

# MARK LANGLEY

## HORSEMANSHIP CHALLENGE:

### CHALLENGE 6

#### Challenge 6: Clarity in Acceleration

##### Key horsemanship Principle

*Know the answer before you ask the question*

##### Videos to watch

Teaching Gracie to walk very slowly


Working on walking transitions to help  
get a pony quiet with the legs (only watch   
until 6 mins 45)

For this Challenge, there is a ground work and ridden section. Ignore the ridden if it is not right for you.

#### Ground-work

Before we get on and ask our horses to move at a certain speed, leading, in the walk we first have to ascertain if they can manage that speed. Most horses can do this easily on the ground, but under saddle other anxieties and habits change this and it can be harder for them to find it. If you have completed Challenge 2 and your horse can follow a soft feel inch by inch, you will have seen that they can walk super-slow.

At clinics I will ask someone a question. Say, "Can you put your horse in a walk?". After 4-5 steps I will stop them, and ask "What walk did you ask for?" and they will umm and ahh...and usually reply, "a medium walk". My response is "That was the walk that the horse offered. Did you really ask that or did you just say, 'walk'"?



My point is that I want you to learn how to ask a specific question, that has a clear answer, and then reward your horse when it finds the answer - not just a random answer.

1. Lead your horse, and let it follow your rhythm at a super slow speed (don't go so slow that your horse stops and starts - we want a smooth rhythm). Once your horse finds a smooth rhythm you can steadily slow it down more. The idea is that we are teaching our horse something different to what it normally does when it is being led by you. For the fast horses that find this difficult and walk faster than you and walk past your shoulders, turn around away from your horse and walk in a different direction (this puts your horse behind you). Do this every time they pass you.
2. Once you have established a super slow walk then you can try a different walk, and hold it until your horse finds it. Some slower horses may be prone to go into a little jog. For these, it is important that you slowly build your speeds so that your horse can learn to lengthen its stride rather than bypassing into a jog. If your horse goes into a jog, you need to slow down again.
3. Once your horse is walking with you at different speeds softly, do can do this again - but this time hold the lead closer and apply feel to ask them to come forward and speed up or backwards feel to ask them to slow down. They will need to start to listen to the halter pressure. This is important for the ridden exercise, when you won't be in front of them.
4. If you are happy with your work on Challenge 5, Walking at the Hip, your horse shouldn't be carrying anxiety when you are moving beside it. This challenge may have already started to help how your horse will now move under saddle. But, just to make sure, we can do a little bit more here - stand where your saddle would be and ask for one step, then stop, then one step, and a stop. You can cluck/ gently tap your horse to create some acceleration (only enough for one small step). If your horse is soft and calm at one step, then allow it keep moving softly. Your horse takes the first steps, you follow. If you are at this stage and your horse can't take the one step (rushy or too hesitant) then treat this lesson as a repeat of Challenge 5 but with more stop starts in it.

#### **Things to watch out for:**

Don't hold the pressure. Ask until they find it, then release and let them carry that speed.

Ask again quite quickly once they drop out of that speed, don't wait.

## Ridden-work

There are anxious, forward moving horses who take fast steps and always walk fast. There are also anxious, shut down type horses that keep their mind at the yards, and move slow. BOTH of these can be from lack of confidence and understanding.

Some horses listen to us really intently, but struggle with responsibility. This will show up when we ask them to have responsibility.

*For fast horses:*

Hopefully by addressing the ground work correctly, your horse will be more calmer and confident and won't be so fast.

1. Stand and centre your horse for longer before you ride off. Wait for it to settle, breathe out and relax. If you ask for it to walk out whilst it is anxious, it is more likely to take a hard, fast step. Ask for 1 soft step and that it is. Stop and wait until your horse settles and connects. Repeat this until your horse becomes confident with stepping softly and stopping softly, until you have a good level of accuracy. (Ask for the step with your heels, not your seat - this is to help your horse be confident with your heels. I know many horses that spend their life avoiding heels because they don't like them. If our legs are hanging on a horse, there shouldn't be one part of them that our horse is troubled by. So if we bring in the seat too early, they learn to avoid heels by listening to the seat, which is leaving a troubled spot in there.)

**Fast horses learn this better by learning it from a stand still, not slowing them down from a fast walk.**

**Use your new tool box tool: *Have the answer in your mind before you ask the question***

2. Allow your horse to walk really slowly on a loose rein. Slow them if they go too fast. Aim for a walk that is just above a stop in speed. They will feel wobbly. Stay in this until they are not wobbly or crooked but smooth.
3. Increase the speed in increments until your horse can hold each speed with responsibility.



### *Things to watch for:*

If you are kicking them to keep them going or holding them to slow them - you are not giving them responsibility. You should be loose and relaxed when they are in the right speed and no pushing with your seat.

### *For slow horses:*

Years ago I accidentally stumbled across a way of getting slow walking horses to accelerate better. That was through asking them to walk *slower* than their natural slow walk, but not allow them to stop. Once they have walked slower, they smiled when I used my legs because they got to go back to their walk. This built confidence through a more positive feeling to the accelerator. Before, these horses were used to someone asking them to always walk faster and so they were dull to the legs. They had no responsibility.

Some horses are slow - not due to laziness - but because they don't think forward very easily. This is a confidence problem.

You can try the steps in the *fast horses* also. This is just another way to help.

1. Allow your slow horse to walk at *its own walk*.
2. If your horse slows, allow it to stop, then immediately ask for the walk again. Relax. Let it carry its own walk. Keep repeating until your horse realises its responsibility is to keep going. Don't over manage the steering, just let it choose its own direction (do this in an arena or similar). Eventually, it may start to let go of you and start to think ahead (watch their ears) - this is very good sign. The less you interrupt your horse, the more space it has to start thinking for itself. You must allow it to stop before you ask it to go - we want room for acceleration. Your legs mean accelerate, NOT keep going.
3. Once your horse is carrying its walk, some horses will start to walk a little faster. This is a bonus if it happens to you. If not, find the direction your horse is most interested in and set it up so that you can go in that direction. Slow your horse down below its walk (but not to a stop) and see if you can hold a slower walk for a few steps, then loosen and speed up to your horse's normal walk in that direction.
4. Repeat 3 quite a number of times until the acceleration is smooth.

Most horses will have by now found a walk that is above their walk.



*Things to watch for:*

Don't get them to do the fast walk too much once they can do it - allow them to do it but bring them back down out of it quite quickly so that they don't fall out of it themselves.