

## December 2008 Beyond the Basics

*Training Your Horse – Part VI of series*

### Use of the Whip

For those of us who most often ride in western tack, the concept or even the picture of riding with a whip may be foreign. As I heard Curt Pate describe one time, it is difficult to hold a dressage whip when you are roping! (Now that would be multi-tasking!) However, as we study horsemanship and listen to the masters from many continents we will discover that the whip and its mindful use has many benefits for every discipline of riding. In fact, similar to participating in a clinic regarding only ranch roping, we could travel to Europe to learn solely about the many uses of the whip to aid us in achieving effortless communication.

The whip, and by this I mean a family of extensions of our arm, that range in length from approximately one meter up to about 2 meters, has been unfortunately characterized as a torture device for horses. In the right hands with clear purpose, it can have many useful and honorable attributes.

#### **Purpose of the Whip:**

Artificial Aid – The ‘natural’ aids include our seat, leg, hands, and focus. ‘Artificial’ aids or extensions of our body parts, such as the whip, spur, and rommel, should be used as reminders of the clear intentions we first establish through the ‘natural’ aids. In other words, I don’t want the whip to become a crutch, where my horse only moves forward due to the tap of the whip. Rather, I will use the whip to remind him to move-on *after* my focus, seat, legs, and hands said “GO”! The whip should not become a crutch.

Extension of Your Arm or Leg – For those of us who are vertically challenged, (i.e. A little short... riding rather large horses, OR a rather tall... riding a smaller horse), the whip can be an excellent way to communicate to specific body parts without negatively effecting our body positioning or giving mixed, confusing signals with our legs. Being on the short side myself, and often riding rather large horses, I have to be very careful about the use of my leg pressure, particularly if I am wearing spurs to enhance the movement. I cannot get my leg back to influence the hip or some lateral movements, without touching him too high on his ribcage. The dressage whip can allow me to keep my seat, hands, and focus all in the correct position, while using the whip to point and talk directly to the body part that needs to move.

Enhance Movement & Balance – In both your groundwork, as in round or square penning, work-in-hand, or developing high school maneuvers, and in riding, the whip can be a wonderful tool in helping to enhance movement, balance and clearly communicate your intentions. Exercises using two whips can greatly help your balance and posture in the saddle (No...I am not talking about using the whip on you!), as well as enhance the balance of your horse.



*Chuck is using the whip, first in the ski pole position to free-up the hindquarters, then in the sword position to affect the forehead.*



Develop Your Multi-tasking Skills – As we talked about previously, if you had to describe horsemanship in one hyphenated word, it would be ‘multi-task’. Combining clear leadership, focus, balance, rhythm, timing, and feel together with another living, breathing, thinking, feeling creature is not EASY! Anytime I can further advance my multi-tasking skills I know I am on the right track for educating my body and mind to communicate with the horse.

Use as a Reprimand – Schooling and learning requires some measure of discipline:

- The discipline of providing good leadership for our horses
- The requirement to care for our animals
- The appropriate demanding of a response from our horse.

The word ‘discipline’ should first relate to the human’s role of instruction, guidance, and educating both our horses, and ourselves. Using the whip to correct, politely reprimand, and chastise should always happen with mindful intentions, where you clearly have pictured the correct response and are ready to reward the slightest try in that direction. The use of the whip to ‘discipline’ the horse must be used in that mindful sequence, and never used as punishment.

Tradition & Honor – A final purpose of the whip is related to the traditions of riding schools and the honor one earns (from the horses, I hope) after many years of study. To ride with a willow stick is one of the highest honors afforded in many riding schools across the globe. Similar to our true vaquero traditions of earning the honor to ride straight-up in the bridle, with the rommel reins attached with one horse hair to a beautiful spade bit... You only earn the right to carry a willow stick as a whip after many years working with and studying horses.

