

## Method 1: Horse held securely

To sack a horse using this method you should still work in a large stall or small corral. The horse should be tied securely.

1. Allow the horse to smell the blanket. Do not shove it in the horse's face but gently move it so that it can smell it.
2. Start to rub the horse with the blanket in a way that it will not scare the horse but allow it to be comfortable with it. Start at the shoulder and move over the entire body as you talk to the horse. Work up the neck and over the head as well. Do this on both sides of the horse.
3. If the horse wants to move around, allow it to step. but quit sacking if it is getting frantic. Begin again by allowing the horse to smell the blanket.
4. Once the horse allows you to rub the blanket over its entire body, then you can begin 'flapping' it onto the body. This should be done in a gentle motion that does not scare the horse, but teaches it to accept the blanket. Gradually move further away from the horse as you swing the blanket onto its body.
5. By paying attention to the horse's body language while you are sacking, you can determine how it feels about the process. You can identify 'tickly' spots that need more sacking and the areas where the horse is really comfortable.

A well sacked horse will look as follows while being sacked:

- head position will be level
- the ears pricked forward or relaxed,
- eyes quiet
- body still

If the horse is high headed, with worried look in the eyes, ears laid back showing discomfort and fidgeting, you should continue sacking until it is relaxed. Depending on the attention span of the horse, sack the horse for a short period of time, take a break and begin again.

This process should be repeated for a period of time before attempting to saddle the horse for the first time to ensure the horse is ready.

## Method 2: Non resistance sacking

Horses will develop greater confidence if they can follow or move towards things that scare them.

Because a horse's natural instinct is to 'run' if something is frightening, this method gives the horse a level of trust in the handler.

During the sacking process it is never 'forced' to stand still.

Try this with unusual things like plastic patio chairs, plastic bags and any item you can easily carry around.

1. Let the horse loose in an enclosed pen. Round pens are best because they don't allow horses to 'hide' in the corners
2. Walk in with the item (blanket) that you want your horse to be sacked with.
3. Show the horse the item, then walk away, allowing the horse to see the item as you walk. As you walk away the horse will usually follow you in an attempt to get close and smell the item if they are nervous about it.
4. When the horse walks towards the item you are carrying, walk backwards letting the horse smell it as you move. Change direction, stop and move again, the whole time letting the horse smell the item.
5. As soon as the horse stands still and seems slightly bored with the item you can begin touching the horse with it over its entire body. Do this in the same order as mentioned previously in Method 1.
6. Any time the horse gets nervous and wants to move away, allow it to move as you walk away with the item. The horse will begin to stand for longer periods of time as it realizes that it will not be confined and forced to stand still. Because it is always free to move away, it will willingly chooses to stand while being sacked.
7. Repeat the process until the horse is comfortable standing still while you touch its whole body with the item.

This method of 'resistance free' sacking will encourage the horse to be 'brave' and remain focused on you as a handler while developing trust and respect. It may be more time consuming, but this method will reward you in the end, with a horse that develops respect, trust, focus and willingness to be with you.

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## GIRTHING THE HORSE

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Horses will often be quite sensitive in the girth area. Some even begin bucking when they feel the confinement around their girths during their first saddling. To prevent any wrecks and to properly prepare the horse for saddling you can use the following method of 'girthing' your horse.

1. Use a long soft cotton rope (lead shank).
2. Standing at the side of the horse, place the end of the rope over the horse's back right behind the wither, allowing the end to hang freely on the far side of the horse.
3. Reach under the horse to grab the loose end. Pull it around until it is half way up the horse's girth area on the near side. This allows you to stand straight while you go through the girthing process.
4. Pull gently on both ends, increasing the tension of the rope around the girth.
5. If the horse begins to tense, release the pressure and begin again. Once the horse accepts the pressure begin increasing the tension until it is as tight as it might be if you were doing a saddle up. Never tie the rope onto the horse - just use your hands to tighten and release the tension.
6. The horse should eventually accept the tightening of the rope around its girth area. Now you can move the rope along the horse's barrel and repeat the process until it is completely accepting of the tension all the way to the back cinch area of the barrel.
7. Work from both sides of the horse in this manner.

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## SADDLING THE HORSE FOR THE FIRST TIME

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Use the same method to introduce your horse to a saddle as you did when you were sacking the horse. If you used the non-resistance method, you would place a halter and shank on the horse so that you would have some control for safety.

