

As compared to a halter, a cordeo is not a means of control. A cordeo can be used during a school lesson as simply another form of communication. The main function of the cordeo is to assist in giving precise signals. Aside from obvious stop or left, right turns, you may have noticed Alexander give two slight finger tugs on the cordeo to indicate to the horse a pesade (horse rearing 45+ degrees). An example: Two tugs means 'we are going to do a pesade' and the third means 'Now'. The continued contact can mean how high.

Guidelines to NHE philosophy is that there is no force to be used, no punishment or 'correction', and the horse, of course, is allowed to say no. Part of the reasons behind that is not only treating the horse with respect but to allow the horse to decide, express himself and know that he is free. That is just one of the aspects of NHE that turns standard training ideas upside down. In so doing, he will be more willing to participate if he knows that if things get uncertain or uncomfortable, he can simply leave. That leaves us to find what we are not doing properly in relation to that specific horse. Each horse can have subtleties to how they learn and their own, progressive comfort zone. These are important to observe, realize and adjust to at the beginning.

That is, if you choose to use a cordeo. **Almost always, I will begin teaching a new student and horse using a cordeo.** A reason behind my choice is that most people, even if they want to have a new way of interacting with horses, still have trouble completely relinquishing control. The cordeo gives them something to hold on to and have a direct, physical connection with the horse. Although a cordeo cannot control, or rather, physically subdue a horse, it helps give the person focus and be very aware of what they are doing at that precise moment.

You may have heard or read about some people who are so thrilled at the possibilities and this new way of being with horses, that from one day to the next, they remove the standard halter and lead line, replace it with a cordeo and go for a walk to a pasture across a busy highway. Of course it is wonderful to want to allow the horse freedom, but there is a lot of work and practice just for both of you to learn how to walk and stop with a cordeo. Remember, it only represents a signal, a message. There has to be a lot of time, practice, trust and self-discipline for that signal to mean something.

That last line refers to what Alexander calls 'Sangra Fria'. Literally translated, 'cold blood'. Cool-headed, would be more appropriate.

This is developed not because of any 'training' technique but through time and experience

shared with the horse. Although we must be responsible, it is the self-discipline in the horse to remain steadfast by you and to focus on you and to willingly put faith in you either through a lesson or a scary situation.

Many people talk about trust, but how many trust the horses? Not because of a fantasy notion, but because they know, like an old friend, how the horse can adjust to a situation or react. I have faith in my horses and they understand very well. If I was to lead out any of my horses away from our safety zone and into the forest across the road, after all these years, I would still use a halter. Respect and freedom for the horse is important in NHE but the welfare of the horse is paramount. We never know what we may come across and what if something happens to me and the horse is left to wander alone? Even a non-horseperson would think of grabbing hold of the lead line.

It should come as no surprise that even if a horse follows you at liberty, this strange thing that you put around the base of the neck could be a complete mystery at first and the horse will not even walk alongside you. A horse may feel the cordeo as some type of restriction or feel unsure and hesitant as to what it is you are asking of them.

To check/clean the hooves or do a trim, will the horse understand what you are going to do and willingly stand still? Many people will take the phrase, 'The horse is always right' and so if the horse walks away, there is no cleaning, no hoof trim. How many days, weeks, even months will that go on? It is not beautiful notions or nice phrases that will build a relationship with a horse or foster understanding and cooperation. It takes dedication on our part and a lot of little learning moments with the horse. It does not always have to be 'work' or even geared toward haute ecole schooling. It could be everyday interactions and it could be a lot of fun.

I trim my horses at liberty in the field while they are grazing. Makes no difference to me.
Everybody's happy.

If the health of the horse is of prime importance, and there is not enough time to teach the horse even how to stand still with a cordeo, then by all means, put on the halter and do the hooves. There will be no productive learning to be had anyway if the horse is uncomfortable, lame or sick.

As mentioned above, is the cordeo absolutely necessary? No it is not. I have one horse who will accept the cordeo, but I can tell it is not liked. So, I stopped using it. Hand signals now replace any little cues. My own body can also relate speed or position. A form of my own

'shorthand' words also work. If you are trying to convey a message, it can be anything that you create and that your horse comes to understand. If you do a lot of practice with a cordeo, in time, you may find that it is not even necessary anymore.

It depends how far you want to progress or how intricate the signals need to become. Whenever I put on or take off the cordeo I say 'cordeo'. Always let the horse know what it is you want. Always let them know what they are doing is what you want. A horse will come to learn that a cordeo means school time. Which will also develop into paying attention, trying to understand what you are asking and focus.

If you want to use a cordeo, then it is important to work on at least a basic exercise. Walk a straight line. (actually it is really 3: start walking, keep walking, stop) I personally incorporate rhythm. I do not mean music, but paces.

If you have an arena, place the horse between yourself and the wall. Look ahead to where you want to go, raise the cordeo forward off the withers. You start walking. If your horse already understands the word 'walk' then say walk. Be as clear and concise as possible. Take four steps and ask for a stop. Take up the slack on the cordeo (do not yank back - it is a signal not a physical force). You stop. If the horse understands 'whoa', then say it. The horse stops, 'drop' the cordeo and praise the horse. Adding 'stand still' is also useful. These pieces could help achieve a hoof cleaning/trim.

Seems simple enough but it could be quite a challenge for some people. It could be so new that a simple exercise becomes a concentration of all little details and they do not realize what they are really doing. A cordeo could mistakenly be held high in full constant contact with the bottom of the horse's neck (indicating what should be 'stop'); the person might walk while pulling the cordeo toward them to the side (indicating a turn), the horse may become secondary to their focus and they are walking up ahead, trying to 'pull' the horse with the cordeo way up right behind the horse's ears! It would be good to video yourself and look back on your own actions. It helps a lot.

If you have an arena then just you and the horse with no other distractions would be great. If an arena is not an afforded luxury, then a fenceline will do. Use the posts as your pace markers (ie: walk length of four posts and stop, or four steps between posts and stop). A line of trees will do. Or, an open space but put an objective ahead of you in the form of an object. (cone, barrel, rock, bucket) I often practice with several horses loose, but that presents another challenge, an opportunity for different learning, and is a whole other story.

As with any exercise, do not exceed 10 minutes while trying to teach the horse and when the horse understands and does it well, do not ask more than 3x max. If the horse does it well, then once is enough and then maybe you could go on to showing another exercise. Standing still, turning left/right, or adding a hoof placement or jambette or flexing at the poll. In between point A and point B you can mix and match all those things. Then remove the cordeo - class is over - it's recess! Play, do what the horse wants, give what the horse likes.



First class after long winter 'vacation'



As a side note, you know what I have found interesting? When the horse begins to understand the cordeo and what we are doing, they want to change sides. What I mean is that they will want me on their right side. When this first happened, it worried me. I thought that maybe the

horse had a vision problem in one eye. But it continued to happen with each horse, one by one. It's not insisted upon, but they do usually ask or show me. I allow it. I only venture a guess that doing this 'new' stuff, they don't want a person on the left side, as is the common standard in normal horse training and handling.