

## ***Why is my horse starting to refuse jumps?***

*by Charles Wilhelm*

**Question:** My horse has started to refuse jumps. He has been both a reserve and grand champion but now he is consistently refusing. Can you explain why this might be happening? Any help with what I can do to correct this behavior would be appreciated.

**Answer:** I have had the opportunity to work with many hunters and show jumpers when I lived on the west side of the bay, and I found that sometimes horses used consistently for one thing just get sour. No matter how much pressure is put on them by lunging or spurring, they continue to refuse the jumps. I have worked with six or eight horses like this and I believe they simply got sour.

When I work with a horse with this problem, I begin by changing the routine. I work the horse in the arena doing many different flat-work exercises. I sharpen up the response to the leg and rein aids. I work on getting the horse to go forward which is a big key. I take the horse out around the ranch and out on the trail. I leave the horse stalled for a day or just lunge it. All these things break up the routine and give the horse a fresh perspective. After several days of this varied routine, I begin to get the horse to want to jump again.

Wanting to jump is the key because if a horse does not want to do something, it isn't going to happen. They may do it for a while, but if it does not want to jump, it will eventually shut down. So the idea is to get the horse to have the attitude to want to jump.

As I am doing the flat work, I will have the horse lope over one pole. If the horse veers from the pole, I circle back around and shrink my circle, say from a 10 meter to a five-meter circle. I bring the horse down to a trot, do a turn on the forehand, pick up the right lead and ask the horse to go over the pole. Finally the horse will be looking to go over the pole. The circling, moving the hips over and doing the turn on the forehand are difficult. The horse will start searching for the

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easiest way to do this and will start going over the pole. Then I put down a second pole down and we start loping over both poles. When we are doing this easily, I move on to trotting over cavalettis.

I always have the horse stop and relax after doing these exercises. This gives the horse time to absorb what we have done as well as relax. The idea is that the horse will find this is easier and enjoyable. The process to get to this point may take many sessions. When I was in the west bay I worked with a nice black Hanoverian mare that was very well trained but had totally shut down. It took two months before she started jumping again.

Many times when a horse refuses you can push a little bit and let the horse know you expect it to take the jump. You follow through because you have to set the standard of obedience. However, when a horse is consistently refusing, it is obviously sour and you have to examine the mental and emotional state of the horse. Just like us, the job gets old. The horse needs a break. Vary your routine with the horse. Do flat work and sharpen other skills. There are many great exercises you can practice that will make your horse a better ride.

Charles Wilhelm

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*For more information on Charles Wilhelm's training, please visit [www.charleswilhelmtraining.com](http://www.charleswilhelmtraining.com)*