1. Begin by letting the horse smell the saddle as you stand at the side near its head. Do this on both sides.
2. Walk around the horse carrying the saddle. It should feel comfortable allowing you to do this. If it does not, work at it until the horse will stand still and stay relaxed.
3. If the saddle is light enough for you to manage, you can even 'sack' the horse with it by touching a part of the saddle over its entire body (don't 'hit' the horse hard with it, simply touch the saddle to the horse's body). This will let you know whether the horse is ready for its first saddle.
4. Stand on the near side of the horse.
5. Place the off side stirrup over the saddle horn and the cinch over the seat of the saddle to keep it out of the way so it won't fall and hit the side of the horse as you place the saddle on its back.
6. Gently lift the saddle onto the horse's back. You may or may not have a blanket on. Sometimes for the first saddling, the blanket just gets in the way if your horse is tall or you are too short to lift the saddle well onto its back.
7. Once the saddle is placed onto the back, do not let go of it, but wiggle and move it a bit to get the horse used to the new feeling before you do it up. If the horse bolts, pull the saddle off as it moves away. If the horse simply steps away then move with the horse while holding the saddle in place until it stops again.
8. If you have someone holding the horse, be sure they are not standing in the way, they should always take up a safe position to the same side of the horse as you are working on.
9. Once the horse accepts the saddle on its back, move around the horse and let the cinch and stirrup down on the off side. Again, hold onto the saddle from this side, and wiggle and move it to ensure the horse is comfortable.
11. Move back to the near side. Put the near stirrup out of the way, over the horn, and reach under to get the cinch.
12. Place the latigo through the cinch and gently tighten the cinch. Be sure you have at least three wraps so that if the horse begins to lunge with the saddle, the cinch latigo would probably stay in place without having been done up completely. Do not over-tighten in the beginning, but make sure that it is tight enough that the saddle would remain on the horse if it jumped or moved quickly. You might take a minute or so to gradually tighten the cinch to where it is tight enough.
13. Once the saddle is tightened on (back cinch included, but not done up as tightly as the front), allow the horse to move around, preferably in a small familiar corral. You can

undo the lead shank and let it go on its own. Do not get in its way while it is getting used to the saddle - it may run, buck, or simply trot around. Most horses become uncomfortable once they start moving. It is important that you make the horse move around.

14. Once the horse is relaxed while moving with the saddle around the enclosed area you can catch it and remove the saddle reversing the steps to put it on.

Repeat the process of saddling the horse using the same cautions until the horse is very comfortable with saddling/unsaddling.

### **Some things you might try while the horse is saddled**

1. Sack the horse with the saddle on its back.
2. Lunge the horse at walk, trot and canter.
3. In a round pen, loop a rope on the horn and let it drag as the horse moves around the pen at walk, jog and lope.
4. Tie a plastic bag to a whip, sack the horse with the whip and bag first, then attach the whip to the saddle so the bag is in the air as the horse moves. (This is a great way to introduce the horse to the feeling of having a rider sitting on its back.)
5. Ground drive the horse as a method of introducing the horse to the aids for turning and stopping before actually being ridden.

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# GROUND DRIVING

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## What is it?

When you ground drive a horse you are positioned (at a safe distance) on the ground, behind a saddled horse while steering and controlling the horse with long reins attached to the sides of the halter or snaffle bit and run through the stirrups to your hands.

## Why do it?

Ground driving teaches the basic skills needed when you start riding the horse.

## When do you start?

This can be started as early as two years of age when the horse has been started in its training. The attention span of an older horse is longer and so training takes less time. The horse does not necessarily need to be bridled at this time, but it does need to be saddled.

## Where do you ground drive?

All of the work for ground driving is done in an enclosed area. This will ensure that the horse is under control and safe in the event that it gets away from the handler.

## What preparations are necessary before ground driving your horse?

1. Your horse must be able to carry a saddle in a relaxed manner. It should be comfortable being lunged with the saddle at a walk, jog and lope.
2. Your horse can be ground driven with a bridle (snaffle bit) or well fitted halter.
3. Tie the stirrups together under the horse's girth with a string (bale) or other suitable material. This is to prevent the stirrups from coming away from the horse as you turn. Be sure it is tied tight enough with no sagging for a foot to get caught in.
4. You must have two long ropes, either driving lines or lunge lines that can be attached to the sides of the halter or to the rings on the snaffle bit. These should be long enough to reach from the front of the horse to at least a full horse length or more behind the horse.
5. Your horse should be comfortable having the driving reins lay against its sides, hips and hind legs. Prepare the horse for this by looping each of the driving lines over the saddle horn and running them down each side and through the stirrup, letting them drag on either side behind the horse. Let the horse get used to the dragging the lines by doing this daily in an enclosed area until it accepts them.

## Steps to ground drive

### 1. Preparation

Saddle and bridle your horse (or with halter). Lunge the horse until it is working quietly. Let the horse move with the driving lines dragging behind for a while.

The lines are fastened to either side of the halter or to the rings of the snaffle bit if the horse is bridled. They are each run through the same side stirrup (which are tied together under the horse) and back behind the horse on either side of its hindquarter.

