



Gladur goes on-line

By Yvonne Eberling



Gladur in June 2009, after starting the program.

It is that time of the year again, the nights grow longer and the days darker and colder. One doesn't really have the urge to subject oneself and one's equine partner to the weather conditions.

In all those years with Gladur, winter time is always the time in which I remember all the different things I can do with my horse inside the indoor arena besides riding. Above all:

longeing. For years I thought it is the easiest thing imaginable: One somehow attaches a longe-line to bit and bridle and then off we go in circles. I have seen it a lot and it seems too easy – did I ever receive real detailed training? Not really.

Going out there one sees a lot. Sometimes the line drags on the ground; the horse spins around its handler, some of the horses equipped with the most adventurous contraptions and bondages and sometimes one cannot help but wonder: Does this really make any sense?

In 2008 – after a 3year break from my equine friends – I had to face the topic horse and working with horses again: Gladur was scheduled to arrive in NY from Germany. Due to my search on the Internet for methods and techniques to make the adjusting period easier for him and also to build us up as a team again, I came across it: The Lungeing course.

Two very idealistic women, Babette Teschen and Tania Konnerth made it their goal to create a course that compresses all the knowledge about longeing. They created a document, an online course that explains the principles of good longeing practice with the aid of descriptive pictures and easily understandable examples. This all comes in a manuscript which can be quickly downloaded from the internet, for a small and very well deserved fee.

After the first read-through I had to realize: Longeing is not just a method to “get the horse moving quickly when short on time” or to “let the horse get rid of its flurries before working it”.

No, longeing is a very finicky method and the way I did it before did harm Gladur more than it did him good. But used the right way, it can improve a horse's life.

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 longe line, what does it resemble: 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. And the reason why our horses sometimes turn into motorcycles is very nicely explained.

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 have no need to engage their hindquarters to support a rider's weight. So from the horse's point of view there is nothing wrong with the motorcycle style of moving forward. While being ridden or during work, running on the forehand is not very desirable. Let's have a look at our horse running in a circle, falling on that "inner shoulder":



Gladur in September 2008, shortly after his arrival. He didn't have any muscles, dragged himself through the ring and had enormous issues carrying the rider's weight.

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 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, its inner shoulder can't move freely. The shoulder is fixed. So the horse is only able to do shortened strides with 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 moving on its forehand.

At the same time, the horse is not tracking – and as long as the hindquarters are "shearing" past the horse's front, the horse won't be able to achieve tracking. The hips can't be lowered

and the back muscles won't be picked up and won't be "swinging" and won't be able to sufficiently carry a rider's weight. Hence, longeing is a very nice method of teaching our horses how to carry our weight.

The first question I asked myself after reading the script: What will we need to be able to learn these things? Everybody knows these things can become a huge expense and I started to be sceptical.

Luckily the authors did a great job in gathering all of the possible solutions for these questions. All one needs is a well fitted cavesson and a rather short longe line. Naturally, there are so many variations and products out on the market that one can run into difficulties choosing the right ones. But www.wege-zum-pferd.de offers a nice forum and a lot of information about the choices one has and what is most suitable for the horse in question. If there are still questions left, it is simple to contact the authors to receive immediate help, which will arrive promptly.

All beginnings are difficult

So here we were: Cavesson attached to horse, the longe line hooked to the cavesson and convinced it would be a piece of cake to get this thing working. Keep on dreaming...

The first lesson – the basics, the bare minimum your horse has to be able to do was to be lead "in position". This means the horse has to learn to walk on a volte with its neck bent. 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 ear facing inwards but, most importantly, the head is not to be crooked; if it is, something is not right. The horse is to be lead 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.

Let's put it that way: My barn buddies, all Hunter Jumper riders, did have something amusing to look at. Whatever we did had nothing to do with the way they saw longeing from their point of view. My horse was not spinning around me and I wasn't hanging on the longe line, holding on for my life, to get some control over my fierce horse.

When I started to plan my work with this course, I generously planned 15 minutes for that exercise – little did I know. I don't have to tell you that it actually took a week until we were capable of executing this exercise. Not that Gladur is particularly clumsy or untalented, but it took us that long to control our bodies and to establish the right means of communication. After we mastered the "leading in position" in walk, we wanted to take it a step further as advised in the script: I wanted to perform that exercise in trot. Once again I had to learn that being able to do something in walk does not mean we are able of doing the same in a faster gait...

Longeing Gladur today

I think even with my short explanation I made clear that this course can be challenging but also very rewarding to horse and human.

Looking back, I can only assure you that our work following this course did help Gladur and me and still does. WE were distanced from each other caused by 3 years of separation and due to a riding accident I was rather fearful and hesitant dealing with horses. Also, we weren't able to trust each other. Toelting was an issue – I used to toelt him mainly using high, hard hands and a lot of pressure which caused misunderstandings and ultimately caused the accident mentioned before.

Gladur gained muscle mass and carries himself much better, in freedom and under saddle. Because of my amazing experience with the longeing course I purchased the follow-up course and was able to take my success into the saddle and also using more advanced longeing techniques.

Today, I can ride Gladur in all gaits – with or without saddle – knowing that my horse can carry me in a healthy manner, knowing he is having fun doing work with me. His tolt is not an issue anymore and we can toelt for miles without any pressure – unthinkable when he arrived in the U.S.

The authors recently released a new version of the course, which now also has a chapter focusing on the work with gaited horses and I can warmly recommend the longeing course to everybody who is looking for more information about how to longe correctly, wants to re-build their horses or is just looking for mentally stimulating work with their horses.

Interested?

You can find the course at www.wege-zum-pferd.de . Sadly the course has not been translated to English, yet, but some of my English speaking friends had luck using Google translator. One doesn't have to purchase the course to find good information about horse friendly longeing and riding techniques. The forum offers a nice platform for further communications and invites to a nice chat with many users.

It definitely is worth to keep an eye on this wonderful course! We didn't regret it.

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