

# Positive interactions between horse and rider

---

**Gregić, Maja; Horvat, M.; Bobić, Tina; Gantner, Vesna**

*Source / Izvornik:* **XII International Symposium on Agricultural Sciences "AgroReS": book of proceedings, 2023, 279 - 288**

**Conference paper / Rad u zborniku**

*Publication status / Verzija rada:* **Published version / Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

<https://doi.org/10.7251/ZARS2301279G>

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:151:196846>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#) / [Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2025-01-31**



Sveučilište Josipa Jurja  
Strossmayera u Osijeku

**Fakultet  
agrobiotehničkih  
znanosti Osijek**

*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[Repository of the Faculty of Agrobiotechnical  
Sciences Osijek - Repository of the Faculty of  
Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek](#)



## Positive interactions between horse and rider

Maja Gregić<sup>1</sup>, Matija Horvat<sup>1</sup>, Tina Bobić<sup>1</sup>, Vesna Gantner<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek, University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek, Osijek, Croatia

Corresponding author: Maja Gregić, [mgregic@fazos.hr](mailto:mgregic@fazos.hr)

### Abstract

The aim of the work was to present a way of developing positive interaction between horses and riders in training. Interactions between horse and rider that lead to a positive relationship are realized through a series of human actions towards the horse and vice versa. The interaction between horse and rider is influenced by many factors; rider's seat, training method, appropriate equipment and knowledge of the basic characteristics of horse ethology. The connection between a man and a horse is the embodiment of the greatest connection between a man and an animal, while the ultimate goal of riding is to achieve union with the horse, that is, some kind of fluidity. With proper work and training, horses show a desire and willingness to communicate with people, while coercion in working with a horse is the worst for both partners. The rider around the horse should have the qualities of a calm and reliable leader, while the horse should have confidence in its rider. Constant proper work and time dedicated to the horse will lead to a high-quality and successful creation and maintenance of a positive relationship between horse and rider.

*Key words:* horse, training, positive interaction

### Introduction

Horse riding is a popular sport and form of recreation for people all over the world. Throughout history, horses have played various roles. Many wars were won on their backs, while today they are used for recreation and people keep them primarily out of love. The most popular activity with horses is horseback riding. Horse riding can be recreational or disciplinary. In riding, the rider controls the horse's movements in several ways. I apply signals through my weight, i.e. the seat, pelvis, arms and legs in order to encourage the horse to move in the given direction, speed and manner. A well-ridden horse reacts to very light signals given by the rider,

and the rider is able to sit independently of the horse. In order for the relationship between individuals of two different species to be good, it is suggested to achieve a positive relationship with the horse. The relationship between humans and horses is based on several interactions between them. The outcome of these interactions will lead to a positive or negative relationship. Such a relationship between horse and rider is of increasing interest among riders, but also a relatively new field of science (Hausberger et al., 2008, Andersen, 2015). The relationship between horse and rider is interesting and still largely unexplored. In any case, it always needs to be improved. It is a mistake to see riding as a horse's job because riding is a privilege. Interactions between horses and humans take place in many ways, through feeding, grooming, treatment and riding. The outcomes of these interactions can be positive or negative, depending on a number of factors. The aim of the work is to clarify the interaction between horse and rider and how the relationship between them is realized.

*The relationship between horse and rider*

The interaction between horse and rider falls under the study of anthrozoology, which investigates communication between animals and humans. Although a relatively new field of science, horse-rider interactions have captured the interest of riders and scientists (Andersen, 2015). Horse riding is quite a dangerous sport and in terms of frequency of injuries, it competes with football, motorcycling, rugby and skiing. In order to minimize the number of injuries, it is necessary to develop a positive relationship and interaction with the horse. It can be achieved by choosing a certain training method and implementing it. The interaction between horse and rider is influenced by many factors; the rider's seat, training method, appropriate equipment and knowledge of the basic characteristics of horse behaviour. Through his seat, pelvis, arms and legs, the rider signals the horse at what speed and in which direction he wants it to move (Andersen, 2015). Before riding, it is necessary to check the correctness of the rider's bridle and saddle, as these are the main points of contact between the horse and the rider. The saddle must fit the back of the horse as well as the rider. That is why it is important to choose a horse that matches the rider's size, and weight and is within the 20% rule. The 20% rule refers to the weight and requires that the rider can weigh a maximum of 20% of the horse's weight (National Equine Forum, 2022). An ill-fitting saddle can cause pain and will lead to a negative interaction between rider and horse. The relationship between horse and rider is a relationship of mutual dependence, cooperation and mutual becoming (Maurstad et al, 2013). The relationship between man and horse is considered an equal partnership. It must be taken into account that riding is an activity in which two individuals of different species participate and that their