It is useful to have a helper at first to teach the horse to walk forward with you behind it. You will be holding onto the long lines as you would hold reins while you ride.

### 2. Walking forward

With a voice command asking for the horse to walk, and a slight movement of the long lines on the hips of the horse ask the horse to step forward into a walk.

As the horse walks, apply a soft contact with your hands, and keep at a distance that allows for a slight contact at all times.

This is probably the most difficult part of ground driving. Appropriate contact should be kept so that there are no big loops with loose contact or the contact is too tight.

### 3. Turning the horse

When teaching the horse in the beginning, simply ask it to walk and allow it to move where it wants.

As it begins turning, use your hands to direct the turn by applying pressure to the inside rein and giving on the outside rein to allow the head and neck to bend in the direction of the turn.

As soon as the horse moves in the direction of the turn, release the pressure and apply it again as you continue asking for more turn.

Use your voice to praise the horse as it makes attempts to do the right thing.

Don't expect the horse to be perfect in the beginning. It takes quite some time for a horse to learn to be controlled through the reins and voice commands.

### 4. Using a helper

It is important that the horse walks forward and doesn't stop and turn around to face you. This is why you keep the horse moving and why you might use a helper in the beginning.

The helper should only walk beside the horse and try to stay out of the way of the horse as it wanders about.

Soon the horse will begin responding to your pressure on the lines as you ask it turn at a particular point.

## 5. Halting

When you ask the horse to halt, use a voice command such as 'whoa', (it already is familiar with this because of lungeing) and apply a firm pressure to the bit with your hands on the reins.

If the horse does not halt after a short moment of this pressure, release the pressure and try again.

It is important that you do not use a steady pressure as a horse will often lean heavily into the bit if you don't release that pressure.

When the horse does halt, release the pressure immediately, praise it verbally and stand quietly for a few moments before asking the horse to move off into a good strong walk again.

As soon as the horse understands that you are controlling its direction and gait and is responsive to you the helper can gradually walk away, leaving just you and your horse in the enclosed area.

## 6. Backing up

You can also teach your horse to back up using ground driving.

This is quite a difficult movement for a horse, so start with a helper at the front, pressing the chest with their hands as you use the voice command, 'back', and firm pressure on both reins followed by a release as soon as the horse makes a step backwards.

Don't ask for too much at one time.

One or two steps done well is better than four or five done poorly.

If you are consistent and give immediate rewards (releasing the pressure) a horse will very quickly learn to back up.

## **Should I jog my horse while ground driving?**

Some people jog their horses while ground driving, but this is a difficult thing for the handler to do.

You must keep up with the horse while not pulling on the reins.

Sometimes the jogging motion of the handler will scare the horse and cause so much forward motion that the handler cannot keep up with the horse.

When you are ground driving, do not teach the horse a new skill unless the horse knows it from earlier lessons. You can teach a horse to move around obstacles for example, but work the horse in hand around the obstacles first.

Acceptance of the bit pressure in making the horse turn and stop are the basic goals of ground driving.

Once the horse moves easily around with you directing its motion then it is likely ready to be ridden.

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## BRIDLING THE YOUNG HORSE

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After the horse has been lunged and ground driven with the halter, you can start bridling the horse. When bridling a young horse, you need to be gentle. Rough or incorrect handling will make the horse hard to bridle. You must be careful of the ears, eyes and mouth as you bridle and unbridle.

### Equipment

To keep from damaging the horse's mouth and to enable you to use two hands while teaching the horse, use a large diameter loose ring, D-ring or eggbutt snaffle bit.

Some people prefer to use a hackamore for early training so that the mouth is not damaged before the horse learns to respond to seat, leg and rein pressure.

### Before Bridling

You can prepare the horse for the bridle by standing beside the horse's head facing forward on the near side.

1. Slide each of your fingers into the corners of the horse's mouth. It must be able to accept you doing this before you can expect the horse to take the bit and hold it in the mouth. They have no teeth at this part of the jaws so it is safe for you to move the fingers into the mouth and get the horse to open its mouth as if it is taking the bit in.
2. You can also take a lead shank and drape it behind the horse's ears, stand in front of the horse holding on to either end of the shank and position the shank on either side of the horse's face in the place that the bridle or bosal would lay.
3. Walk backwards and keep the horse's head between the sides of the shank as you move around an enclosed area. If a horse will not accept the pressure of the shank on either side of the head, then it is not ready to be bridled. Do this until the horse calmly follows you around keeping its head level and between the shank.

