

S T E P O N E



Maintaining a calm connection promotes focus and confidence and gives Lindsey Partridge an edge when competing in Extreme Cowboy Races on her reining horse, RN Ozzy Jac.



PHOTO COURTESY LINDSEY PARTRIDGE

Red- Yellow- Green

Whether a horse is in a high-energy or low-energy state, Lindsey Partridge shares an exercise that creates a calm connection.

By Maureen Gallatin

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN UPSET OR SCARED and had someone tell you to “Breathe,” “Chill out” or “Just relax”? How about someone advising you to “Get a grip”? Likely neither approach was effective. And those approaches don’t work with horses, either.

Lindsey Partridge, a performance horse trainer, clinician and competitor, has a technique that works for calming upset horses – and energizing lazy ones – without any kind of rough handling. Lindsey’s exercise is ideal for working with horses that are intense about their jobs, such as working cow horses and barrel horses. Often they’re bred to be naturally ambitious, but sometimes they’re anxious, as well. Her approach helps the rider/handler avoid getting cross, while helping the distracted horse develop focus and confidence.



PHOTO COURTESY LINDSEY PARTRIDGE

CO Coosino Gold earned the nickname “Dreamer” after Lindsey Partridge started using her energy-matching “red, yellow, green” techniques to get him in a learning state of mind. The method works with kids, too.



During a clinic, a horse in new and unfamiliar surroundings benefits from the “square” exercise. A hand placed at the fold of the neck encourages him to soften and turn.

Lindsey’s background is a mixture of natural horsemanship and Sally Swift’s “Centered Riding.” But Lindsey also draws on her experience as a public health nurse in her home area of Ontario, for dealing with both the high- and low-energy horse.

“In an effort to help kids do better in school, we’ve been using a scientific, evidence-based theory about helping them self-regulate their energy. We look at kids as being in a “red,” “yellow” or “green” state of mind – with green being the ideal energy state for learning,” Lindsey explains. “Remaining calm is only part of the picture.”

In the red, high-energy state, kids aren’t calm enough to learn. They’re either anxious and fearful, or too all-over-the-place with their energy. In the yellow or low-energy state, it’s difficult for kids to learn because their energy is depressed, tired or unfocused. They can’t give 100 percent attention.

The goal is to help them to find green, the calm-alert state.

It works best if you begin by matching a child’s energy, but not his emotion, Lindsey asserts.

If you approach a red-energy kid with the opposite, yellow energy, your low energy will frustrate him. And if you approach a yellow-energy kid with your high, red energy, you’ll de-motivate him further. There’s too big a difference in the levels. Instead, you begin by matching physical energies, then lead the child toward green.

Lindsey has found that these energy states also apply to horses.

Let’s say your horse is in a red state. He’s wired, nervous, upset – or just plain energetic. Perhaps you just unloaded him from a trailer in a new location. Maybe he’s whinnying for a buddy. Imagine someone in a yellow, low-energy state trying to slow him down by pulling him back. The horse will feel trapped, maybe even panicky. He needs to move his feet. Since he can’t contain himself, if you try to get him to stand

still, he’ll end up pulling you around, acting up and potentially knocking into you.

In a situation like this, Lindsey uses the red-yellow-green theory and an exercise she calls, “Square.”

Going Square

“WHEN I LEAD A HORSE, I WANT HIS BODY SHAPED AROUND ME, his head slightly toward me, and his shoulders respectfully out of my space as if to ask, ‘What’s next, Mom?’” Lindsey explains.

“But the excited, unfocused, red-energy horse is looking everywhere, with the shoulder closest to me stepping into my space. He’s not seeking my leadership.”

Lindsey says it’s important to stay calm and keep your mental focus. But that doesn’t mean low energy.

She begins by visualizing what she wants the horse to do and maintains that mental picture – not allowing the horse’s behavior to change her behavior.

“Red energy has to go someplace, and I can’t fault the horse or punish him for being red. So walking energetically, I’ll lead him about 20 feet, then turn left. I’ll walk another 20 feet, and then make another 90-degree lefthand turn, then 20, then turn, and so forth. Each time he looks somewhere else, I turn.”

