

Starting Your Miniature Horse In Harness



Stage Three

Long Lining



What You Need

1. An open bridle with a non-pinching, single or double jointed bit.
2. A surcingle with crupper or harness saddle with tugs tied/buckled down.
3. Long lines (mine are 20' long). Cotton is good – leather is too heavy.
4. A whip – usually a sturdy driving whip with a lash is easier than a lunge whip and works well.
5. This is a good stage to also introduce the rest of the harness – breeching and breast collar – as your horse becomes more comfortable. .
6. Gloves – smooth leather, not too grippy.





Work on the long lines allows your horse to develop the strength and balance to be comfortable in draft.

It also continues to confirm cues and responsiveness.



You wouldn't drive a car that didn't have breaks, balance and steering - make sure you've also installed them in your driving horse.

Balance becomes even more important when you are asking your horse to pull a load that is often equal to their own weight. Longlining allows them to start building the strength to allow them to work in draft without overwhelming them or causing tension due to lack of balance.



Learning Curve

Begin by walking in a straight line with the horse walking in a serpentine in front of you – the opposite of how we started teaching the horse to turn by using our body.

Then try moving yourself to one side of your horse while having the horse continue straight – be very aware of your rein cues to keep the contact consistent as you change positions.

When comfortable moving yourself from side to side, ask your horse to move in a circle around you – don't stand still, simply move in a smaller circle.

Begin with a small circle at the walk until you both start to have a feel for it. When you can walk on the circle both ways, then can enlarge circle and then ask for trot.



Having Trouble?

This is normal! Long lining takes a lot of coordination and practice to do well, but even a single small circle at the walk is benefiting your horse.

Move Your Feet. Standing in one place = tangled up and dizzy.

If you feel you are confusing your horse, switch to having the inside rein go straight from the bit to your hand – more of a leading rein might be the clarity you need to get started.

Your horse is also learning to balance themselves on the circle – diving in or out isn't bad behavior, it's a lack of balance and understanding.



Outside Rein

Long lining is a great way to establish the outside rein.

Having the rein run low around the horse's hindquarter naturally supports them on the outside rein to help them maintain the circle and establish balance.

It also encourages bend and allows them to become accustomed to that valuable outside rein soft contact.

Use the outside rein to help support your horse to stay out on the circle, and your inside rein ("finger wiggles") to help encourage bend as needed.



Balancing Act

We are teaching the horse to use themselves in a balanced way – we need to be aware of how they are moving.

Straight (balanced) on a circle means they are bent on the same curve as the circle.

Watch for the inside hind leg to travel in a line with the inside front leg – if the inside hind is stuck into the middle of the circle, they're not moving correctly.

Use an inside rein activation ("finger wiggle") to ask them to bend and support them with the outside rein.

Bigger circles are easier, smaller circles require more strength – make em big as soon as you can control the situation, and don't do too much trotting on a small circle unless you have a horse who has spent a lot of time working up to that level of difficulty.



Changing Directions

Be sure to work both sides equally – every horse has a strong side and a weak side, and a large part of conditioning our driving horse is stretching the strong side and strengthening the weak side.

Initially, you can change directions by having your horse travel straight (or even stand still) and moving yourself to the opposite side.

Changing directions without losing rhythm takes lots of practice. Again, move your feet, and be sure to let the new outside rein slide through your hand so as not to inhibit your horse's forward movement.



Transitions

Refine communication – if you can't get them to quietly whoa and stand on a soft cue at the end of the long lines, they're not ready for the cart.

Build hind end strength and improve balance.

This is where we look at promptness beginning to develop.

Hind end activation = hind legs reaching well under their body right front the first step into the new gait (up or down).



More Advanced Transitions

Transitions within the gait: small walk – big walk – small walk.

Lengthen the trot – balanced trot on circle then lengthen on straightaway – you will have to run ;) – and then rebalance back onto circle.

Non-progressive transitions = halt to trot.

Further increase balance, strength and responsiveness.

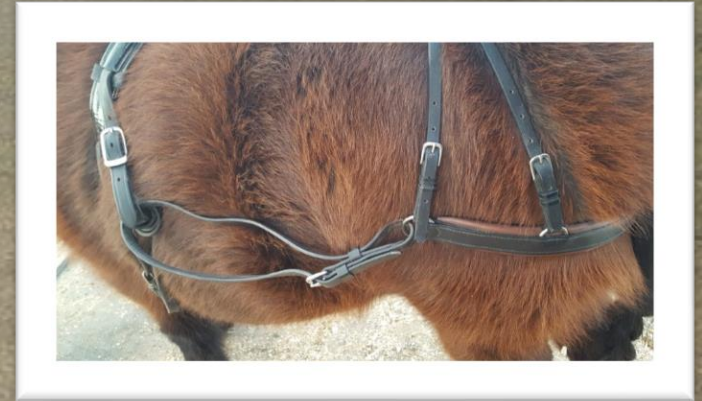


Introducing The Rest of the Harness

Put breeching on and buckle forward to tugs – work on long lines as usual.

Get a helper – ask them to back the horse while you apply some resistance by holding on holdback straps.

Get a helper – put on breastcollar and traces – have helper lead horse forward while you supply light resistant on traces to teach them to push into breast collar pressure.



When To Move On

When your horse is comfortable on a circle of varying sizes at the walk and trot, without falling in or taking off in a new direction.

When your horse is confident and relaxed while giving prompt transitions.



When To Come Back

Long lining is a tool that you can use throughout your horse's career.

To introduce a new skill – ie cantering.

To rebuild strength following an injury or layoff (ie winter).

To refine a concept you are struggling with.

To continue to work in a limited space.



Other Things You Can Do At This Stage

Use PVC to simulate shafts.

Have them drag a travois, tire or sled – SAFELY.



Primary Goals

A safe, sane and happy driving horse.

1. Confident in cues and communication.
2. Balanced and strong enough for the job.