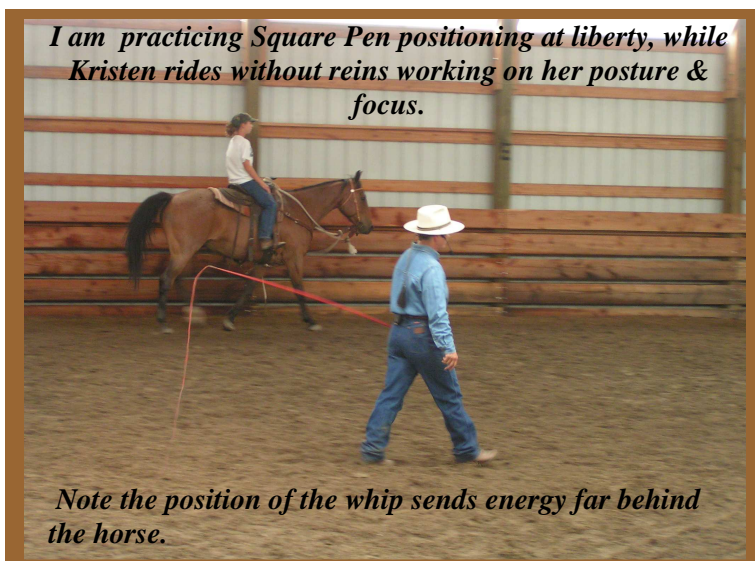
### *Cautions in Using the Whip*



- The whip is NOT to be used for punishment. There is no room for that type of aggression with horses!
- Avoid using the whip in a nagging or knit-picking manner, particularly without clear intensions of the desired movement or outcome.
- I do not use the whip for trailer loading education. The whip has a bite to it, and this can distract from the desired intention of sending the horse into the trailer. In frustration, the horse will often kick-up at the whip biting him, and not focus on the right answer of flowing into the trailer. Instead, I use the whirl of the end of the lead rope, or an extension of my arm like a fiberglass/carrot stick, or team up with another knowledgeable human.
- Be vigilant about the end of the whip when it is around the horse’s eyes. In particular, the popper end of the lunge whip can cause serious injury to the eye. Be Careful!

### **Specific Exercises:**

Liberty Work – I find great benefit in using a traditional lunge whip when either round or square penning my horse. (Review the November NWHS article “Mindful Liberty Work” at [www.tnhorsemanship.com/articles](http://www.tnhorsemanship.com/articles) or [www.NWhorsesoure.com](http://www.NWhorsesoure.com)) In using the lunge whip, I have a perceived greater reach towards the horse, or in cracking the air behind him. Also, when I am starting a horse, this long reach allows me to rhythmically extend my feel to many body parts as the horse moves around me on the end of the lead. This method really helps a timid horse, when you use the lunge whip to toss the popper politely and with rhythm out over the colt, as you work him from atop your riding horse. It also prepares the younger horse, a horse you are re-starting or evaluating, for things coming in and out of his vision, and noises such as the whirling of the popper end over his head. Keep in mind that this should all be accomplished with movement first. Then, when you ask for acceptance at the standstill, the whirling noise becomes a non-issue. This allows you to ‘sensitize’ the horse to your intensions, rather than ‘de-sensitize’!



*I am practicing Square Pen positioning at liberty, while Kristen rides without reins working on her posture & focus.*

*Note the position of the whip sends energy far behind the horse.*



Work-in-Hand – (Review NWHS article – 2005 Clinic #5 Work in Hand at [www.tnhorsemanship.com/articles](http://www.tnhorsemanship.com/articles)) Work-in-Hand is a very intimate positioning for ground work, which develops self-carriage and self-confidence in both horse and rider. The use of the whip can help the human to clearly identify for the horse, what body part needs to move, how, where, and with what rhythm. If we were to go to Europe to study the use of the whip, we would discover that not only are there a variety of whip lengths and popper types, but each can be used to communicate

