

GLADUR TAKES AN ONLINE LUNGEING COURSE

BY YVONNE EBERLING



Here is Gladur before he started the lungeing course, in September 2008.

Do you lunge your horse? If yes, when and how do you do it? Honestly?

In my beginning days, when I was under time pressure, did not have enough time to ride, and just wanted to have my horse move around quickly, I “lunged” my horse. Many people do this. They may not know that, if not done right, lungeing a horse can cause more harm than good. People that do know this, however, keep away from lungeing altogether, and so lose a great opportunity to tone their horse’s bodies.

Recently two very idealistic German women, Babette Teschen and Tania Konnerth, put together an online course with the intention of cleaning up this technique’s reputation. At first I hesitated to take it. An online course for lungeing? How can a simple 200-page-long pdf file show me

how to lunge a horse? I waited and browsed their page, liking their concepts and views. Then the German horse magazine *Cavallo*, tested this course. It got very good reviews. So I bought it and started to train my horse using these guidelines. Their course gives amazing guidelines on how lungeing can be done right. In the following paragraphs I want to tell you how training my Icelandic horse Gladur with correct lunging techniques changed both his body and mind.

WHAT IS LUNGEING ALL ABOUT?

First of all, lungeing is certainly not meant to get your horse moving around quickly when you are short on time. The intention should never be that your horse zips around a few times and then you call it a day.

I’ve seen horses speeding in circles,

heads up, backs tight. Sometimes I’ve seen horses wearing the weirdest attachments—resembling some strange bondage experiments—side reins, etc., heads tied down, etc. Seeing those pictures I can understand why so many people and especially so many horses are not very fond of lungeing.

The general idea, on the contrary, is to teach the horse to carry us without any harm done to its body. It has to learn to round up its back, “lift” its shoulders, and use its rear end to actively carry our weight. And correct lungeing is a great aid to teach a horse to do so.

MOTORCYCLE OR TRAIN?

A very helpful image used in the online course is a comparison of our horses with two everyday vehicles. Looking at your horse on the lunge line, what does it re-

semble: a motorcycle or a train?

Is your horse “leaning” into the circle like a motorcycle, balancing itself by “falling” into the direction it is supposed to go? Or is your horse more like a train taking a curve, with “the front end” bending into the curve and the rest of its body following in track?

Obviously we want trains, not motorcycles. So why does the motorcycle-horse happen? Why are horses falling on their inner shoulders and/or trying to push inwards into the circle? Why are they getting off their track?

Look at the horse’s movements in nature: A horse runs on its forehand, and it is not normally running in tight circles. Such horses also do not carry people on their backs, and so they do not need to use their hindquarters in such a way as to support a rider’s weight. So from the horse’s point of view, there’s nothing wrong with a motorcycle style. The horse is going along the way horses have been doing it naturally for ages.

Why do we have to show them how to do it right?

Let’s have a look at our horse running in a circle, falling on that “inner shoulder”:

The horse is turning its body around the inner front leg, leaning into the leg which is on the ground at that moment. This action causes rotational forces on that leg and the joint.

Since the horse is leaning on this leg, balancing itself, and running with the rest of its body turning outwards, this inner shoulder can’t move freely. This happens because the horse’s brachialis muscle is dilated, under tension; because of this, the shoulder is fixed. So the horse is only able to do shortened strides of the front legs. The result is that the front legs are “rammed” into the ground. The horse can’t move freely; instead it employs a hard, unsprung, and leg-harming way of moving. In short, the horse is running on its forehand.

At the same time, the horse is not tracking—and as long as the hindquarters are “sheering” past the horse’s front, the horse won’t be able to achieve tracking. Also, with the rear hoof going past the horse’s body, the horse’s hips can’t be lowered and the back muscles won’t be picked up and won’t be “swinging.”

All those problems in just one single turn!

This is actually just a glimpse of what is going on in these situations, but I guess it’s

enough to show the importance of doing it correctly to avoid harm.

WHAT EQUIPMENT DO WE NEED?

The course called for three things: a comfortable, gentle, and well fitting cavesson, one lunge line (surprisingly, just a short one, about 5 meters or 16 feet long), and a driving whip or lungeing whip. Three simple things that would change our lives.

ALL BEGINNINGS ARE DIFFICULT!

For sure, we didn’t actually start lungeing. First we had to get the basics down. The very basics. It was quite depressing.

