

The Tellington TTouch Method[®]

Liberty Lariat Neck Ring

For more than four decades, riding with a neck ring or just a rope around the neck – often with nothing on the horse's head – has been one of the foundation exercises of the Tellington TTouch Method.

Riding without a bridle isn't new, nor is it a gimmick. Over 40 years ago at the Pacific Coast School of Horsemanship, Linda toured the US giving demonstration of bridle-less drill jumping with two stallion, a mare and a gelding. This display of riding inspired people with a sense of wonder at the ability to ride a horse with seemingly so little control.

In 1975, Linda introduced the concept of bridle-less riding to Europe at Equitana in Germany. Three riders jumped a course bareback and bridleless. Europeans were incredulous, and the major German horse magazine wrote an article stating how impossible and dangerous this was, and adding that there must be a special secret. However, in the ensuing four decades, thousands of riders in Europe and North America have discovered the joy and advantages of deepening their relationship with their horse with this Pegasus-like feeling.

You may be wondering? How do I safely begin? What if my stable does not allow bridle-less riding because of insurance? Is it advisable to ride bridle-less with a spooky horse? How soon in the course of training can I ride a green horse bridle-less?

There are many instances in which you may not want to take off the bridle. Perhaps you are starting a young horse; insurance at your stable will not allow it; or you simply do not feel it would be a safe thing to do.

Can using the neck ring with a bridle still have benefit? Absolutely! You needn't ever take off the bridle completely to get the benefits of riding with a neck lariat.

Start with whatever bridle you are already using. We normally use a stiff, adjustable ring made of lariat rope.

You can experiment with different ways of holding the reins and neck ring. You can hold the neck ring in both hands, much like a second rein.

***Always start in a safe, enclosed space.**

You can hold the reins in one hand and the neck ring in the other. Or you may find it easier in the beginning to pick up the reins with a signal from the neck to turn or stop.

You should quickly find that using the neck ring will reduce your dependency on the reins, giving you an improved sense of balance over your feet.



Why Ride Bridle-less?

- Develops a sense of trust & partnership
- Enhances a rider's seat & balance
- Improves a horse's balance and general performance with a bridle
- Allows freedom of the head and neck
- Encourages "swing" and freedom in the stride
- Provides a "novel", non-habitual experience under saddle
- Changes a horse's posture intrinsically
- Is an easy way to teach neck reining
- It's a lot of FUN!



The Tellington TTouch[®] Method

Liberty Lariat Neck Ring- cont

How to Use the Neck Ring: For some, it may be easier to hold the reins in one hand and the neck ring in the other. As you are learning, give a light signal on the turning rein at the same time that you signal the turn with the neck ring.

To give the signal to stop, pick-up the neck ring to make a light signal-and-release contact two-thirds of the way up the horse's neck while using a long, tone, verbal 'whoaaaa' while using your seat aids.

Follow the angle of the shoulder rather than pull straight back.

You may have to use your rein along with the neck ring to reinforce the signal as you and your horse learn these new dance steps. Signal and release two or three times to accomplish a complete halt while using your seat and exhale.

Remember, the horse will actually respond on the 'release' rather than the pull – if you constantly pull on the reins many horses will simply lean into it. Be sure only to signal for the halt and avoid pulling.

The light pressure on the base of the neck helps to trigger the 'seeking reflex', which encourages the withers to lift and the neck to telescope from the withers to the poll.

This is very helpful for horses who have a tendency to brace at the base of the neck.

In order to stop and turn the horse, you will almost automatically use your seat and legs in a more effective way. Your balance, as well as your horse's, will improve as you both start to "smile" at the new sense of connection.

When riding in a circle, initiate the turn by imagining a searchlight in the middle of your chest. Look around with your eyes in the direction of the turn and swivel your body to follow. This will keep you from leaning into the turn and help you stay in better balance with your horse.

The neck ring will quickly reveal your horse's tendency to lean into the circle in one direction or the other. It simultaneously gives you the means to pick up his shoulder and neck and encourage him to stay on the outside of the circle's perimeter without relying on the inside rein.

For example, if your horse tends to fall to the inside on the left rein, with his body stiff rather than softly following the arc of the circle. In this situation the horse will tend to make smaller and smaller circles.

Hold the neck ring so that it touches the neck near the shoulder on the inside and close to the poll on the outside. At the same time, open your inside thigh and 'flutter' your leg at the girth to encourage him to bend around it and lift rather than fall.



As you ride, try out different positions of the neck ring, from near the base of the neck all the way up to near the throat-latch.

Be careful to only make contact with the neck ring when you are giving a clear signal, such as to turn, slow down or halt. Practice turning and stopping at a walk first.

Once you feel comfortable with the horse's response, you can pick up a trot.

