



KEN McNABB

HORSEMANSHIP
DISCOVERING THE HORSEMAN WITHIN

Loping With Confidence

By Ken McNabb with Katherine Lindsey Meehan

When you are first teaching a young horse to carry a rider at the lope, you want him to learn to be relaxed and confident. Starting the process with these things in mind will help you avoid lots of the common problems that you might see at the lope, like rushing, running away, and anxiety on the part of the horse and the rider.

First, after I have loped a young horse out a few times in a straight line, I like to start building to the point where I can get a nice circle at the lope. I like to do this in an open, flat meadow. This setting is very low pressure and should be free of distractions. It can just be you and your horse, and you can focus on what you are trying to do without other horses stalled around you or fences in your way.

Start at the trot, and work until you can get a nice circle at the trot, with your horse softening his nose to the inside on one rein when you ask him to. Do not attempt to move up to the lope until you can get what you want at the trot. Use both reins and both your legs to help guide your horse, and remember to look where you want to go. You can also use the weight of your seat to help guide your horse. Sit to the inside if your horse is drifting in on the circle, and push him out with your seat. If he is drifting out on the circle, sit to the outside. I don't like to ask a young horse to lope for a long time. Do short periods of work at the lope, and when you get something good, stop and give your horse a break. You are just letting your horse get used to you controlling his movement at the lope.

When you ask your horse to move in to the lope from a trot, sit back a little and drive him forward with your pelvis, opening your knees and legs to allow him to move forward. Think about using your seat to drive his hind end up under him for the lope transition. You'll want to start by just asking for a consistent lope around your entire circle, and once you have that you can start asking for softness on one rein. It is too much to ask for both from the start. Also, you can't work on softening the front end until you can consistently drive from the hind end.

Once your horse is a little more experienced, you can work on your trot to lope transition. You don't want your horse to pop up in his front end as he goes into the lope. Again, you are going to drive into the transition with your seat, opening your legs, so your horse is driving with his hind end. You want to develop a soft easy lope that is relaxing and enjoyable for both the horse and rider.

Another more advanced loping exercise is to get your horse softening on both reins and collected at the lope. As you did with the earlier exercises, make sure you can get softness on two reins and a consistent

circle at the trot before you try it at the lope. Remember everything you do to one side you must do to the other side, so you'll need to warm up at the trot in both directions before you ask for work at the lope. When you are asking your horse for collection and softness on two reins, keep your hands correctly in front of the saddle horn, and sit straight in your saddle, don't lean forward. If you ask for softness and don't get it, do not try to pull your horse to softness through the bridle. This won't work. Instead, drive more with your seat, pushing his hind end under him and pushing him up into the bridle, getting your softness and collection that way.

When your horse softens and his face is where you want it to be, give him a little slack in the reins and leave him alone as long as he is there. Build on your success, rewarding little pieces at a time and gradually building up to more and more. Don't get mad at your horse if he breaks to a trot during these exercises. Consistency is the responsibility of the rider, and if your horse is breaking out of the lope it just means he needs more practice. I would rather have a horse slowing down and breaking to a trot than speeding up into a panic and running away with me. The more you work on these exercises, the softer and more consistent your horse will become.

Enjoy building your relationship with your horse, and until next time, may God bless the trails you ride.

For more information on Ken McNabb's programs call us at 307-645-3149 or go to www.kenmcnabb.com.