



GRACE'S GUIDE...

*to safe practice when handling Thoroughbreds:
Part One*

"I have always made a conscious effort never to do anything without first planning the best way to deal with a difficult or potentially dangerous situation."

Thoroughbreds' reactions are much sharper and quicker than other horses, both physically and mentally. This makes them much more trainable, however, it can also cause some of its own problems...

With this in mind it seems appropriate to cover the subject of safe practice when dealing with thoroughbreds and indeed, with any other horse.

The majority of accidents can be prevented, I am continually amazed when I see the unnecessary risks some people take. Being more aware, and understanding the importance of safe practice when dealing with any horse, especially thoroughbreds does avoid injuries.

During years of working with horses I have always made a conscious effort never to take foolish and unnecessary risks and not to do anything without first planning the best way to deal with a difficult or potentially dangerous situation before tackling it. Some of the areas covered in this two-part guide are as a result of these 'thoughtful moments', and some are just common sense with suggested routes to take.

You may find these very obvious but I hope you can take something from what has been passed on to me over the years.

SAFETY WHEN LEADING HORSES

Always lead horses from the left hand side; this is not only correct practice but the safest place to be. Not in front of them or on the right hand side. Use both hands when leading a horse, with the right hand giving the horse some freedom on the rope by not holding it directly under the chin.

Horses' biggest phobia is being too restricted or feeling trapped so giving them a bit of 'free rein' works well in settling them. Similar to riding and needing the correct contact, this also applies to leading horses in hand.

When leading past another horse make sure you are between your horse and the one you are passing. Do not walk close behind another horse – if that horse kicks out you or your horse may be in the firing line. A horse's legs stretch a long way, almost two horse lengths, and remember they reverse quickly too!

At HEROS all horses are led with chifneys. This was instilled into

Always lead from the left hand side and allow some freedom on the rope.

me by my father who was a stud owner/manager for many years. Never underestimate the strength of a horse. If it pulls away or is behaving badly there is nobody strong enough to correct the situation by just holding a horse on a rope.

Horses have more respect if they have something in their mouth and behave more sensibly when led with one. A chifney can also be helpful when administering a wormer to a tricky horse. Many people say chifneys are too severe but in the right, sensible, hands they are one of the best pieces of kit available.

If you have not used a chifney before I recommend using it with a headcollar. This will enable you to clip it onto the bottom ring and thus become more comfortable and confident before using it on its own.

CORRECT FITTING OF A CHIFNEY

Always put it on with the head strap undone, flick the long strap over the horse's head and do up on the near side, allowing you to get it positioned correctly in the horse's mouth.

Some people pull the chifney over the ears with it still done up – this can cause another set of problems, like making the horse head shy and not setting the bit correctly in its mouth. At HEROS we use straight bar, brass

chifneys (see photo) which are much kinder and not as severe as the old type of stainless steel ones with a port.

RUGS – PUTTING ON AND REMOVING CORRECTLY

This is, perhaps, my biggest pet hate. I see so many people taking rugs off and undoing straps the wrong way round resulting in serious injuries to the horse because of this 'unsafe' practice.

The simple rule to remember is when putting a rug on, start doing up from the front and when taking off, start undoing from the back. So, the correct way to put on a rug is to stand at the shoulder and throw it over the horse's back (put on gently when folded in the case of the young horse).

Once in place always fasten the front breast straps first, then the front belly strap followed by the second, finally pull the tail through the fillet string (we always remove leg straps as they are extremely dangerous if forgotten and the rug is pulled off).

When removing a rug, always undo the back belly strap first followed by the front and finally the front breast straps, remove the rug by pulling it back over the tail.

If the horse has more than one rug on, make sure all the rug belly straps are open before removing (lift the side up to make doubly sure). Many horses will panic if you pull the rugs off and the straps are still done up, rather like a 'kicking strap' on a bucking bronco, and an accident will surely follow.

Always have either a head collar on the horse with a rope or some means of controlling the horse whilst fitting rugs.

LEADING IN AND OUT OF A STABLE

Take care when entering or leaving the stable to lead the horse straight and make sure the door is opened right back.

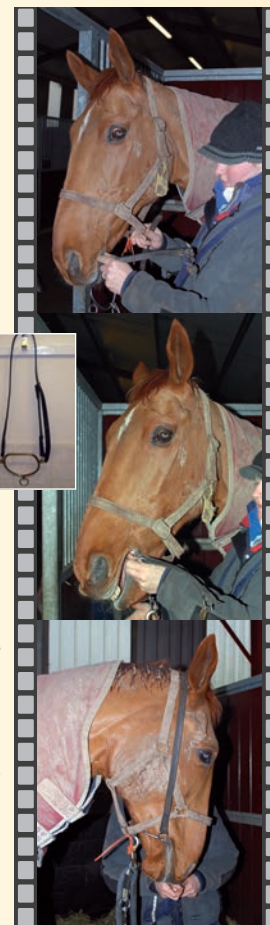
When going in walk the horse right into the back of the box and turn his/her head to the door before you remove the chifney and headcollar. Make sure you close the stable door before you release the horse (some horses are clever escape artists!). Leave the door unbolted in case you need a quick escape route for any reason.

ABILITY TO KICK, and not taking horses for granted

Please remember any horse might kick if surprised, even if it does not normally do so, so avoid taking chances like walking behind the horse and startling it. They may even kick at a fly and get you by mistake!

In conclusion, in my opinion most accidents occur due to human error and in that moment when one lets one's guard down.

Horses' senses are finely tuned and they often see and hear things before we ever do. It is important to respect this so please try to be aware around horses – you can still enjoy them as much in a safer and more professional way.



A correctly fitting chifney, used with soft hands, is an ideal piece of kit. If you're unfamiliar with a chifney HEROS recommends using it with a headcollar as Monsignor helps to demonstrate.

COMING UP IN PART 2...

- Safety when turning out horses
- Tying horses up
- Safety when mounting
- Common yard hazards