*In this series of pictures, we are preparing the horse for a haunches-in posture, drawing the outside hind foot under the belly, and carrying the energy forward to the left.*



*Hope and I will be backing up to give the horse a place to go.*



very specific activities. However, for most of our purposes, a simple dressage whip of about a meter in length will suffice for work-in-hand and riding purposes. After reviewing the 2005 article, practice using the whip to compress the air in moving your horse for a turn-on-the-forehand, to a larger shoulder-in on a circle, to a leg-yield to the wall and finally to



a polite back-up. Remember that the whip in these movements is primarily used to ask the horse to go forward and sideways, moving AWAY from the pressure of whip. (Suggested Video: Bettina Drummond Work in Hand for Vertical and Lateral flexion)

Next, try using the whip as an invitation to come into pressure, in a haunches-in positioning. Here I view my whip as if it had velcro on the end, and my horse had velcro on his side! While facing the horse, with my belly-button energy running parallel to his side, and my hand on the inside rein near the bit, I will tap the whip until the horse begins to search with his hind feet. I am looking for the outside hind foot to step under the body and in towards the center of the arena. As soon as the horse prepares his body to make that correct movement, I pull the whip away from the imaginary velcro on his side, and back my body up a step or two. It will amaze you, but within a very short amount of time, you can clearly communicate by your body language, positioning and intention whether you want the horse to move away from the whip, or come to it! Similarly, as you move on to asking for half steps, piaffe, Spanish walk, or high school maneuvers, you can use the whip with rhythm, timing, and positioning to educate your horse and YOU!



Ski Poles and Swords – This is one of my favorite riding games that uses either a whip or a fiberglass stick. The basic principle is to use the whip as a visual aid in getting us humans to free-up our upper and lower body, focus, and allow the horse to accomplish more with less. Here is the concept: While holding the whip as if it were a **ski pole**, put a slight twist in your torso, and bring the ski pole back towards the flank of the horse, as if you were planting the pole vertically. This movement and positioning will affect the hindquarters of the horse. If accompanied with getting the inside eye and a little inside rein, you will affect the horse's inside hip and hind-leg to cross under the belly. Now switch to holding the whip as if it were a **sword** and place it in the outside hand. (i.e. The outside of the bend.) As you direct the inside eye for a change of direction using the inside rein, extend the sword forward, as if to reach around the outside arc of the circle, in the direction of travel. This movement and position will affect the forequarters of the horse.



To begin with I use the whip in this exercise on a series of ½ turns, or changes of direction with forward motion. As example: Start tracking to the left with the whip in your left hand as if it were a ski pole. Now think of changing directions around your left leg, and flowing back off to tracking right. Your left hand will have the left rein and your ski pole. Put that twist in your torso, opening your shoulders by drawing back on your left hip and bringing your right shoulder forward. The whip (i.e. ski pole

position) is placed vertical, perpendicular to the ground, near the flank. (i.e. Don't dip your shoulders!) Once you have accomplished the change of direction by stepping the left hind foot under the belly and you are riding off to the right, you are ready for the sword. Change the whip to a sword position. See in your minds-eye a ½-turn change of direction around your right leg. Look right, slightly guide the right eye with your rein, and extend the sword out an arc to affect the left eye until you have changed directions. Advance this Exercise by riding with two whips – The inside of the bend contains the ski pole, and the outside of the bend holds the sword. Soon you will be accomplishing riding with little or no reins and experiencing the joy of your horse following your natural aids with the help of the whip!



## **Come Ride with Alice**

*Author's Note:* It has certainly been my pleasure over the past 12 months to write these articles for the readers of NW Horse Source. To share what the horses have been teaching me is truly a gift from the Creator. In this month of spiritual celebrations, let's remember how fortunate we are to have horses in our lives!

I hope to see you next year.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alice Trindle". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored, textured background that appears to be wood grain.

***It's time to start planning for  
2009.***

***Give the gift of equine  
education this holiday season!***

