

4-H State Trail Riding Project Training

Kim Hornsby



Tack and Equipment

Saddle

- western or English
- proper fit
- Rings to tie

Bridle

- Good to have a throat latch
- Halter

Saddle pad

- Contoured
- Thicker 1" for long rides
- Wool

Accessories

- Saddlebags
- Breast Collar
- Crupper or Breeching

Tack and Equipment



- ▶ Proper fitting tack for horse and rider is a must to prevent galls, rubs, and saddle sores
- ▶ Check wear before and after each ride
- ▶ Tack should be clean and free of debris
- ▶ Check the horse for rubs after each ride
- ▶ All straps and cinches should lie flat against the horse and be snug and secure, but not tight
 - ▶ Cinch placement depends on saddle rigging, but should not be placed right underneath the elbow

Conditioning the Horse Mentally



- ▶ Form a partnership before taking a horse out for the first time
- ▶ Spend time grooming, doing ground work, and riding
- ▶ Expose your horse to different types of stimulus
- ▶ Good training is as important as good conditioning for fitness as a horse can use up a lot of physical energy coping with emotional stress

Conditioning the Horse Mentally

- ▶ Ground Work
 - ▶ Stand for mounting and dismounting
 - ▶ Lead quietly
 - ▶ Backing
 - ▶ Tying
 - ▶ Focus
 - ▶ Desensitizing
 - ▶ Obstacles on the ground



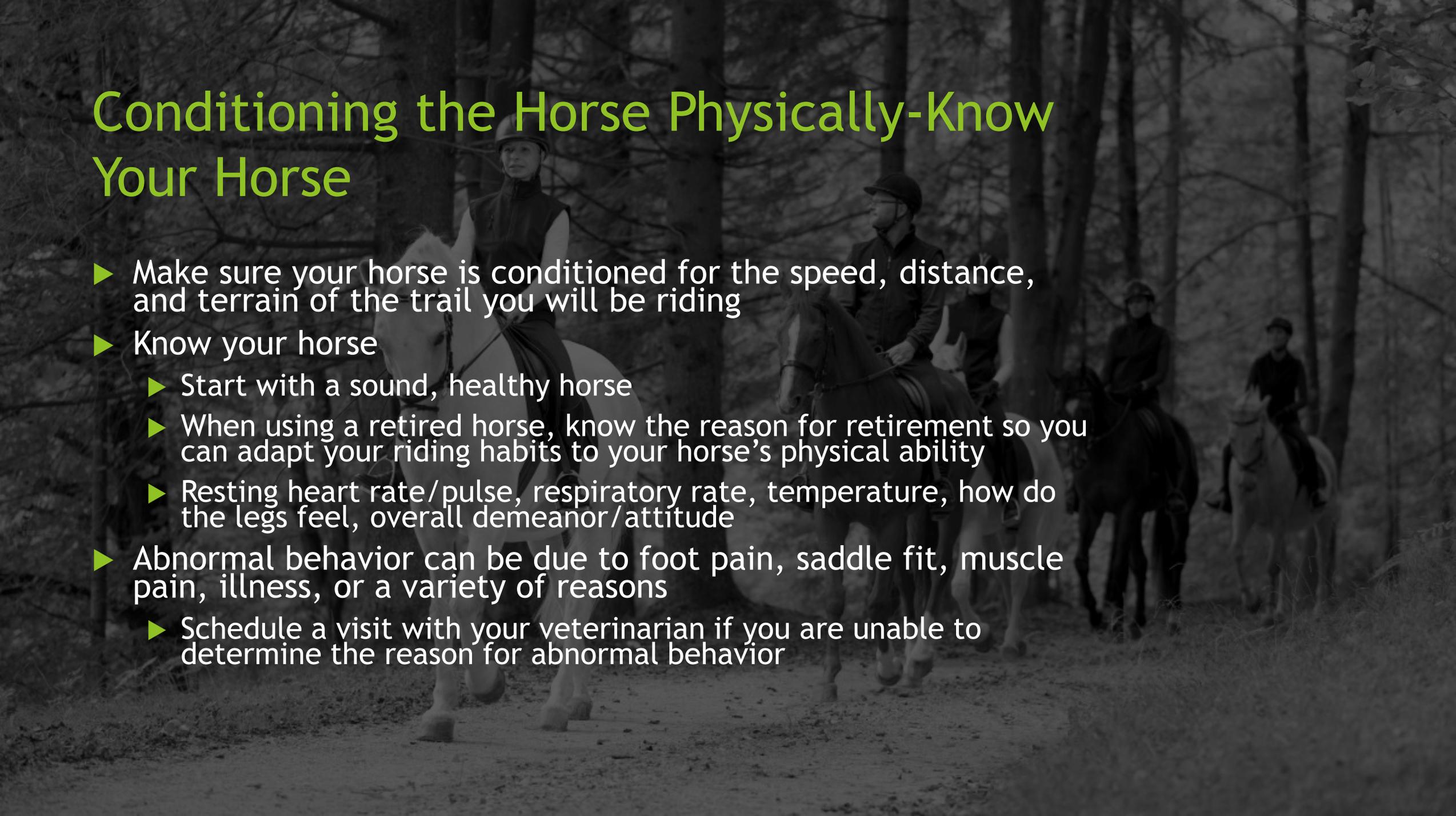


Conditioning the Horse Mentally

- ▶ Mounted Work
 - ▶ Stop with seat, verbal cue, and gentle pull on the reins if necessary
 - ▶ Stand quietly after stopping
 - ▶ Go forward willingly
 - ▶ Turn left and right
 - ▶ Desensitizing
 - ▶ Obstacles under saddle

