

MICHAEL LANGFORD

# THE FINISHED HORSE

A new series on maintaining and fixing the finished horse starting with a definition of 'finished'

There are different stages in training a horse. The first is starting and there is a lot of good information out there about this. A good 'finished' horse will have had a good 'start' with the emphasis on softness and suppleness. A horse that has been started with these principles is pretty much guaranteed to be a broke horse and will be much easier to maintain and fix in the future should problems arise at any other stage of their training.

Teaching specific manoeuvres comes next and if the foundation is good, these should be picked up reasonably easily by the horse. This applies to all manoeuvres in all disciplines.

A finished horse is generally defined as a horse that has successfully passed through these stages and is at a point where he knows and performs the different manoeuvres softly and relatively easily, depending on his physical abilities. A finished horse is basically a broke horse that has some kind of show experience and who has little left to learn or improve on.

Now, a horse's training doesn't stop when he reaches the point of being finished. He has to be kept fit, interested, willing, honest and has to keep performing to the best of his abilities. Non professional riders should find this series of interest as I hope to be able share

some insights and exercises to help them maintain their horses in the absence of a professional trainer or in between clinics and formal instruction. By identifying some common problems I hope to be able to teach how to maintain and fix the finished western horse so that riders can keep them at the top of their game and avoid problems arising.

The focus will be on exercises and tips to keep horses performing well and to help point out common rider mistakes. I will also try and explain how to deal with typical problems that occur with horses that have more experience, be it at home or in the show pen.

## MICHAEL LANGFORD

Based in Hampshire, Michael runs Positive Equine Solutions, a training business producing western horses for all disciplines from youngsters to National Champions. [www.positive-equine-solutions.co.uk](http://www.positive-equine-solutions.co.uk)



## ASSESSMENT DRILL

If you are trying out a finished horse to ride or to buy, it is good to have a plan to assess his level of training and how well maintained he is. The two most important things to try and discover are:

- ★ Is the horse soft and light?
- ★ Are there any stiff parts that are going to need to be worked on specifically?

It is very common for a finished horse that has been out of a regular maintenance programme for a while to become rusty and idle. Bare this in mind but persevere through

the following checks to ascertain his skill level so you can work out what knowledge he has and where his fitness and suppleness issues lie. If this is a horse that you are going to be riding regularly it will give you an idea as to future warm up and schooling plans.

These exercises are also very useful when assessing a horse to buy that is advertised as 'finished' and in a regular training programme. If the horse is in regular professional training and cannot perform these exercises then it should ring alarm bells.



## FINISHED HORSE:

- ★ When you pick up on the reins, the horse should give his face and not resist pressure from the bit or push on it
- ★ He should be able to move all his different body parts (neck, shoulder, hip, etc.) independently and effortlessly
- ★ He should keep his cadence at all gaits through all exercises
- ★ He should perform all the manoeuvres for his discipline with ease
- ★ He should feel 'solid' meaning that he can perform each manoeuvre without quitting or finding it hard. For example, he should back up or spin for as long as the rider asks him to

### Basic Suppleness Check:

- ★ Direct and indirect bend circles
- ★ Move shoulders out on a circle
- ★ Move hips around on a small circle with a direct bend

### More Advanced Exercises:

- ★ Travers ('quarters in')
- ★ Backing up softly
- ★ Picking up lope from 'kiss'
- ★ Listening to your seat, eg. can he change speed and direction following your seat?