

Long Latigos

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I was staring at some of the figures in my book, *Teaching Yourself to Train Your Horse*, the other day (e.g., figs. 2, and 6-9) and noticed the length of the latigos hanging down on one side or the other of Slick as I was riding him. I realized that many readers would wonder about those hanging straps. Hence this note.

The first question that occurred to me is what I would have done if I had noticed the straps before the book was published. Obviously, the straps should not be hanging down so far that they raise questions. I could have tucked the straps up and re-photographed. Or I could have used a computer program to remove six inches or a foot or so in the existing pictures. Either procedure would have forestalled questions. Or I could have left the photographs the way they are and commented on them in the book. Here is what I might have said.

If anyone ever saw long latigos hanging down that way while I was actually riding, and asked about them -- as has happened across the years -- I would thank them. If I felt that the straps were not long enough to get under the horse's foot or wrap around its leg and cause a problem, then, unless it just seemed too rude under the circumstances, I would probably explain that and ride on.

In the photographs in the book, the horse obviously doesn't care about the straps. The reason is that he is used to them. He's used to them because, first, he has had all kinds of things hanging on both sides of him ever since I started gentling him and sacking him out. Second, such straps have never given him any reason to fear them because they never caused either him or me any problems.

As I say in the book, I use everything I can find as a training device. I want my horses to pay no attention at all to reins, latigo straps, ropes, snagged feet attached to whole people, or anything else hanging down alongside them while they're being ridden. I expect I have ridden hundreds of miles with such straps longer than many people think is neat and orderly, and I've not yet had a problem. This doesn't mean I recommend to anyone else they ride the way I do, in this respect, and certainly not on purpose.

I suggest fastening your latigos up where you know they won't bother you, the horse, or anyone watching you ride. Then you can be sure you're safe and reasonable, and, even better, you won't have to put up with questions on the topic. That's obviously what I should do too. If you have your saddle rigged identically on both sides, as I do, you will always have to check the end of the latigo strap on the horse's right side when you saddle up, because during the manhandling of the saddle -- done mostly from the left side of the horse -- the right latigo might come loose and hang down farther than you'd like. I think that is what happened in the photographs I am discussing.