Intro to Lungeing

Lungeing a horse is very similar to riding him. To lunge a horse means to exercise the horse on a circle on a lunge line (the lunge line is held by a person on the ground). The hand provides contact through the lunge line in much the same way that the rein does. The whip simulates the rider's leg. The lunger's body position and voice help the horse to understand the lungeing aids.

Lungeing can be used:

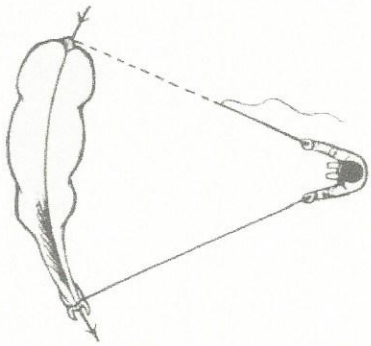
- To train a horse to voice commands
- To teach stabilization
- To exercise a horse when he can't be ridden
- To develop rhythm, balance, and suppleness
- To improve the rider's position
- To diagnose lameness
- As advanced schooling for the horse

A Brief Overview of Technique

The lunge line is held in the left hand when the horse is tracking left, and held in the right hand when the horse is tracking right. While tracking left, the whip is held in the right hand toward the horse's hocks with the lash pointing down at the ground.

*The lunge line should be folded rather than wrapped around the hand and may be held in the rein position or driving position.

The horse and lunger form a triangle. The lunger stands at the point of the triangle and the sides are formed by the lunge line, lunge whip and the horse's body.



As the horse moves around, the lunger should keep his attention on the horse and follow the movement by making a miniature circle inside the horse's larger one.

Lungeing is physically demanding on a horse. It is harder than ordinary riding because working on a circle puts more stress on the horse's legs, muscles, joints, and tendons. The direction of lungeing should be changed about every five minutes, so that the horse will not have stress on its body in one direction for too long.

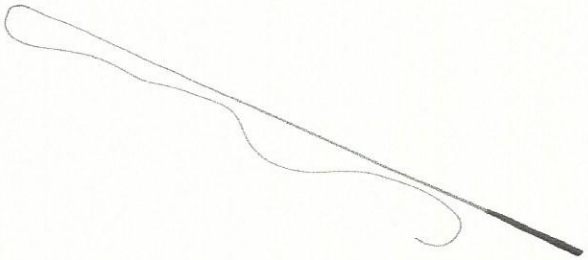
Lungeing Equipment

The Lunge Line is a long, single rein and the main means of communication between the handler and horse during lunging. Through the lunge line, a handler provides subtle aids as when riding. Lunge lines measure from 25 to 35 feet long to enable the handler to ask the horse to travel on a comfortably-sized circle. Generally, the wider the circle, the better it is for the horse as circling is stressful to the horse's tendons, ligaments and joints. The smaller or tighter the circle, the harder it is on the horse's body.

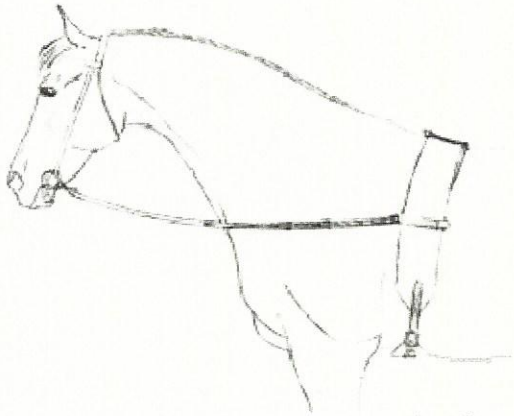
A **Lunge Cavesson** at first glance resembles the headstall of a snaffle bridle. Most lunge cavessons have a padded noseband topped with jointed metal pieces that bend over the top of the horse's nose. When sized and adjusted properly, a lunge cavesson remains securely in place during lungeing and provides a solid method of control without involving the use of a bit. The noseband of a lunge cavesson is fitted with rings—one in the center and one positioned slightly to each side of center--to which the lunge line can be attached.

*If using a bridle: the lunge line can be threaded through one ring of the bit and over the horse's head, and then attached to the top of the bit ring on the other side. This enables your hand to work on both sides of the horse's mouth.

A Training Surcingle is a wide band of leather or webbing that buckles onto the horse like a girth and is equipped with dee rings placed at various intervals on each side for use with side reins. When used directly on a horse's back, extra padding such as a wither pad should be used for cushioning. A surcingle should be positioned carefully so that it doesn't put pressure on the spine or dig into the horse's shoulder blades, and where it does not interfere with the horse's elbows during movement.



A **Lunge Whip** is yet another aid for the handler. It acts like a rider's leg as it is used primarily to move the horse forward or outward on the circle. Lunge whips vary in length from approximately 5 to 7 feet, and have soft, light lashes about 6 feet long--just enough to tickle the horse if needed as a driving aid.



Side Reins run from the surcingle to the rings of the bit. They can help a horse learn contact with the bit, gain balance and suppleness or find self-carriage. Used incorrectly, they can cause a horse to over flex. A horse has to become accustomed to the feel of side reins gently over time, with them adjusted loosely at first and gradually shortened to where they need to be.

Various types of side reins are available with the most commonly used types involving either a rubber donut or an elastic insert to provide give. A rubber donut adds a small amount of give as well as weight to the side rein.

side rein with a rubber donut

Side reins with elastic inserts