communication is still a big unknown. Mastering riding is a long process that requires constant improvement. Discovering new knowledge in working with horses also brings new methods in training. An experienced rider, as well as an inexperienced one, is expected to constantly work with a trainer and learn new things in order to improve their skills, communication with the horse and performance. During training, it can happen that the trainer asks the rider to get off the horse because the rider fails to perform a certain exercise. This is often the result of poor communication between the rider and his horse. In that case, the horse perceives the trainer as a person with greater authority and will perform the task more obediently and efficiently (Lesimple, et al. 2012). The connection between man and horse is the embodiment of the greatest connection between man and an animal (Fenner et al. 2020). Communication between horse and rider takes place through the bodies of both partners, requiring sensitivity, emotion and kinetic intelligence (Maurstad et al., 2013). The ultimate goal of riding is to achieve union with the horse, i.e. a kind of fluidity with its body. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to have a feeling for the animal you are working with. Feeling for the horse is something that every rider strives for, and it signifies a form of non-verbal communication between the two species, relying on body language, mutual understanding and cooperation (Fenner et al. 2020). The horse should accept the man as part of the herd. Horses, tame or wild, tend to form social bonds with each other in a herd. They achieve social connection in several ways; by sending visual messages (e.g. throwing the ear back), neighing and growling, smelling excrement and urine and grooming, and body position. Horses that have not been trained by humans do not know how to recognize the happy or angry or raised tone of voice and do not understand our words, which in other words would mean that people effectively use only a very small part of the horse's "language" when communicating with them (Turner, 2022). This is quite normal considering that horses and men are different species. When working with a horse, the rider should be authoritative, and reliable, and the horse will trust not out of fear but out of the safety of the leader. The leader of a herd of horses in the wild is a stallion or an experienced mare whose main role is to reproduce and protect the herd. Hierarchically below him are one or two mares whose role is to find food and water. The importance of the alpha stallion or alpha mare in the herd is equal, and they have acquired better physical fitness than other individuals through experience (Cathy, 2022). A horse will follow the one with whom it feels safe and cared for. The horse should look at its rider so that he is a leader who will not harm him. Gaining mutual trust is a long-term process between man and horse, and it starts from foaling. Socialization is the primary goal in raising foals, and it is necessary to spend as much quality time with them as possible. In order to create a stable and courageous horse, it is necessary to

work with him in the early stages of his life. It's never too early to start teaching your foal some unusual objects or things that make different sounds. Walking young horses in hand is also laying the foundation for riding. The horse gets to know its surroundings and separates itself from the only things it has ever known, which are the stable, the familiar yard and the drain. In the aforementioned walks, they will encounter many unknown and frightening things that the owner must familiarize the young horse with so that he will approach the object first, and then let the horse sniff and explore (Socializing foals, 2022). In these situations, patience and persistence is the most important item. With this combination, the development of positive interaction with the horse will be achieved. After mastering the aforementioned basics of socialization and developing a positive relationship with the horse, you can start riding. There are several disciplines and types of riding, but this thesis is based on newer and more modern methods, with the mention of classic ones.

### **Horse training methods**

The first written record of horse training is mentioned in 1350 BC by Kikkuli, who is still known as the "chief horse trainer" in the Hittite Empire. It can be said that the horse is the animal on whose back the entire history of mankind is written. Horses had various roles in the past that are practised less today. For people, they were a source of food, a means of transportation and a necessary tool in war. Today, keeping a horse is considered a luxury and with that, the very purpose of keeping a horse has changed. For hundreds of years, horse training methods did not change, everything was based on traditional horse training. In 1980, newer methods of horse training appeared and became more and more popular. Examples of where traditional training methods differ from modern ones are numerous.

