Training aids and gadgets (Part 2)

**by Theresa Odendaal**

In the previous edition of *SA Horseman* we looked at some of the aids and gadgets used when training a horse. Just to recap, a training aid is a piece of equipment used to develop a well-schooled horse to improve his performance, whereas a gadget is a piece of equipment which prevents or restrains an aspect of a horse’s behaviour which makes him difficult or dangerous to ride.

A degree of skill is needed when using aids or gadgets as, when used incorrectly, they can be more harmful than beneficial. It is important that they be fitted correctly and that one be aware of their action, strength and severity. Only use it when specifically required and never as a matter of course.

**Lungeing aids**

These aids and devices are used exclusively for lungeing or longreining.

**Side reins** consist of two separate leather straps with a piece of elastic in the middle, a buckle at one end which is attached to the roller and a clip on the other end which is clipped onto the rings of the bit or onto the cavesson lungeing noseband.

Most rollers have rings along the sides at various heights where the side reins can be attached, depending on the specific horse. They can also be attached cross-wise over the withers to discourage leaning. When attached too low along the sides, it may encourage the horse to lean and/or to become overbent (cheesecurl).
Some people attach them from the bit to between the front legs to encourage the horse to stretch down. Remember that this puts much pressure on the back and should be used with care. Also make sure that the horse does not get his front legs caught in them when he drops his head. Some people use side reins for ridden work, but this is not really what they were designed for.

**The Chambon** is used for lungeing only. It consists of a poll-pad with rings or pulleys on either side, which fit onto the headpiece of the bridle. A strap is attached to the lungeing roller, passing between the horse’s front legs before dividing into two cords. The two cords pass through the rings or over the pulleys on either side of the poll-pad and clip onto the rings of the bit.

The Chambon encourages the horse to lower his head and round his back to work the neck back. It should be fitted so that the horse is prevented from lifting his head above the wither, but should not pull the head down or into the vertical. If too loose, it can get entangled in the front legs when the horse lowers his head.

Many people advocate that the Chambon should not be used for canter work (especially not in young horses), but if so, use at the trot for some weeks to strengthen the back and hindquarter muscles before canter work is initiated, as the back muscles can be compromised. Never use it for jumping. Encourage the horse to work forward, otherwise the horse will merely drop onto the forehand and the aim will not be achieved.

**The Pessoa training system** aims to give the horse a rounded outline, building hindquarter, back and neck muscles. It consists of a roller and pulleys attached from the roller to the bit rings and to a strap passed around the hindquarters.

When the horse lifts his head or drops it too much, the strap around the quarters tightens. Make sure that the device is not fitted too tightly, allowing the horse some play. As this is a rather severe training device, skill and experience are needed to use it correctly.

**The overcheck rein** is attached from the rings of the bit, to the poll and from there to the roller during lungeing or longreining or through a centre buckle and over the horse’s poll through the bit rings to the rider’s hands when riding.

Overcheck reins will encourage the horse to raise his head by raising the bit in the horse’s mouth (a little like a gag bit). This is useful for horses who have a tendency to curl down and behind the bit (cheesecurl) at the slightest contact. Overcheck reins are sometimes used when riding.

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The following training reins, as described in the previous edition of *SA Horseman*, can be used for both ridden work as well as lunging: The elastic training rein (also known as a German rein, German elastic or bungee rein); the Harbridge; the De Gogue; and the overcheck rein.

The subject of training aids and gadgets is fairly controversial. In this sense bits, whips and spurs can also be considered by some as training aids. As far as bits are concerned, this is a whole topic on its own. Whips and spurs warrant only a brief mention, and more of how NOT to use them.

**Whips**

No whip or crop should ever be used in punishment, but rather as an extension of the rider in order to give an aid.

**A jumping crop** is a short whip made of fibreglass and covered with either nylon or leather with a handle at one end (which is thicker) and a leather flap at the other end.
The elastic training rein (also known as a German rein, German elastic or bungee rein) can be used for both ridden and lungeing work.

(which is thinner). It is generally held in the hand with the reins, pointing down the horse's shoulder. It is mostly used on the horse's shoulder to get his attention or to "wake him up". It is mostly the sound of the flap that has an effect and should not be used to inflict pain.

This type of whip is used mostly in jumping or racing. If the flap at the end has been ripped off, throw the crop away, as it is now useless and can only do damage. It is also no longer legal to be used in competition.

**A dressage whip** is usually a longer whip made of fibreglass with a handle on the one (thicker) end and a short string at the other (thinner) end. The length may vary, but in South Africa, for competition purposes, may not be longer than 1,10 m. The longer variations are more commonly called schooling or training whips. These whips are used to engage the hindquarter.

They are held in the hand (usually the inside hand) together with the rein with the long end pointing towards the quarters, where it is used to touch or tap the quarters, or sometimes along the flanks just behind the leg to enhance a leg aid. NEVER use this whip to punish, as it can cause serious pain and damage. Once the short string at the end of the whip has been ripped off, such a whip may no longer be used in competition.

**A lunge whip** usually consists of a long fibreglass tube with a handle at the one (thicker) end and a nylon string or rope at the other, with a short string attached to its end. It is used when lungeing to engage the hindquarter and to create forward movement and can be "cracked".

A lunge whip should never be used to whip or punish a horse. It is held in the hand not holding the lunge rein and is pointed at the horse's hindquarter. It is used by flicking the wrist up, down or sideways and not by raising the arm above the shoulder and hitting at the horse.

**A driving whip / carriage whip** is basically somewhere between a lungeing whip and a dressage whip. Although designed for carriage driving, many people use it for groundwork (work in hand), as its length is better suited to this than either a dressage or lungeing whip. It is used to enhance various aids and to make the horse move away from pressure.

**A showing cane** is usually a short fibreglass cane. It is simply straight, with no "handle" and no flap or string on the end. It is usually covered in leather or plastic, made to look like leather, or resembles a bamboo stick. It is basically only for show and cannot really be used effectively in any way.
Spurs

Spurs should merely be used to sensitise a horse to the leg aid and encourage the horse to move forward and off the leg. Spurs should never be used to punish a horse. Unless a rider can control his legs properly, spurs should not be used, as they can damage a horse or rub bald patches on his sides and eventually make a horse quite leg-dead.

Spurs come in many shapes and types, but the most common is a short piece of metal, which is rounded at the end where it comes in contact with the horse. The more square or sharp these ends, the more severe the action of the spurs on the horse.

The length of the spur can also make a difference. The longer the spur, the more the rider will need to keep his foot and lower leg in control. If the toes point out, the spurs will nag at the horse's sides all the time. With very short spurs (stubbies) on the other hand, the rider may need to turn his toes outwards in order for the spurs to have any effect whatsoever.

It is important that spurs be fitted correctly. They should sit high up, in the middle of the Achilles tendon, and not hang down close to the heel, as this would mean that the rider would have to raise his heels for the spurs to connect. Not all types of spurs may be used in the various competitions. Before buying spurs, find out what the parameters are for spurs in your specific discipline.

As with all training aids and gadgets, whips and spurs are merely a means to an end and not an end in itself. All aids and gadgets should only be used for and within the parameters for which it was designed.