



# Ward off the Winter Blues

## Bareback Rides

There are lots you can do for yourself and your horse, even if you are only comfortable walking. Riding bareback helps to improve your balance and allows you ride feeling more connected to your horse. Enjoy his warmth, feel his muscles working beneath you and find ways to make his job of carrying you easier. For example, be sure your rib cage is lifted and your chest is open. Lighten your seat a little by taking a little more weight on the inside of your thighs. Feel all the back muscles he uses to move and allow your pelvis to softly follow that movement. Be aware of his breathing and try to match it to yours. Use soft eyes and deep breaths to relax both of you and improve your connection. Work those hills to help strengthen his hind end. Ride sideways across the hill-causing him to open his chest and build strength there. (Be sure to stay parallel to the hill, walk only and do both sides as long as the footing isn't slippery). Anytime you reverse direction ask for a turn on the forehand or haunches. Ride him in leg yield along the edge of a field, fence line or driveway. Practice stopping him by using only an audible exhale. Sidepass over logs or poles. Practice circles and lateral work upon freshly fallen snow so you can see your tracks.

## Play With Him!

Your time together should be split between work and play. Teach him how to smile, touch objects and play fetch with a variety of toys. My book, *Open Heart, Open Mind* will get you started with these things using positive reinforcement training.

## Take Him Hiking or Snow Shoeing

Help him get in shape while you are getting in shape. Take him out with you in hand for a walk, a hike or a snow shoe. **Caution:** Only snow shoe with him if he will happily and obediently walk beside you and not behind you.

## Picadero Time

Work on your relationship training, observation and communication skills with lessons learned from Piet Nibbelink, Klaus Hempfling & Carolyn Resnick. Read in this newsletter the note titled, “Why a Picadero?” to understand more and how to easily set up your own.

### **Practice Ground Driving**

This is a skill that every horse, regardless of his intended purpose, should have. It offers you both a great opportunity for conditioning and training when you can't or don't want to ride. It helps to create a more confident, obedient partnership. With you in the driving position you are building confidence in your horse because he has to go first, and you are establishing leadership by virtue of moving him from behind. Always begin by getting him used to ropes and lines around his legs, body and butt. If your horse lacks confidence take it very slow and do only a little bit at a time. Remember to stop, praise and reward him often. Practice your riding skills by turning from your center, stopping with an audible exhale and backing him with only a soft, gentle feel. I recommend attaching the lines onto a halter or bitless bridle type of headstall only, not to a bit.

### **Just Share Time & Space**

Horses spend most of their time together doing nothing. You can improve your relationship with your horse doing the same thing. This gives you a chance to work on your awareness and mindfulness skills. Even if you only have a few minutes, try to quietly share space with him, no talking, touching or phoning. (It's harder than you think.) Try to see if you can be still and quiet for just 5 minutes. Good luck!

### **When You Can't Be There**

**Hay**-Help ward off boredom by serving hay in small quantities. Play the hay in a variety of slow feeding bags, placed far apart. This will help to support his digestive system and reduce waste. He will have to move more, eat slower and work harder for it, just like in the wild.

**Toys**-There are few slow feed toys that you can fill and toss out midday for your horse/s. Fill them with large hay pellets or alfalfa cubes and spread them far apart, making sure there is one for every horse. These are great for keeping them moving and busy.