

POLO MANUAL FOR THE
INSTRUCTION OF CADETS

Riding A Polo Pony.

How to ride a pony in a polo game is of the greatest importance; on it depends the life of a pony for polo; on it hangs the kind of pony you will be loaned or rented; on it rests your ability to train ponies. Polo is expensive at best but hopelessly so for a poor man if he has to buy trained ponies and ruins them in a season. One should know quite a lot about riding before attempting to play polo; then piloting a pony through a game becomes a matter of applying properly a few important principles. These principles so far as they concern the handling of a pony are different from those used with the saddle horses or chargers only in that response thereto must be more prompt and sudden as they are signals for a complete movement instead of indications which gradually and deliberately lead up to the end desired; they direct the pony's mind to a particular object which it should grasp and accomplish with little or no more assistance.

1. Proper riding will enable you to feel that your riding a pony has tended to improve rather than ruin him.

2. A pony that has to be controlled by sheer strength is not properly trained or has been ruined. The application of the different aids are signals which the pony should instantly obey. Endeavor to get the pony to work with you instead of against you.

3. Ponies have peculiarities and it is well to inquire about these before hand.

4. Look carefully to the adjustment of all equipment and inquire about any that appears unusual. With your own ponies you must know the proper adjustment especially of the bits and curb chain. The best grooms are careless at times, therefore examine everything every time.

5. Make friends with the pony before mounting by kind word and a gentle pat.

6. Let him know at once that you can ride without holding on by the reins. If you can't do this, better give up polo; you will never make a pony of your own, you will never be loaned a good pony more than once and you will never play a decent game.

7. Try him out a little before going into the game and thus establish mutual confidence while giving him a necessary warming up. See if he walks straight to the front, reins barely stretched, and halts at the slightest pressure—the lifting of the hand; changes direction, slightly slowing down, by pressure of the reins against the neck; turns on the haunches by reining in and to the right or left and by holding his haunches in place with the outside leg. Do the same with him at a trot and then at a canter. Begin a change of direction or turn, particularly at speed, with a slight slowing down and closing the outside leg harder and further to the rear, which enables the pony to change his lead and to collect his haunches under him for the turn. A pony that increases his speed at every slight change in direction, or that bears his weight on the forehead in a turn,

gets out of hand in the former is dangerous in the latter case. Change leads a few times first slowly then at speed and note any special indications the pony requires.

Let him follow the ball a while on barely stretched reins encouraging him to go to the left of the ball when your stick is on the right and the reverse. This appeals to his intelligence which is so necessary and which is so often neglected. Make your back stroke quickly in order to discourage stopping. It is dangerous to stop while striking, for an opponent is generally close after you.

9. Ride with barely stretched reins leaving all the freedom possible for the extension necessary for a quick move. The one worst thing that can be done to a pony is to give him the signal with the whip or spur for a quick start or for a burst of speed and require him to receive the effect of his whole effort plus the weight of your whole body on his tender mouth. A well trained pony can be ruined by one such experience.

10. The proper effect on the reins is obtained not by a continual pulling against the mouth or bearing against the neck but by alternately taking and giving—thus sending a succession of signals. A dead pull develops into a tug of war between pony and rider in which the pony in the long run always wins. Likewise use the legs with a tapping effect instead of with a dull, lifeless application.

11. Close your legs and throw your weight back in stopping or turning in order to help get the haunches under. This will also break the effect on you of a sudden stop by planting the forefeet. Ponies will soon learn to stop from proper use of weight and legs and very little use of the hand.

12. Be more than careful not to give a tug on the reins while you are striking the ball. It is a good plan to hold your bridle on the withers when striking.

13. Don't stop your pony any more than you absolutely have to. Save his mouth always. When the ball has been knocked out or over let your pony gallop around to his place instead of stopping suddenly and turning. Even in fast games moments occur when there is nothing for you to do and which should be utilized in giving the pony a rest for which he will immediately reward you by better service. At best polo is rather hard on the pony.

14. It is better to work the edge off a fresh pony than to use a more severe bit. A work-out before a game is a wonderful help.

15. In riding off, the pony should do the leaning—not the rider—otherwise you push yourself away. Get a slight lead if possible. Don't drive your pony straight into a back hander. Pull out and crook or make a time stroke.

16. It is better not to strike at all than to hit your pony. The stroke under the pony must be finished with a sharp upward pull or by striking the ground to keep the mallet from going under. The former stroke is less dangerous when at speed. Protect your pony by fending with the mallet.

17. A properly trained pony will stay at the gait you set him—walk, trot, canter or run—on barely stretched reins.

18. Keep up with the pony so your body will not interfere with the haunches. Being well forward al-

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so facilitates striking the ball further to the front. Lean slightly back for back strokes so as to get the ball behind the hind legs.

19. Most ponies turn better to the left than to the right; this is because the reins are held in the left hand which moves better to the left and because the right reign works looser

than the left. Try to overcome both tendencies.

20. A whip is necessary with most ponies but it should be used sparingly. The same applies to spurs. In fact as with human beings so with ponies—continued hammering destroys the effect of the hammer while

(Continued on Page 7)

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