The first step in this course was to show your horse how to bend and to lead him “in position.” That means that he had to learn to walk on a volte with his neck bent. Bending the neck, in this case, means that the “leader” stands about shoulder level at the horse’s side, and the horse has to look more or less at the leader’s belly. The outside ear should be in front of the inside ear but, importantly, the head is not to be crooked; if it is, something is severely wrong. The horse is to be led at a walk on a bigger volte—not falling or pushing towards the inside, just simply walking, with its head bent towards the person who is leading it.

SOUNDS EASY, DOESN’T IT?

So here we were: Gladur was wearing his cavesson, the lunge line hooked to the middle ring, waiting for things to happen.

I was holding my horse on the lunge line, just one inch from the hook where it was connected to the cavesson. And a bunch of people from my barn were standing at ringside making rather de-motivating comments, not understanding what I was trying to teach my horse, since lungeing means to run in circles and certainly not “that,” whatever it was.

When I first started to read through the course, at work during lunchtime, planning what I was going to do that day with Gladur, I planned on spending about five minutes on that first exercise, “the leading in position,” and then move right on to the “real deal,” the lungeing itself.

It took us a whole week. Not that Gladur is especially untalented, or that I am especially clumsy. No, it actually took us that much time to get this basic exercise down, and not let Gladur get too frustrated or bored.

We didn’t do well the first time we tried this. We had to “trick” it a little bit, using the so-called “Dual Alleys” system established by German horse trainer Michael Geitner. Lacking the original “Dual Alley Blocks,” I built a circle using pool noodles with an inner line and an outer line, so that Gladur had some boundaries to restrain his urge to break out of the circle or push inside the circle toward me. Still, Gladur did sheer out of his track with his rear end on the right hand; and still he pushed himself toward me, leading him from the inside, on the left hand. So I had to stop that. I actually had to start showing him how to bend



This photo was taken in June. It is easy to see how he buffed up with the proper exercise.



Working with Gladur in this program gave both of us a lot more understanding of each other and was a huge confidence boost for both of us. After being a rather fearful rider, I was able to build up the trust and the confidence to ride Gladur regularly without a saddle and bridle, and we both are able to communicate.

his head while standing straight. After this we were actually able to walk in a circle in a straight manner, Gladur bending his head toward me while doing so, and not having his behind run out of the track.

After one week he understood what I wanted, and I didn't need to use the "Dual Alleys" any more. We moved on to the next exercise, which is basically the same, but now he was supposed to learn how to foot his inner rear leg toward the outer front leg to loosen up his haunches and enable him to step under his balance point. This exercise he picked up quickly, and we proceeded with our lungeing training without any further difficulties.

Since the first exercises were all performed in walk, we had to learn to do the same things in trot. I was thinking it would be easy, since he mastered it in walk. Sadly, that is not how things worked. We had to slow down, going back to walk, and then getting to the trot little by little. I had to take out the pool noodles again and build the Dual Alleys again to keep him from pushing inward again. Slowly he learned he could do these exercises also in trot.

LUNGEING GLADUR TODAY

I have to admit, we needed some time and patience. Not everybody understood what I was doing when I was working with

Gladur in this way. But in the end, my horse not only buffed up amazingly, no: He also gained more trust in me and gained more self-esteem by executing the exercises correctly and being praised like he had just conquered the world.

I also love that I didn't have to use any side reins or other "aiding devices" that would have made me feel uncomfortable.

Today, I'm still working with Gladur following the course's guidelines. Over a few months, I saw more changes happen in Gladur, physically and mentally, in the way he moved and carried himself in freedom and under saddle. Lunging now is a workout for both of us—it's well beyond what is commonly understood as "lunging." He isn't zipping in a circle around me anymore, he is moving nicely in all gaits, even tolt, in a relaxed manner, and moving forward using his hindquarters actively. Riding has changed too. He is not heavy on the reins anymore, and it is a joy to feel his back swinging in all gaits. In the meantime, we also picked up long-reining and working on the double-lunge, but that will be another story to share.

Interested in hearing more about the lungeing course? Drop me a line at y.eberling@yahoo.com. Want to contact the original authors of the course? Write to babette@wege-zum-pferd.de or [\[wege-zum-pferd.de\]\(http://wege-zum-pferd.de\) or visit their website at \[wegezumpferd.de\]\(http://wegezumpferd.de\). I am currently working on translating the course from German into English, since my husband and barn friends are interested in it, and maybe, if there are more people interested, there could be a way for it come to you.](mailto:tania@</p>
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