The Tellington TTouch® Method

Liberty Lariat Neck Ring- cont



Most people find that the trot and the canter will also improve with the use of the neck ring.

Experiment to see what happens when you hold the neck ring with your inside hand, then your outside hand, then both hands. Do you lean more or less with one or the other? How does your horse feel? Is the circle rounder holding the neck ring one way or the other?

Once your horse stops and turns to a light signal, tie the reins in a knot halfway up the neck and practice with the ring only or hold the reins at the buckle along with the neck ring – the reins will hang loose but are there should you need them.

Taking Off the Bridle: In order for you to feel safe about taking these steps recommend “chunking down” the process with a ground person. We recommend starting with a light, 21-foot rope fastened with a non-slip knot (such as a bowline) around the horse’s neck, just behind the ears. Remove the bridle and put a double half hitch over the horse’s nose, making a simple halter from the rope.

Have an assistant stand about 10 feet from the horse, holding the rope and a wand. You’ll give the signals to the horse while your ground person acts as a backup and ‘safety net’.

Practice stopping and turning first at the walk and then at the trot. We want you to be confident that you’ve got good ‘brakes’ before going on to the trot.

To halt, use these specific signals: 1. Slide the ring higher on the horse’s neck and give two or three gentle ask-and-release signals for him to stop. The secret to success is the release. 2. At the same time, use your regular seat aids for halt. If your horse does not come to a complete stop within a few strides, having your ground person observe what you are doing with your lower leg – you may be inadvertently giving your horse a signal to go forward. 3. Combine your seat signal with a long, toned verbal cue, “whoaaaaa”. If your horse still does not stop, go back to working with the bridle in combination with the neck ring.

When your horse stops easily and consistently from these signals, have your helper remove the loops from his nose and continue to hold the rope loosely from about 10 feet away. Repeat the steps above and confirm that your horse comes a complete halt from your signals alone.

These steps can usually be accomplished in about 10-15 minutes.

If you feel confident about your progress and your horse is listening, it’s a good time to quietly remove the rope and continue riding bridle-less on your own.

Ride your horse in various patterns, such as serpentines and circles, at the walk.

Besides using the neck ring, remember to allow your seat and legs to give signals. Generally, your inside leg will naturally stay at the girth and your outside leg will move back slightly on the turns.

Once you feel your horse is responsive at the walk, you may want to try an easy trot. You may find that “steering” is actually easier at this gait.

Stay light and balanced in the saddle and remember to give press-and-release signals rather than steady pressure. Relax, breathe, sit up straight and enjoy!

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Liberty Lariat Neck Ring- cont

Bridle-less Benefits: It has been amazing to see how horses and riders of all disciplines have changed using a neck ring in their training.

We saw a lower-level dressage horse who was said to be dangerous on a circle. It was thought he would literally fall down if you didn't hold him up with the reins. He could not be ridden forward no matter how much the rider "drove" him with the seat and legs.

At the end of the first session of the neck ring and going bridle-less, this horse was doing an extended trot for the first time ever. He had wonderful elevation and extensions, with no sign of stumbling or falling down.

Similar improvements have been seen in jumpers. Several years ago in Finland, Linda worked on a talented mare, who was a very successful Grand Prix jumper. However, she had lost some of her scapiness. Her head set was "stuck" on the vertical and she wasn't using her head and neck enough. Removing the bridle helped to trigger the "seeking reflex", raise the withers and free the neck. Within six months, her rider won the jumper championship in Finland for the first time with this mare.



Bridle-less riding is a staple of our clinics, and it's amazing to witness the transformation of horses and riders time after time.

Shedding your bit and bridle is a great way to improve the balance of both you and your horse, gain a new level of cooperation from your equine partner and experience a new level of joy and trust. In addition, we see horses naturally produce those qualities sought after in collection, including lengthening of the neck, raising the withers, lifting the back, and freeing and engaging the hindquarters.

While bridle-less riding has gained popularity in the past years, many riders do not feel safe riding in a large group of horses with nothing on the horse's head and little to guide him other than their seat and legs. We find that starting with the lariat neck ring in combination with a bridle or halter, helps rider and horse gain trust, safety and the aids necessary for successful communication and safe passage.

While we don't expect you to ride a 100-mile endurance ride with only a neck ring as Bob and Brooke Sample did in the "Quilty", Australia's toughest and most famous endurance ride. (Brooke won and Bob was third.) You can achieve results at whatever level you choose., plus it is fun for you and your horse. Even a few sessions riding bridle-less should pay dividends when you go back to the bridle.

As you can see there are many applications for the lariat neck ring. Even if you eventually choose not to remove the bridle, the lariat neck ring is a great tool for both you and your horse.