In accordance with the ethical guidelines set by the International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE, 2022), work with horses focuses on ethical horse training, improved horse behaviour and welfare, improved understanding of human-horse interaction, facilitating scientific education about riding and development of horse research methods and techniques. Working with a horse should be guided by the safety of man and horse, the natural needs of the horse (food, physical activity, contact with other horses), the mental abilities and perception of the horse, maintaining a positive state through the work, avoiding pain, discomfort and stress. pressure on the horse (related to the possibility of escape). While working with the horse, understand that the behaviour becomes more or less likely depending on the consequences, strict training should release the pressure as soon as the desired behaviour appears, avoid delaying the reward, use a combined reward and avoid punishment. Through work with the

horse, desensitization should be achieved so that an unpleasant situation can lead to an urge. Modelling training into smaller segments to achieve dynamics. Each step (segment) to the desired action ends with a reward. Dynamics can be achieved by changing only one training segment (trainer, place, signal). Plan the training so that it is understandable and easy for the horse. Through training, the horse needs to develop self-confidence. To achieve interaction with the horse, the signal should be clear and understandable to the horse. Check if the horse can distinguish one signal from another. For successful signal communication, ensure that each signal has only one meaning, match the signal with the biomechanics of the horse, and avoid using multiple signals at the same time (ISAE, 2022).

Horse training in the narrower sense refers to accustom the horse to equipment, lunging and mounting and riding. The basic equipment required for riding consists of a bridle with bit and stirrup, saddle pad, gel, saddle, belt and protector. Lunging a horse can be done in several ways, and the equipment for this is quite diverse. To lunge a horse without a jaw, the equipment includes a halter for lunging, lunge, guards and a long whip. A lanyard and harness can be used, and instead of a halter, a bridle with a bridle (HKS, 2015).

Lunging is the basis of training a young horse, and the purpose of lunging is numerous. Some of the reasons why it is necessary to lunge horses are:

- To improve rhythm and balance in the walk, trotting and canter
- To tire a spirited horse before riding
- For examining lameness in horses (HKS, 2015).

After the horse is familiar with the equipment used for riding, it is necessary to teach him to lunge. The lonža is a strap approximately eight meters long, it is attached to the ring of the jaw, and it is held by the trainer (HKS, 2015). During lunging, it is essential to use voice commands. For example, when the horse is asked to walk calmly and "walk" is said slowly when the trainer wants the horse to trot excitedly, he will quickly say "trot" so that the horse will feel in his voice that he is being asked to move at a faster pace. A young horse should not lunge for too long due to the pressure on the joints that occurs when moving in a circle. When the horse adopts certain commands, it should start with saddling and lunging under the saddle (Mitrović, 2003). A horse that has been trained on a lunge harness accepts the saddle mostly without problems.

When the horse has mastered voice commands and lunging with the saddle, it is ready for its first ride. You should be careful during the mounting procedure (Gregić et al, 2017). For riding a horse, it is safer for the horse to be attached to the longe. A minimum of two people are

required when climbing a horse for the first time. Before actually sitting on the horse, it is suggested to lean your stomach on the horse's back in order to feel the rider's weight. Thus, there is a possibility to get off the horse quickly if he gets scared. The first rides are done on small fenced areas and start with a light step of the horse. After a few days, a light trot is gradually introduced, followed by a gallop. After the horse gets used to the rider, after a few days, if it is calm during riding, the halter can be removed and riding continues in a circle without the halter. When we assess that the horse is prepared, it can be moved to a larger open riding area (Gregić et al., 2022).

Horse management is done in several ways. Most people think that the rider's bridle with the bit is the priority in handling the horse, but this is not necessarily true. Equally important is the rider's leg, i.e. calf and seat, as well as voice. The rider's legs control forward motion, turning and balance. The inside leg of the rider is used to encourage the horse to move forward, to quicken the stride or to emphasize the turn. The rider's outside leg is used to control the horse's hindquarters. If the rider's inner and outer leg commands are used at the same time, the horse's balance is achieved. The reins attached to the bit are used to maintain contact with the horse, and by gently pulling them, we let the horse know when we want to turn right, left or stop (Gregić et al., 2022). The jaw itself should not be considered a steering wheel or a brake on a horse. To reduce the pressure on the horse's mouth, it is necessary to learn to follow the commands of our body. For example, if the rider wants to go from a trot to a gallop, he will lean his whole body forward. When turning to the left, the rider slightly shifts the entire body weight to the left side of the saddle. By perfecting all the mentioned methods of horse management, the rider will create a perfectly ridden horse.