Conditioning the Horse Physically-Know Your Horse

- ▶ Make sure your horse is conditioned for the speed, distance, and terrain of the trail you will be riding
- ▶ Know your horse
 - ▶ Start with a sound, healthy horse
 - ▶ When using a retired horse, know the reason for retirement so you can adapt your riding habits to your horse's physical ability
 - ▶ Resting heart rate/pulse, respiratory rate, temperature, how do the legs feel, overall demeanor/attitude
- ▶ Abnormal behavior can be due to foot pain, saddle fit, muscle pain, illness, or a variety of reasons
 - ▶ Schedule a visit with your veterinarian if you are unable to determine the reason for abnormal behavior





Conditioning the Horse Physically-Diet

- ▶ All horses need a balanced diet of hay and/or pasture, concentrate, or ration balancer
 - ▶ Factors that influence amount
 - ▶ Lifestyle
 - ▶ Hard keepers that need higher caloric intake
 - ▶ Easy keepers may do well on a ration balancer, which may need to be adjusted as athletic performance increases
 - ▶ A horse that is losing weight
 - ▶ May be being ridden too hard
 - ▶ Not being fed a proper diet
 - ▶ If the horse starts to lose weight, ride less frequently or with less intensity and feed him more until he is at an optimum body score



Conditioning the Horse Physically-Feet

- ▶ It is extremely important to pay attention to your horse's feet, especially when going long distances
- ▶ Tips for hoof care
 - ▶ Build a relationship with a good veterinarian/farrier team
 - ▶ Shoe/trim routinely
 - ▶ Proper nutrition
 - ▶ Biotin, zinc, methionine
 - ▶ Hooves will grow faster as horses exercise due to increased blood circulation unless they are being worn down faster than they are growing.



Conditioning the Horse Physically- (Phase 1 Long, Slow Distance

- ▶ Long, slow distance work is the basis for preparing a novice, young, or sedentary horse for a longer ride
- ▶ Plan to ride the horse 3-5 times per week and allow at least 12 weeks to get a horse physically fit
- ▶ Start at 20-30 minutes at a walk and increase by 5 minutes each ride until they can be comfortably ridden for an hour
- ▶ Active horses on turnout may take less time than sedentary horses in the stall or field
- ▶ These initial rides can be done in a field, easy trails, or a mixture. Ride inclines diagonally initially to prevent injury.

A photograph of a rider on a light brown horse in a field under a blue sky with clouds. The rider is wearing a helmet, a vest, and blue pants. The horse is facing right.

Conditioning the Horse Physically: Phase 2 (Increasing Intensity and Time)

- ▶ In the following weeks, introduce some trotting and faster gait intermingled with walking
 - ▶ For older, retired, or sedentary horses, the trotting should initially be for only short distances but gradually increased
 - ▶ Learn to post the trot or learn to stay out of the saddle so you're not jarring the horse's back. This combined with ill-fitting tack can cause a lot of soreness
- ▶ Continue to increase the trotting time and start adding some cantering.
- ▶ Begin to introduce hill work at a walk/diagonally and increase to a trot eventually as most trail rides in Kentucky will involve substantial hill work
- ▶ Downhill work at this stage should be done at a walk because the front legs take a majority of the concussion on flat terrain and even more so downhill with a rider
- ▶ Continue to increase the distance and time you spend moving out at a faster gait
- ▶ Always include a warm-up and cool down
- ▶ Pay close attention to saddle fit because the horse's back will change as they become more fit.
- ▶ A horse can become fit fast, but tissues will not be conditioned to withstand injury, so take your time!
- ▶ It could take 3-4 months to prepare a horse to go on 4-6 hour rides



Conditioning the Horse Physically-Phase 3 (Maintaining Fitness)

- ▶ Ride routinely
- ▶ The musculoskeletal system, tendons and ligaments, cardiovascular, and respiratory system takes longer to condition than it takes to weaken

Conditioning the Horse Physically- Cross Training

- ▶ Hills are important for training, even if you will do mostly flat rides because they force the horse to engage his hindquarters and use his back muscles differently
- ▶ You can let your horse canter or go at a faster gait on flat portions of the trail with safe footing
- ▶ Changing pace and scenery keeps everything fresh
- ▶ If you don't have access to hills, consider ground poles, cavalettis, or trailer out to trails with hills to help develop your horse's hindquarters

Conditioning the Horse Physically-Rest



- ▶ Rest is as important as conditioning miles
 - ▶ Rebuilds energy storage and regenerates/repairs muscle fiber or other tissues that become inflamed
- ▶ Allow for less days during phase one. As intensity increases during phase 2, you will need to allow the horse to rest and recover more frequently
- ▶ Horses need at least one full day of rest per week.
- ▶ If no rest or recovery is allowed, the body is unable to regenerate tissues and will break down. This allows injuries to happen to the weakest parts (tendons, ligaments, joints, muscles, etc.)