not quite up for an extended period of riding (Don't over-do...Build UP!)
- Being aware of the horse and rider teams around you
- Turning yourself over to the Leader
- Have FUN! If you make a mistake, don't let "negative speak" take over. The mistake is history...go on and focus on the next maneuver with a smile on your face!

Column of Two's with Chuck and Gloria leading the group at Circle G River Ranch in Idaho.



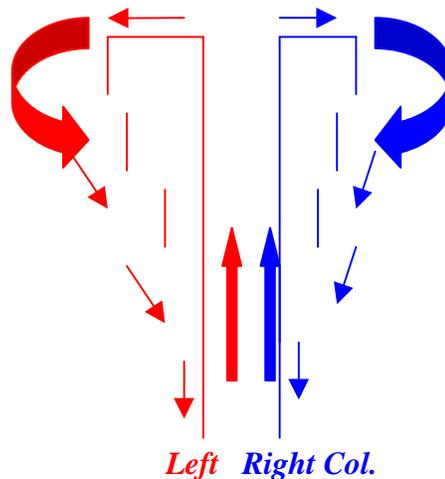
Let's Do Some Group Riding!

Divide the Column to Flank Turn



- Column of two's departs down centerline;
- Divide the column with each column going opposite directions until they hit track;
- Flank Turn – **Left col.** does ¼ turn to left & **Right col.** does ¼ turn right at the same time; Passing through the centerline, left shoulder to left shoulder; This is NOT a "follow the leader" maneuver, rather on command, everyone does the flank turn;
- When you reach the track the **Right col.** tracks left, and the **Left col.** tracks right, meeting at centerline for col. of two's

Come About



- Column of two's departs down centerline
- **Left col.** has the horse shaped to the left & **Right col.** has their horse shaped to right
- At the top of the school – Come About – with left col. doing ¾ circle to the left & right col. doing ¾ circle right
- Both columns will have a moment of straightness, then change the bend and leg-yield towards the centerline
- The **Left col.** should now slightly see the right eye of their horse, and the **Right col.** is shaped to the left, seeing the left eye