



Daily Stretches as per Dr. Lance Cleveland, Equine Chiropractor

Many horses coming off-the-track seem to have soundness issues but most of these are resolved with some chiropractic work and proper exercises. Horses use different muscles at the track and they need to be relaxed and rebuilt with proper exercise. Doing a chiropractic adjustment is not enough you need to do exercises to build the muscles to hold the adjustment in place. If you can't find a good chiropractor you can still do the exercises. Work on the lunge line at walk and trot and don't do canter work until the horse is moving freely on both sides.

Poll Stretch:

The poll stretch is used for stretching the poll and upper neck. Using a treat if necessary, have your horse pull his chin tight to his chest. You want a "tight" curl, getting him to come as close to touching his chest as possible.

This is not the dressage stretch which reaches the head lower. You want the horse to curl up as high as possible where the neck meets the chest.

Neck Stretch:

The neck stretch is used to stretch the entire neck evenly on both sides. Stand at the shoulder with your back against the horse. Using a treat if necessary, have your horse bring his head around as close to the shoulder as possible, hugging you to him. Keep the motion of stretching towards the hip as far back as possible. Try to keep his eyes level with the horizon as he reaches around. If necessary, place a hand up high on the neck just behind the halter to stabilize the head and neck as he reaches around. Try not to let your horse "drop" his head at an angle. The key is keeping the eyes level. Do both sides.

Butt Tucks:

The butt tucks is used to develop suppleness in the rear. Draw an imaginary line from the point of the hip to the dock of the tail. Move away from the tail, back towards the hip approximately 4 inches to the "valley" of the hamstring muscle.

Using your thumbnails placed in this area on both sides of your horse, rub from the rear towards the head using small strokes, almost as if you were revving a motorcycle. It is not necessary to use a great deal of force. Look for your horse to engage his pelvis, drawing upwards. You should notice the pelvis engage separately from the entire back-end. There should be little to no movement in the stifle and lower leg.

This is good to do 2 to 3 times a day on any horse. Dr. Cleveland suggests doing it once before a ride and once after, with an additional time during the course of the day.



Cross Unders:

The cross unders is used to stretch the hamstring muscles. Here's what you will be doing: Turn your horse in very tight circles, 3 to 4 rotations, looking for the inside hind leg to "crossover" the midline behind. Repeat in opposite direction.

Here's how to do it: For the first rotation, hold the lead rope in front of the horse and ask him to move in a circle. As you complete the first circle, move the lead rope so that it is at a 90 degree angle to the horse and do another circle. Then, for the third turn, bring the lead rope back towards the horse to make a 45 degree angle. Your hand will be back near his stomach. This will tighten the circle even more causing the horse to really reach under himself. If he cannot do this, then start at the beginning again and do only the steps that keep the horse crossing his legs underneath himself. The exercise does no good if he is not reaching under and crossing over with the back legs.

Backing:

Back your horse up when on the ground and see if she reaches under equally with both back legs. At first the horse will not reach very far underneath and there may be a large gap between the front and rear feet. Keep backing the horse every day until the feet almost touch when backing up. This will mean that the hips are unlocked and the horse can now reach underneath herself and build up the back and hind end muscles. When your horse is backing well, back her up a hill to increase the difficulty of the exercise.