Long Lining Horses
By Chester Weber

Introduction

Combined driving is the ultimate test of communication, athleticism, and collaboration between horses and their driver. Long lining, or driving the horse from the ground, is a key training method to develop a horse as a combined driving athlete. In addition, this method can be utilized by riders and equestrians of any discipline to strengthen their horse physically, as well as build effective communication and correct contact. USA’s Chester Weber, an Individual and Team Silver medalist from the World Driving Championships and ten-time National Four-in-Hand Champion, elaborates on the correct way to long line a horse with inspiration from one of his mentors, German driving great, Dr. Franz Josef Vetter.

‘Basic Work’

Dr. Vetter utilized a training method, he termed ‘basic work’, to establish a strong foundation in his driving horses. I employ this system in the training of all my horses. Its foundational basis is in the classical principles of dressage, which creates supple, willing athletes with the mind to compete at the highest level. One aspect of this ‘basic work’ is lunging and/or long lining. Lunging is done with a single rein, while long lining is done with two (double) reins. Both are highly effective training methods.

Lunging - Lunging has many advantages, including giving the handler the ability to watch the horse’s movements at work from the ground and helps develop contact with the horse. Another advantage is lunging can be performed by almost everyone. Lunging (with one rein) is useful for young horses during which the handler has limited influence on the horse. Thus, side reins are recommended to build responsiveness equally on both sides of the horse.

Long Lining – Lunging with two (double) reins, or ‘long lining’, is useful for every horse in any discipline. Long lining affords the handler much more direct influence over the horse in comparison to single rein lunging. Long lining is an extremely effective method of strengthening the horse, while simultaneously developing the correct contact and establishing the foundational basics, as well as developing the higher, more collected movements.

There are different techniques in long lining. In all cases, the reins are attached to each side of the bit which are then, normally fed through a collar and/or surcingle. For work on a circle, the inside rein passes through the surcingle and directly returns to the handler. The outside rein can be used in one of two ways: 1) through the surcingle, around the outer hind leg and behind the horse; or 2) through the surcingle and over the horse’s back. Horses should be allowed time to become
accustomed to all new training equipment, including the surcingle, long reins and whip. Both the handler and rider must learn to communicate effectively and correctly through long lines. Learning the correct action and reaction applying the aids of long lines and whip, are instrumental in effective training and obtaining optimal performance from the horse.

**Short Reins** - Once basic trust and understanding are achieved with the horse using long lines on a circle, additional training methods and techniques may be applied such as using short reins. The short reins method involves the handler working behind the horse on a much shorter rein. Using short reins is an excellent way to build trust, allow closer contact and communication between horse and handler. Most importantly, short reining allows the handler to have the most direct influence over the horse. As a result, using short reins can be an extremely effective training method, which builds partnership, trust, and communication between the handler and the horse.

One of the most advanced techniques of using the short reins method is to directly activate the horse’s hind legs to build impulsion (the active, rhythmic steps of the hind legs) and collection for the most advanced movements of dressage. This method should only be attempted by an experienced handler. As collection increases, the horse’s haunches will lower as the he steps deeper under his body which, in turn, raises his center of gravity. Both long lining and short reins are excellent ways to develop collection and impulsion from behind. The goal is for the horse to step into the rider or handler’s hand by distributing more weight onto his haunches, while the handler maintains a steady, correct contact with the hand.

**Voice Communication** - The power of the voice is another important aid that can help build trust and communication between horse and handler while long lining, driving, and riding. Specifically, the voice is an invaluable tool for drivers and can express a wealth of information through tone, volume, and choice words. It is a powerful tool that should be developed in every horse and human partnership.

**Ground Poles** - Work over ground poles and cavaletti can improve the horse’s gaits and develop rhythm, while the handler develops his/her own skills and application of the aids. Once horse and handler are experienced working over ground poles, long lines can be incorporated into this training routine for driving or riding disciplines. Working over ground poles with long lines is highly effective for teaching both horse and handler.

**Summary**

The benefits of long lining should not be overlooked as a valuable tool for training driving and riding horses. As the training and experience of the horse and handler in long lines progresses, the horse should build strength, suppleness, impulsion, and cadence, while learning to step correctly into the contact.
Meet Chester Weber

Chester Weber's name is synonymous with four-in-hand driving throughout the world. He has had an incredible season so far in 2014, with consecutive wins at the Kingdom of the Sun CDE, Live Oak International CAI, Windsor Royal Horse Show, and CAI Saumur. His summer schedule for 2014 includes the CHIO Aachen and the 2014 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. His 2013 European tour saw wins at the CAI Saumur and the CAI Caen, the 2014 World Equestrian Games test event, as well as top three finishes at Beekburgen and Aachen. At the 2014 Live Oak International CAI in March, Weber won his 11th National Championship title. Chester became the first American to ever win an individual medal at the World Driving Championships in 2008 when he won the Individual Silver Medal in the Four-in-Hand World Driving Championships. He is a driving force on the international scene, taking the Team Silver Medal for the US at the 2010 World Equestrian Games and winning the Individual Silver Medal and the Team Bronze Medal at the 2012 Four-in-Hand Driving World Championships at Reisenbeck, Germany. During his 2012 European tour, Chester was dubbed “Mr. Dressage” as he dominated the dressage phase at CAI Lahden, CAI Beekbergen and won the dressage at CAIO Aachen with a record-breaking score of 33.54.

Chester is not only committed to promoting Combined Driving, but is an avid supporter of all equestrian sports and serves on the United States Equestrian Team Foundation (USET) Board of Trustees, in addition to being on the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) High Performance Driving Committee, the National Driving Committee, the Safety Committee, the Hearing Committee, the Licensed Officials Committee and the Driving Technical Committee. Chester is also the chairman of the Active Athlete’s Committee and served on the Dressage Search Committee. In addition, Chester serves on the advisory board of the prestigious Equestrian Quarterly magazine. Chester has twice been named as a USEF Equestrian of Honor and always shares the limelight with his horses, including his horse, Jamaica, who was named the 2008 USEF Horse of the Year and who was inducted into the EQUUS Foundation Hall of Fame in 2013.

For more information on Chester, visit his website at www.chesterweber.com and visit him on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pages/Chester-Weber.