

Riding In

...at Lucan Lodge

Horses returning to work after a spell require a systematic program to ensure they get up to speed safely and sustainably. Preparation is key, along with careful ongoing planning.

PREPARATION

Before commencing work, we undertake a full pain assessment, conformation and gait analysis, dental check, saddle fit and bridle fit. We allow the horse 24 hours to become comfortable in the new environment. We prefer horses are fed low starch diets in the two days prior to arrival, and that they are fed a mix of their local and our own hay supplies on day one. We prefer to take a history of the horse from the owner on or before this date, and draft an overall training plan together.



GROUND WORK

To re-establish confidence, we introduce the ground tie, and systematically desensitize the horse to being handled again. We ensure the horse is comfortable accepting contact and pressure on all parts of his body, as well as being approached, circled and walked away from, without moving his feet or showing any signs of anxiety. We then do at least one session working the horse in hand. We make sure the horse understands and accepts cues to yield, go, stop and back up at walk, trot and canter. Any physical issues not apparent in the preparation stage can be identified here.



FAMILIARISATION

The initial ridden sessions are focused on ensuring the horse is comfortable and calm in the training environment. These sessions are usually limited to walk and trot, with most work on a longer rein. We introduce head-lowering cues in the initial rides to help combat anxiety if it presents during the riding in process. This involves using a direct (opening) inside rein to encourage the horse to reach down and forwards with his head on a circle whenever he becomes tense, choppy or resistant.



FLEXIBILITY

With the horse working well in a long, low frame at walk and trot, we begin redeveloping lateral and longitudinal flexibility. We do this by asking the hindquarters to come further under, and the poll to flex slightly more on a shorter contact. We also introduce more bends, corners, circles and voltes. We commence work in canter for short periods in a long low frame to encourage stretching from the lumbosacral joint over the back, and loosening of the shoulders.



FITNESS

With the muscles loose and limber, we begin increasing the gymnastic difficulty by introducing voltes, transitions within and between gaits, lengthened trot and medium canter, pole work, some hill work, and a more elevated frame. We ensure this intensive activity is interspersed with plenty of 'downtime' on trails and with some unmounted sessions. As fitness increases, so do feed rations, but at this stage horses will convert some fat to muscle. No matter the workload, we do not start to feed grains or sugars.



FINESSE

The focus on horses returning to work is to regain their confidence, flexibility and fitness. However every ride is an opportunity to train the horse, and throughout the process we work to develop more lightness, straightness, responsiveness and submission. Once we have achieved our main Riding-In goals, we like to dedicate some time to further refining the aids, and ensuring the horse's education has been developed as well.

