



## **Using Our Legs and a Slow Hand as Our Power Steering**

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If we rely completely on our hands to guide our horses through a pattern or down the trail, we take a great chance of making our horses hard mouthed. The ultimate goal for everything we do on our horses should start with a soft mouth. This starts with soft and slow contact with the bit. Most people have heard of being soft with our hands, but what about being slow? What exactly do I mean by using slow contact with our hands? Being slow with our hands will slow everything down with our horse. It teaches them to be more patient and trust us much more. Horses will react to every amount of pressure we put on their reins. Depending on how much they react is entirely up to the horse. I like to do everything I can to ensure my horse remains soft; and being slow with my hands gives me more confidence that he will be soft. Horses are very much like humans, if something sneaks up on us, we are more likely to have a negative reaction. It's the same with horses, if we sneak up to them with our hands, the reaction will be negative almost all the time.

It's only natural to want to rely on our hands to steer our horse the direction we wish to go. The biggest aid for making a soft mouth is a horse that moves away from leg pressure. If I squeeze with my right leg, I want my horse to move to the left. Likewise, if I push with my left leg, I want my horse to move to the right. If I pull my horse to the left, I complement it with a squeeze from my right leg. When squeezing with my leg, I use my calf to do the majority of the squeezing. If using my calf isn't enough, I will use my heel. I ride in spurs about 99% of the time, so I try to be light with my spur as much as I can. Being slow with my leg is as important as anything I do with my horse. Most of the time when I see a rider who wants to slow their horse down, it can be achieved by slowing his/her leg down. It's amazing at how much we can make our ride more enjoyable just by slowing our legs and hands.

When turning our horse any direction, it's important to keep the outside rein loose as much as possible. If we keep our outside rein too tight, it will cause the horse to not understand which direction to go and will ultimately cause our horse to lose any softness and suppleness it may have. Just because a horse starts off really soft, doesn't mean he will stay that way forever. It is up to the rider to maintain it.

When I'm breaking a 2 year old, I start softening them up before I get on them. This can be done by line driving. Once I'm on the colt, I will start asking them to move away from leg pressure immediately. Every little bit of effort is rewarded. One step in the correct direction is all I ask for. If I get that one step, I pat them on the neck and walk around for a minute or so, then do it again. If we reward them for each little bit of effort they put in, it will be amazing at how quick they will learn to move away from pressure. Lastly, it is equally important to look up and look the direction we wish to go. If we look down and drop our shoulder, the horse is going to drop his shoulder and knock down a barrel or cut into a circle and cheat us out of a correct maneuver. Our body will follow where our eyes take us.