At first, the turn isn’t precise, and you might have to pull the horse’s head firmly (not roughly) to turn. But you’re not telling him, “No.” You’re not trying to stop him. Doing either could cause him to rear or attempt to pull away. Instead, you’re giving him a place to go and a job to focus on. And you’re changing it up frequently enough that both his feet and his mind stay busy.

“I can do the exercises from either side of the horse,” Lindsey adds. “If I’m on his right side, I turn right; if on the left, I turn left. If I’m riding, I use one rein at a time so he doesn’t feel restrained.”



MAUREN GALLATIN



PHOTO COURTESY LINDSEY PARTIDGE

Green energy is ideal for tackling challenging new courses bridleless.

Your strategy is to stay as busy as the horse is, while keeping your body language relaxed. No harsh or jerky motions. While working the square, don't let the horse push you around or your square to drift. Keep it upbeat, even playful. You want to engage your horse.

"Sometimes I act goofy, just to keep my own attitude light and my energy up," Lindsey advises.

As the horse begins to focus, she works on getting "the shape." That 90-degree turn helps, as the horse anticipates the next turn. Lindsey says you may have to touch the horse's neck at the fold at first, to relax that muscle and get the horse to shift his weight away from you. Be careful not to poke or jab, which would cause the horse anxiety. A firm touch, even in rhythm with his steps, can help.

As he begins to shape the corners, allow your energy to slow toward green. His energy will follow yours. If he gets upset again, match his energy (but not his emotion) for a few moments, then see if you can shape him and slow your steps again.

You are not only calming him in that situation, he's learning he doesn't have to be scared when he gets energetic.

"The straight lines of the square help prevent you and your horse from pushing on each other, while the corners provide an opportunity for your horse to shape around you. A circle doesn't give you as clear a visual path, and you and your horse are more likely to push on each other without even realizing it."

Green in Play

YOU MIGHT WONDER IF LINDSEY IS ALL ABOUT MELLOW, BUT that's not the case. Her philosophy is about using self-regulation techniques to develop a performance horse. She competes with her Quarter Horses in Extreme Cowboy Races. For that, they have to be in a calm-alert state, even when their feet are moving fast and they're facing new challenges.

"I like doing the Extreme Races because they combine many skills – and it's a test of trust. Each race is different and you can't prepare for all the obstacles. So you get your skills, like lead changes, as good and accurate as you can, and your horse as brave as he can be," she says.

Being able to adjust energy is one of those skills that has helped her win.

Her palomino, "Dreamer" (CQ Coosino Gold), came to her with a history of being mistreated and bounced from one place to another. And he bucked. Working with Lindsey, he has become a solid citizen, and bucking is a thing of the past.

"He really is a dream to play with and ride – but he's only suitable for advanced students because he's so sensitive to cues," Lindsey says. "It wouldn't be fair to put a beginner on him who would accidentally press his buttons."

Not only does Dreamer turn it on in competition, winning at jumping events as well as Extreme Cowboy Races (champion and fastest time in the 2016 Can-Am), but he has starred in two movies in which he had to rear, play dead and run at liberty through open meadows.

Lindsey's other horse, "Ozzy" (RN Ozzy Jac), has a reining background and finished third at the regional championships for Ontario Extreme Cowboy Racing in the professional division last year. He was first during the preliminaries after only five months of training with Lindsey.

As if all that isn't challenge enough, Lindsey puts her red-yellow-green theory to the test with off-the-track Thoroughbreds. She buys horses sight-unseen through online ads and trains each to a level of calm connection so they can compete in whatever field she thinks them best suited.

In 2015, Lindsey won both first and second place in competitive trail at the Retired Racehorse Makeover, and she won the overall title of America's Most Wanted Thoroughbred

with her gray mare, Soar. In 2016, Lindsey won both the Makeover trail and freestyle classes with Trivia Time. There's an amazing video online.

All that is to say, helping red horses turn green allows them to perform with calm alertness – what top athletes call being “in the zone.”

But what about the lazy horse?

Energizing Pokey

IMAGINE FEELING DEPRESSED AND SOMEONE WHO IS HIGH ENERGY is dancing around you, trying to jolly you into movement. Or maybe you're not a morning person, and an “Energizer bunny” plays upbeat music and tries to engage you in spirited conversation. You'd probably say, “Go away” in a not very polite manner.

