

Whoa- Riding to a stop Part 2

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There are 3 posts in this series as the stop on the "click" goes without explanation. I will add that if the horse is not stopping instantly on the click, his understanding of the marker is incomplete or the conditions are such that he is not "with" us on the day. Use this as information. Its part of your toolkit for communication.

If we have been riding to a stop, the horse is prepared to understand that as we stop riding he is allowed and encouraged to stop. At this point we'd like to have him stop on the word cue. I struggled all week to try to determine which stop came next after riding to a stop. I determined that stopping on the word "whoa" is next. The reason I chose this is that Part 3 actively riding up into a collected stop is the last thing in John Lyons Riding book and is built from hip, shoulder, shoulder. So, my understanding of this will be Part 3.

To learn and to teach the stop on the word takes time and patience and patterning. Please do not expect this to happen the first time you try. If it does, that's great. But, most often you need to build the pattern for him to understand the word. It also depends on your horse's understanding of your body language and the ability to bend and ride back to the cone to stop. You will also need to be able to ride straight along a fence line on a loose rein.

So, let's begin. Ride straight along a fence line or arena wall. Ride for only a few strides sit and relax and at the same time say the word "whoa". Do not pick up the reins. On the off chance he stops the first time c/t and sit at a stop (no unrequested forward) for about 1 full minute. Continue to reinforce at a high rate for standing still. It's best if you've done enough passenger lesson so that the horse no longer wants to go forward again without being asked. Chances are that he will not have a clue that he should stop when you say the word. So, after you sit and relax and say the word "whoa" all at the same time count to 1001 - 1004 and slide down your outside rein and turn towards the wall or fence and ride 3 or 4 small circles and head back the other way along the wall without stopping. When you turn towards the wall there is a moment of stop in it. This exercise depends on the pattern of him having to sit back to turn into the wall.

After you turn and go the other way along the wall, again only go 4 or 5 strides before saying the repeating the sit and relax and at the same time saying the word "whoa". If no other lesson teaches you that we often don't stay with an exercise long enough this one will. It may take a lot of time for the horse to understand the pattern. Trust it. After a time when you say the word, you will feel a moment of hesitation. C/T the hesitation which brings him to a stop. You are saying yes, that's the right thought. But, even though you got the stop from the click this time, still turn towards the wall into 3 or 4 circles and head back the other way.

Now that he has asked the question, he is probably still is not sure what you want. So, you will still need to be very patient and focused. He may not ask the question again for some time. Unless you run into some trouble, do not c/t anything other than the stop on the word while you are teaching this. Stopping at the word is the

only clickable action the whole time you are practicing this. The only exception to this is that if he stops at the word whoa and gets his c/t then he will be heavily reinforced for staying stopped for a full minute. Resist the urge to cut the time you stay stopped. Now, even though he is stopping on the word, after standing still for a minute, you will still turn into the fence and circle a few times and head back the other way. You want to imagine that there is a cliff in front of you and if you take one more step you'll be over the cliff. You want your whoa to be that immediate. So, never during the teaching of this go forward in the same direction after the whoa. Always turn back and go the other way. As soon as you are getting the feet to stop on the word even with even the slightest bit of consistency lower your count on how long you wait before turning into the wall or fence to 1001 - 1002. You want to up the ante fairly quickly so that he not only understands that whoa means stop, but that it means stop now. Remember there's a cliff in front of you.

After the horse understands the "whoa", I will want to train the whoa along the wall for at least 5 days or more before trying to take it into the middle. I like those 5 days to be pretty close together. If you find you have taken it to the middle too soon, that's ok. Repeat the ride to a stop using the cone idea if your horse does not stop on the word the first time you take it to the middle. Then, immediately go back to the rail or wall and rebuild. Later, when the horse is good at "whoa" and you have taught hip, shoulder, shoulder I will always back up at least two steps after stopping at the word. In other words, NEVER go forward again in the same direction after saying the word and getting the whoa. He must feel that if he takes one step forward he will fall off a cliff. Before you teach hip, shoulder, shoulder simply turn back and go the other way. Anyone who has seen Isle teach the Dutch word for circle will

see the similarities here. The same principles are in play.

Good luck, have fun. This one really takes patience. Trust the process.

Dolores