

Craig Cameron

Double Horn Ranch—The Making of Great Horses & Horsemen

CONTROL IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

Control of the horse is what all experienced horsemen want and are working for on each and every ride. Excellent control of the horse by the rider is never an accident!

A rider with superior control is a rider with razor sharp awareness as the leader of a horse and rider team. Experienced horsemen are aware of what is happening or not happening with the horse on a moment-to-moment basis. An excellent way to hone your awareness and control is to practice transitions with your horse regularly. Transitions are a tried and true method of achieving control. What are transitions? A transition is a change in horsemanship, a change of pace or gait.

I use and practice transitions on almost every ride with every horse. It is not a hard exercise but extremely effective in developing precise control of your horse. For horses that are chargy, pushy, head strong and out of control, the transitions process is exactly what the doctor would order, because transitions put you right back in control. Here are some examples of how you might use transitions to develop fingertip control of your horse. Transitions can be practiced in the arena or on the trail. I like to start at a walk; you will be amazed at how much you can accomplish at a walking gait. I want a soft, smooth loose rein, free walk. Nothing is nicer than a horse that will walk right out. Now, transition to a slow walk. When I say slow, I mean really slow where you can feel each foot move in the four beat walking gait. Now go to a fast walk! The trick here is to obtain a good fast walking rhythm without breaking to trot. It is harder than you might think; it takes a great feel by the rider to achieve a good walking gaits, fast and slow.

Now transition to trot. The trot to me is the true training gait of the horse -- not too slow and not too fast. Now see how fast you can trot your horse for the fast trot. I recommend to post in rhythm and establish a brisk extended trot. Now sit the trot, collect your horse and see how slow you can trot your horse. I like to open and close my fingers to establish that slow trot and collected position. Really concentrate on a very, very slow trot, slower than you have ever trotted before. You will be surprised how your horse will begin to listen to you as the leader through these transition processes.

Now cue your horse for a slow canter. Find the feet not by pulling on the reins but by signaling with a rocking motion right and left for collection and control. Sit back and slow the rhythm of your body to establish that slow and soft Hollywood canter. Remember to look where you are going and not at your horse. Looking at your horse makes you lean forward causing a faster canter.

Transition to fast canter lean forward and run your hand or hand up his neck towards his ears smooch or kiss and move your hips faster to establish speed.

Transition to slow canter by sitting back. Slow your hips and hum. Yes hum. You will be amazed at how effective this humming technique is at slowing your horse down. Many professional

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reiners use the humming method for the slow down transition don't forget to open and close your fingers to find and slow the horse's feet.

Now transition to slow trot. Remember downward transitions can be tough because the horse many times will want to stop instead of just slow down, so be smooth and precise with your cues. That is what is great about transition work - You have to improve your skills and cues and ride your best. I love that about transitions.

Now you are the pilot -- what transitions now? Fast to slow, slot to fast, it's your choice with smooth precise cues to your horse. Walk to canter; canter to trot; trot to canter; canter to walk; walk to trot; slow trot , fast trot, slow canter, fast canter, slow canter , walk , fast walk, slow walk, fast trot, slot trot and so on...

You have the idea now; your horse is now waiting on your signals. He knows you are the leader and he is the follower. You are establishing leadership, awareness, and great communication skills. It is all about control and as you know control is the name of the game.

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