The rider's seat does not refer exclusively to the part of the body that sits in the saddle, the seat is considered everything from the lower part of the abdomen and waist to the knees. The balanced seat allows for a good rider's stance, i.e. holding on to the horse, and loose and supple legs ready to change the speed at any time. It is also useful when staying on a restless horse that is trying to throw the rider off, which is not uncommon in riding. The headquarters can be managed in several ways. Beginner riders are first introduced to the passive seat. As the name suggests, it is a way of riding in which the fluidity of the horse's movements is followed by the seat. The goal is not to hinder the movement of the horse, but to let it lead, while the rider follows it (Horse listening, 2022). The advantage of this seat is that it allows the horse to move more freely, almost as if there is no rider on the back. Then there is the restraining seat used by more experienced mostly dressage riders. This seat works by stopping the lower back and sometimes the upper leg in the middle of the horse's movement so that the rider signals to the

horse a change in speed and pace. It is most often used when slowing down a horse. When the horse accelerates, the position of the seat changes forward, the body leans forward, and the legs are behind. This is how the rider signals the horse when he wants to transition from canter to gallop (Horse listening, 2022).

In addition to the seat and bridle, communication with the horse during riding is also done by pressing the calf or foot. For the rider to properly use his calves when riding, it is necessary to have a ridden horse on which he does not need to use his legs to maintain balance or hold on to it, that is, it is necessary to have an independent seat. Consistency is the most important factor in improving riding, both for the rider and the horse. For the position of the legs to be correct, it is necessary to have a good posture in the seat. Sitting on the seat bones will ensure proper "falling" of the legs on both sides of the horse (Horse listening, 2022). The position is correct when it follows a straight imaginary line connecting the head, shoulders, hips and heels.

The rider most often uses the leaves when he wants to:

- Encourage the horse to start
- Encourage the horse to go forward and to the side
- Encourage the horse to bend in the body
- Control the pace of riding.

By starting the horse into a gait, pressure is exerted by the lower inner part of the leg. Given that it is an animal that is sensitive to touch, this pressure does not have to be strong. In dressage riding, encouraging the horse to go to the side is done by a combination of pressure on the calf of one leg, contact with the reins and the seat (Horse listening, 2022).

#### *Training methods that value positive interaction between horse and rider*

Thousands of years of coexistence between humans and horses have resulted in numerous new insights into horse ethology, relationships within the herd, and horse well-being. Animal welfare is defined as the state in which an individual tries to cope with the environment. The term includes the physical and mental state of animals, including the term health. The ideal level of animal well-being is a state of overall physical and mental health in which the animal is in harmony with its environment, and the term health is not only the absence of disease or injury but the ability of animals to harmonize the functions of the organism with the immediate environment (Broom and Johnson, 2000).

Fraser et al. (1997) describe three overlapping ethical theses expressed by public opinion on the quality of life of farm animals. These are:

1. animals should live naturally with the development and use of their natural abilities;



2. animals should feel good and should be freed from prolonged states of pain and fear and other negative states;
3. animals should be provided with a satisfactory state of health and normal functioning of physiological and behavioural needs.

By studying ethology, herd relationships and horse welfare, a trainer like Pat Parelli have dedicated his life to studying the Natural horsemanship method of working with horses that he has described in several of his books. This graduation thesis includes the Natural horsemanship method in Parelli's way, Liberty training and Clicker training. The majority of the equestrian sports population uses classical methods of horse training, while modern methods are those with a more positive outlook on the future. They allow the rider to connect with the horse on a deeper level and a new level of trust and partnership. This way of working and playing with horses brings longer-lasting and better-quality results in the world of riding that respect the natural aetiology of horses.

### **Conclusion**

Interactions between horse and rider that lead to a positive relationship are realized through a series of actions of the rider towards the horse and vice versa. Some of these procedures are feeding, grooming, riding and treatment. In order to understand horses and see the world from their perspective, it is necessary to know the basic needs of animals, their senses and the way of communicating in the herd. The need for food, water, movement and socialization must be fulfilled in order to have a happy and satisfied horse, but these are only the basic and fundamental requirements of the animal. It is necessary to know how a horse thinks and experiences the world around him. With proper work and training, horses show a desire and willingness to communicate with people, and the forced way is the worst for both partners. The rider around the horse should be calm, reliable and have the qualities of a reliable leader, while the horse should have confidence in its rider. Acquiring all of the above requires time, perseverance and a desire for education and advancement. Constant quality work and time dedicated to the animal is the only thing that will lead to quality and successful maintenance of a positive relationship between horse and rider.

