
2023 Get Gritty

WINTER HORSEMANSHIP CHALLENGE



LESSON 9: PRESSURE PROOFING

PRESSURE PROOFING

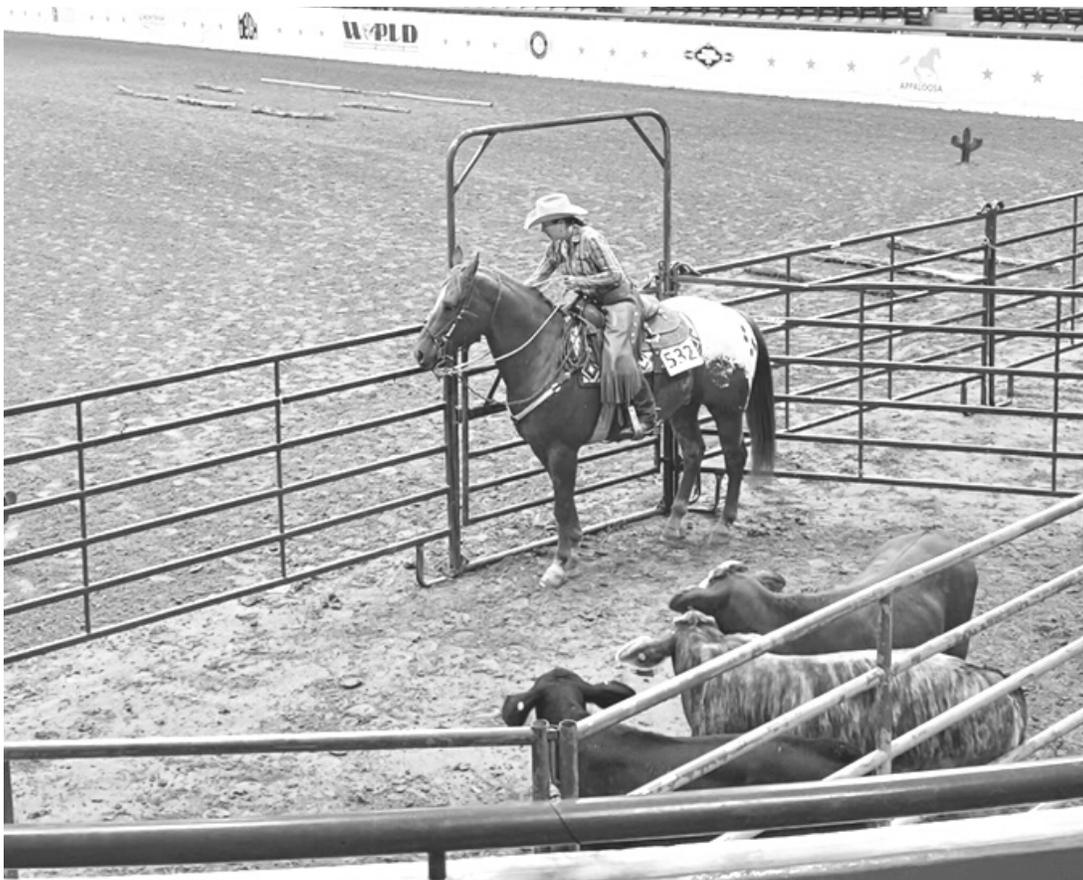
Do you feel like you ride better at home than you do at shows?

It is a common occurrence, and not just for riders. Many competitive athletes, musicians, and artists feel that they perform different under pressure than they do in practice.

Why is this such a common occurrence, and how can you fix it? In this lesson I will share with you why it happens, and some proven sports psychology techniques to help you fix it.

Let's Get Gritty!

Chevy



PRESSURE PROOFING

First, let's look at why you feel you ride better at home than at shows.

This involves some inner reflection. What are your thoughts as you prepare to show? As you walk into the show pen?

Do you feel pressured? Pressured to win, or to perform well? Do you feel fear of something bad happening in the show pen, like your horse spooking or misbehaving? Does the thought of the crowd watching make you nervous? Do you worry that you will disappoint your trainer, family, or friends if you don't win? Are your thoughts filled with a lot of negative "what ifs?"

Now, think back to the best ride that you ever had on your horse at home, where you had the most fun and really enjoyed the ride. What were you thinking? I bet that it wasn't any of those negative thoughts that you listed above!

When we have negative thoughts and negative emotions, they cause a physical response in our bodies. When we are nervous or afraid, our muscles get tight, our stomachs churn, our palms get sweaty. Our horse then feels these physical changes in our body, and it can affect our horse in different ways. So clearly identifying what your negative thoughts are going into the show pen is the first step in solving the problem.

Let's get started!

PRESSURE PROOFING

Step 1: Add Pressure to Practice By Setting Specific Goals

One way to help you perform as well at shows as you do at home is by practicing riding under pressure at home. This will simulate the show experience, and help you be more prepared. By having the mindset that practice rides are just as important as competition rides, you won't feel any change in pressure between riding at home as you do riding in the show pen.

To start adding pressure to your practice rides, set at least one goal that you will achieve during each practice ride. These goals should be achievable, but still require some effort to complete, and that clearly will help you be prepared for what you will be asked to perform in the show pen. By setting, and achieving goals for each practice session you will build your confidence in yourself and in your horse's abilities, and that feeling of confidence will carry over to competition day.