Whereas the red-energy horse is likely to rear when he's restrained, the yellow-energy horse will likely buck when spurred forward or popped with a crop.

“When there's too big a difference between the horse's energy and yours, one or both of you will become frustrated,” Lindsey reiterates.

With a lazy or sour horse that doesn't want to move, the idea is to begin with the same clear mind as you had with the red horse. You'll strive to physically match the horse's low energy. Lindsey says this is hard for her, as she's an energetic person, and slowly waiting for the horse is a challenge. But she quiets her movements and encourages the horse to walk or ride from Point A to Point B, then stops, or turns and stops. She repeats the exercise, walking long straight lines. She asks the horse to stop before he does so on his own. That's key. The horse figures out that he's only being asked to go from A to B, so he's more willing to work with his person.

“It's as if you have to get him in the mood,” Lindsey explains.

After a few straights lines, you can begin to work on a big square, getting the horse to shape as he turns. Before long, you can step up the energy, bringing him to a green energy state without encountering resentment along the way.

All Systems Go

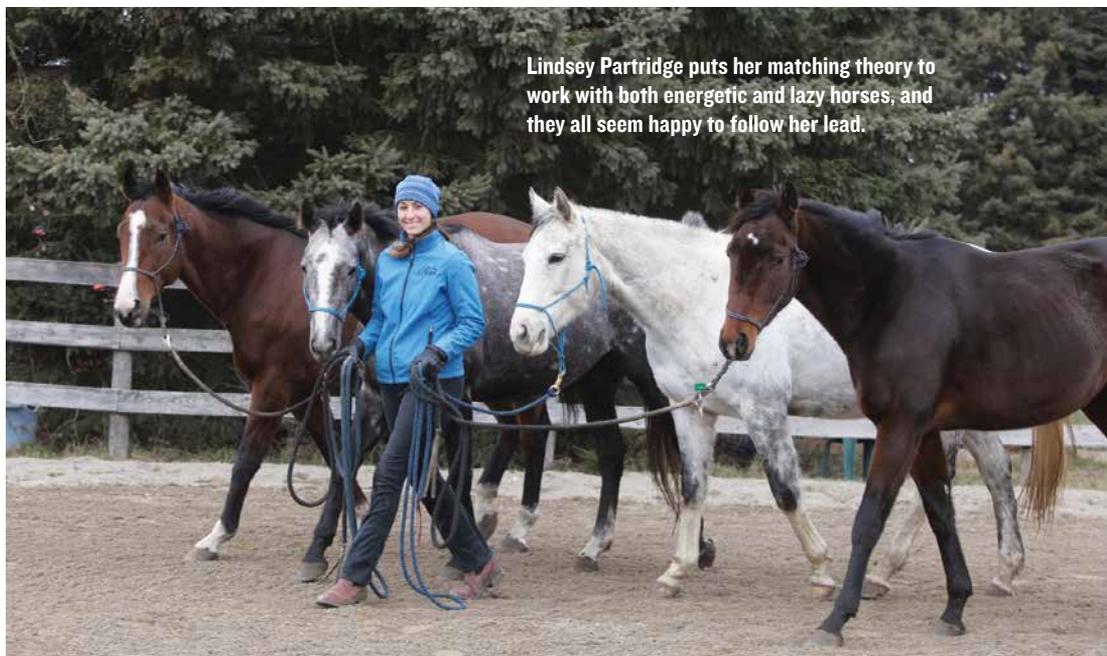
LINDSEY DOES A LOT OF GROUND-work, even work at liberty, before she begins in-the-saddle train-

ing. The square (and reverse square) exercises help horses balance, respond to cues and realize that work is fun. Her red-yellow-green approach helps horses control their emotions. They learn to stay focused even when the going gets exciting in performance or when they confront surprises in unfamiliar surroundings. She calls that a “calm connection.”

Maureen Gallatin is a special contributor to AQHA's Performance Horse Journal. She is founder of Horses on a Mission, and resides in Tryon, North Carolina. To comment on this article, email aqha-jrnl@aqha.org. For more information about Lindsey's techniques, visit www.harmonyhorsemanship.ca.



Matching a horse's energy state is different than matching its emotional state. A rider can exude high energy and be emotionally calm.



Lindsey Partridge puts her matching theory to work with both energetic and lazy horses, and they all seem happy to follow her lead.