### **References**

Andersen, S.S.L. (2015): Interactions between horse and rider that leads to a positive relationship. Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala.

Broom, D., Johnson, K. (2000): Stress and Animal Welfare. Springer/Kluwer Scientific & Business, 1-2.

Cathy H. (2022): Groups of Horses: A Beginner's Guide to Herd Dynamics: <https://horserookie.com/groups-of-horses-herd-dynamics/> Fenner, K., Dashper, K., Serpell, J., McLean, A., Wilkins, C., Klinck, M., McGreevy, P. (2020): The development of a novel questionnaire approach to the investigation of horse training, management, and behaviour. *Animals*, 10(11), 1960.

Fraser, D., Weary, D. M., Pajor, E. A., Milligan, B. N. (1997): A scientific conception of animal welfare that reflects ethical concerns.

Gregić, M., Baban, M., Gregić, S., Bobić, T., Mijić, P., Antunović, B., Gantner, V. (2017): Utjecaj temperature okoliša na rad srca preponskih konja tijekom treninga. *Krmiva: Časopis o hranidbi životinja, proizvodnji i tehnologiji krme*, 59(1), 3-6.

Gregić, M., Baban, M., Bobić, T., Dokić, D., Gantner, V. (2022): Physiological and ethological aspects of horse feeding. *Agrores*, 345.

Hausberger, M., Gautier, E., Müller, C., Jegou, P. (2007): Lower learning abilities in stereotypic horses. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 107(3-4), 299-306.

Hrvatski konjički savez (2015): Priručnik za dresurno jahanje sa zbirkom testova. HKS. Horse listening (2022): [www.horselistening.com](http://www.horselistening.com)

International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE 2022): [https://www.applied-ethology.org/About\\_ISAE.html](https://www.applied-ethology.org/About_ISAE.html)

Lesimple, C., Fureix, C., De Margerie, E., Sénèque, E., Menguy, H., Hausberger, M. (2012): Towards a postural indicator of back pain in horses (*Equus caballus*).

Maurstad, A., Davis, D., Cowles, S. (2013): Co-being and intra-action in horse-human relationships: a multi-species ethnography of being human and being horse. *Social anthropology/Anthropologie sociale*, 21(3), 322-335.

Mitrović, S., Grubić, G. (2003): Odgajivanje i ishrana konja. Poljoprivredni fakultet Univerziteta.

National Equine Forum (2022): <https://www.nationalequineforum.com>

Socializing foals (2022): <https://www.scottcreek.com/socializing-foals.html>

Turner Rachael (2022): YourHorse: <https://www.yourhorse.co.uk>

## Позитивне интеракције између коња и јахача

Матија Хорват<sup>1</sup>, Тина Бобић<sup>1</sup>, Весна Гантнер<sup>1</sup>, Маја Грегић<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Факултет агробиотехничких знаности Осиек, Свеучилиште Јосипа Јураја Штросмајера у Осиеку, Осиек, Хрватска, В. Прелога 1, Осиек, Хрватска

*Corresponding author: Maja Gregić, mgregic@fazos.hr*

### Сажетак

Циљ рада био је представити начин развоја позитивне интеракције између коња и јахача у тренингу. Интеракције између коња и јахача које доводе до позитивног односа остварују се кроз низ поступака човјека према коњу те обратно. На интеракцију између коња и јахача утјече много чимбеника; сједиште јахача, метода тренинга, одговарајућа опрема и познавање основних карактеристика етологије коња. Веза између човјека и коња утјеловљење је највеће повезаности човјека с неком животињом док је ултимативни циљ јахања постизање сједињења с коњем, односно неке врсте флуидности. Коњи уз правилан рад и тренинг показују жељу и вољу за комуникацију с људима, док је присила у раду с коњем је најгори за оба партнера. Јахач у близини коња треба имати одлике смиреног и поузданог вође, док коњ треба имати поуздање у свог јахача. Константан правилан рад и вријеме посвећено коњу довести ће до квалитетног и успјешног стварања те одржавања позитивног односа између коња и јахача.

*Кључне ријечи:* коњ, тренинг, позитивна интеракција