

THE *Art* OF LIBERTY TRAINING FOR HORSES

STEP-BY-STEP
INSTRUCTIONS

—
PRACTICAL
EXERCISES

Attain New Levels of Leadership, Unity, Feel, Engagement,
and Purpose in All That You Do with Your Horse



JONATHAN FIELD

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Putting the Elements Together

Next, let's examine how to use all four of the Primary Equine Language ingredients—*neutral/active neutral*, *friendly*, *driving*, and *touch*—to increase your communication. First, I look at each of the parts starting with *neutral/active neutral* and *friendly*, then *driving* and *touch* on pp. 91 and 100. Afterward, I'll put the elements together to see how they create *drive* and *draw*, which we'll use throughout this book to play at liberty (see p. 104).

Neutral at the Standstill and Active Neutral in Movement

Neutral is a big concept. It takes a bit of time to understand, and even more to apply. So let's break it down.

First, a horse can be at *neutral* in two ways:

- A horse standing still—in a *neutral sweet spot*.
- A horse in movement—in an *active neutral sweet spot*.

To explain, it's easier to give examples of horses that are *not* in *neutral* or *active neutral*:

- A horse pawing while being tied is *not* in *neutral*. He can't relax and is not at ease standing still.
- A horse that is jiggling on the trail to catch up to the others. This horse is too revved to ever find *active neutral*.
- A horse that is moving too slowly and is behind what is being asked. He is not holding the appropriate energy level to find *active neutral* either.

Later, I'll discuss liberty exercises to help the above horses, but for now, think about a herd of horses in motion. The horse that is right in the middle of the herd, not lagging back or impulsively running into the horse in front of him, is in unity with the herd and in *active neutral*. By keeping pace a respectful distance from his neighbors, this horse has found his *sweet spot* (place of comfort) in the crowd (fig. 4.4 and see fig. 1.6, p. 27).

In domesticated horses, the *sweet spot* may be a location in his paddock, where he always stands. Whatever the reason or *draw* (see p. 117), he is comfortable there. Horses pull like magnets to places of relaxation. Most of us have felt this riding past an exit gate or near the barn, when our horse may drift in that direction.

Don't fight nature—instead, help your horse find the *neutral/active neutral sweet spot* in the exercises ahead. When you supply one, he'll begin to look to *you* for comfort, not the herd or the barn. Over time you become the *sweet spot*.

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4.4 – Horses naturally find their sweet spot in a herd, which gives them comfort. We want to provide this same sense of comfort for our horses, just like they would find with another horse.

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Finding the Neutral Sweet Spot

Pick a *neutral sweet spot* for your horse to stand in. It can be anywhere, but be specific. Now imagine a circular line or bubble around that area. If it helps, draw it in the dirt as I have in the photos or place cones for visual guidance (figs. 4.5 A–K).



4.5 A – I am sending Tessa toward the sweet spot, using my Horseman's Stick and String.



4.5 B – When you begin this exercise it is likely your horse will go right past the sweet spot, like Tessa does here. I lift the stick and create a little driving pressure to show her there isn't comfort on the right side of the sweet spot, just as she didn't find comfort on the left side.



4.5 C – And she comes back over to the left side, just to be sure!



4.5 D – I again head her toward the neutral sweet spot—as she nears it, my body language is relaxed, the rope is slack, and my stick is lowered.

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I haven't drawn the lines with chalk for Tessa but for teaching purposes so you can see what a *neutral sweet spot* looks like in action. If it helps you in the beginning, I encourage you to draw something like this out: The clearer you can be when showing your horse where comfort can be found, the quicker he is likely to learn it.



4.5 E – She goes past again, but as you can see, with less intensity.



4.5 F – Found it! I often wonder if the horse says to himself at this moment, “Is this where comfort is?!” Notice I have quickly relaxed my posture and lowered the stick.



4.5 G – Tessa still isn't sure that she has found her neutral sweet spot, so naturally, she wanders out. I block her with my body language and the stick and point her back in the direction of where I want her.



4.5 H – Although her front feet find the sweet spot again, I am being specific about asking her to get her hindquarters inside, as well.

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4.5 I – Now Tessa is more at neutral and parked in the right spot. Having tried everywhere else around the area, she is pretty sure this is the place for her. It is important to notice my stance at this moment. I must have a relaxed posture if I want to convey to Tessa that she can relax, too. This is all about intention—my intent is what she is reading as she seeks direction.



4.5 J – I can leave my spot and walk around Tessa, giving her a nice rub with the stick.



4.5 K – I test her neutral position by walking farther away; notice how Tessa is still focused on me.