Some goals for practice rides could be:

Riding at a posting trot or canter without stirrups for two minutes

Maintaining straightness in a side pass

Extending the trot without breaking into a lope

Trot over logs three times without hitting them

Or some other goal specific to your discipline/event that you are working on. The important thing is to set a clear goal, and work on achieving it during every ride. Think back also to the thoughts that you have as you enter the show pen, and set goals to combat those thoughts.

PRESSURE PROOFING

Step 1: Add Pressure to Practice By Setting Specific Goals Continued

Many negative thoughts trace back to a fear of being unable to perform the required parts of the competition, of not being ready, or of failing in the show pen, and reflect back to a lack of confidence in yourself and/or your horse. To help eliminate these thoughts with concrete actions, your practice goals should be to work on the maneuvers that you will be asked to perform in the show pen, so that you know you can perform them and that you will be ready. Then when you experience the thoughts of "I'm not ready," or "I can't do this," you can reply to that inner voice with positive self-talk by saying "Yes we can, we did that maneuver in practice last week!"

Another idea is to video tape your practice rides, and review these technical skills with your trainer for even more feedback and improvement opportunities. I always feel more pressured to ride better when that red record light is on!

PRESSURE PROOFING

Step 2: Create Action Goals instead of Outcome Goals for Show Day

A common reason why riders perform better at home than at shows is that at home, their focus of concentration is on what you and your horse are doing at that exact moment, and nothing else. You stay calm and relaxed, loose and cue your horse softly.

At shows, your thoughts wander to the outcome-you are pressuring yourself and your horse to ride well and win. Then you start over-schooling your horse, and trying too hard, and over-analyzing and your riding becomes mechanical. Your horse starts to wonder "who is this person riding me?" and doesn't perform well. This raises your nerves, tightens your muscles, and this feedback loop continues.

So how can you ride at shows like you do in practice?

First, you need to take the pressure off yourself. If you believe that every performance is absolutely critical to your success as a horseman, and that if you fail it is the end of the world as you know it, you will continue to ride below your peak level at shows. You have to make yourself leave your expectations at home. They do not belong in the warm-up or show pen.

Instead, make yourself believe that the show is just like practice. Focus on each individual maneuver, and what you need to do in the moment to help your horse perform his best. If you mess up, say to yourself, "No problem," and move on to the next maneuver. There will always be another show.

PRESSURE PROOFING

Step 2: Create Action Goals instead of Outcome Goals for Show Day Continued

Next, set Action Goals, and make these goals part of your Pre-Show Routine.

Action goals should be the things that you need to do on show day to complete your performance. Pick 2-3 of them at most to focus on. You should be choosing action goals weeks before your show, and also making them the focus of your practices, so that you can feel more prepared and confident at the show.

For example, an action goal for reining could be performing a clean lead change in the center of the pen. Write out your action goal into the detailed steps that you need to perform that clean lead change: look ahead in your circles, guide your horse smoothly, set your horse up for the change, add your leg cue softly, and sit in the middle.

Then on show day, focus on your action goals, and the specific steps that you need to concentrate on to achieve them.

PRESSURE PROOFING

Step 3: Choose a Power Word or Phrase to Avoid Paralysis by Analysis

Over-thinking, over-analyzing, and over-schooling on show day can cause Paralysis by Analysis. We over think, and over analyze every little action, and every little reaction, that we as a rider and that our horse makes. This starts a vicious cycle of chasing perfectionism, which increases the pressure we feel, increases our nervousness, causes us to ride tight and rigid. When we are nervous and tight, our horses become nervous and tight. In the end, our performance suffers. Sometimes we even freeze in the middle of our performance, able to recognize that everything is falling apart, but are unable to correct our horse or fix it. Some riders might even forget their pattern. We continue the cycle even then by analyzing every move and what we did wrong, further perpetuating this negative cycle.

In this exercise, you will reflect on a time that you rode well, and choose a power word or phrase that reminds you of that ride. Then when you feel yourself starting to over-analyze and over-school your horse, you can say your power word/phrase to avoid paralysis by analysis.

PRESSURE PROOFING

Step 3: Choose a Power Word/Phrase to Avoid Paralysis by Analysis Continued

Think back to a time when you truly enjoyed riding your horse. This should be a time when you didn't have to think about each maneuver, when you just rode and it felt natural, effortless, instinctive, like you and your horse were thinking the same thoughts and acting as one. What did you do? What did it feel like? Write your favorite horsemanship memory below-be very descriptive!

Next, choose a power word/phrase from that memory. It can be a feeling (keep calm, ride proud, be free), an action (quiet hands, eyes up, sit tall), or a reminder of a place (ride like you did at XXX). Write your power phrase below, then repeat it to yourself on show day to remind yourself of that favorite effortless ride.

PRESSURE PROOFING

Step 3: Choose a Power Word to Avoid Paralysis by Analysis Continued

The last step is to condition your power phrase in practice. When you feel yourself getting tense and over-thinking your riding, take a break, say your power phrase, and focus on breathing slowly, and visualizing your perfect ride. By conditioning this response and practicing your power phrase, you make the connection between the feeling of being in the "zone" and your power phrase stronger. This will make it more effective on show day when you say your power phrase.

Lastly, save your power phrase. It should be the last thing that you say to yourself as you enter the show pen, so that your feeling of calm, confidence, and effortless riding is what you feel as you start your performance.



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