### Bridling the horse for the first time

1. Lengthen the headstall so that it is bigger, rather than too small to fit the horse's head. Remove the reins.
2. Stand beside the head, on the left side (near) facing forward.
3. Hold the headstall in your left hand.
4. Reach between the ears of the horse with your right hand and grasp the top of the headstall or the headstall may also be held over the bridge of the nose with your right hand by reaching under the jaw and around the head.
5. Support the bit with your left hand and press the bars of the mouth with the thumb and forefinger of the same hand (palm under the jaw) to open the mouth.
6. Balance the headstall so that the bit does not bang against the teeth as it goes into the

mouth.

7. As you pull the bridle on be careful around the eyes so that the headstall does not rub them.
8. Slip the headstall over the ears, bringing each ear forward one at a time. Pulling them back is not natural and can hurt, making the horse hard to bridle.
9. Adjust the headstall so the bit rests on the bars and is high enough that the horse can not get its tongue over the bit.
10. Leave the bit on for at least one hour per day for a few days. The horse may be turned loose in a stall and even fed with the bridle (no reins) during this time. This will give the horse time to get used to carrying the bit in its mouth.

### **Safety Tip**

*Do not leave the horse unattended. Be sure there is nothing the horse could hook the bit on if it were to begin rubbing.*

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# BITTING THE HORSE

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## Preparation

The horse moves around the lunge circle at a walk, trot and canter in both directions. It has had a bit in its mouth and is comfortable with the saddle on its back.

## Method

1. You can add 'bitting reins' or 'side reins' to your equipment if you want to begin strengthening the horse's muscles over its back and on the abdomen.
2. Either method will help to position the neck and head of the horse so they travel in a 'rounded' frame, moving into the bit, rather than with their head high in the air with no contact.
3. The reins also teach the horse to move 'into' the contact of the bit. These reins should be used very loosely in the beginning and only be adjusted more tightly if the horse needs it and can handle it.
4. A horse should never be made to bring the head in behind the vertical and so low that it has trouble moving freely forward.

## Method 1: Bitting reins

1. Use heavy split leather or long lines that are least 8 feet long. (Preferably without a snap that attaches them to the bit. Metal on metal can be very irritating to a horse as it is moving.)
2. With each rein attached to each of the snaffle rings, place the rein between the horse's front legs. The off side rein goes behind the off side elbow and the near side behind the near side elbow. Each rein is then brought up to the top of the seat of the saddle.
3. Adjust the length (loose in the beginning) and tie a square knot that will rest freely on top of the seat of the saddle.
4. As the horse moves in any gait with this method of attachment, they will naturally soften to the contact that is created by their own movement.
5. Done properly, this method will encourage a very soft light contact that you will enjoy once you are in the saddle.

## Method 2: Side reins

1. Side reins are often used to help 'position' a horse's head. They are used for the same purpose as the above method. However, a horse will sometimes get 'heavy' in the bridle and brace against the side reins.
2. Side reins are made of either leather or nylon webbing and have a rubber ring attached at a point nearest to the attachment to the bit. This ring allows a some 'give' when the pressure is applied.
3. Each of the side reins should be attached from ring on the bit to a position on the saddle so that the head and neck of the horse is brought to an near level position. Don't attach them too high to the saddle or they will not be effective.
4. Start with them adjusted quite loose, then gradually shorten the length of the side reins (evenly) so that the horse carries its head near the vertical (or slightly in front of the vertical). The horse should move into the contact of the bit as it gets used to the pressure applied from the side reins.

## Fitting and use of the hackamore

A hackamore is made up of a bosal, fiador, headstall and mecate or reins.

The most common bosal is made of braided rawhide or leather.

The thickness and stiffness will vary.

A soft and thick bosal is gentle while a stiff hard one will be more severe in its action.

The bosal should be placed near the soft cartilage of the nose.

It should be short enough that lifting the heel knot with the reins puts pressure on the cheeks before the knot touches the chin.

The bosal should not slip up under the nose in order to make contact.

## The horse responds to three different pressures from the bosal

1. direct pressure on the nose and chin from an even pull on both reins.
2. lateral (sideways) pressure applied to the nose by the direct rein.
3. pressure of the rein against the neck (bearing or neck rein).

Pressure is only used with a hackamore or bit when the rider is asking for a specific response. Direct pressure is only used long enough to get a response, then the reins are released. It is used to turn or circle the horse. The bearing or neck rein is then used as training continues to enable the rider to eventually ride with one hand on the reins.

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## RIDING THE GREEN HORSE **FOR THE FIRST TIME**

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Before attempting to mount your horse it should have the following training and experience:

1. ground manners and sacked out
2. saddled, bridled
3. lunged at walk jog and lope both directions
4. ground driven

From the above training, the horse will already be very familiar with a number of cues needed to be ridden. It will already respect you, trust you, be able to focus on the work at hand, as well as being willing to work with you. You will know that your horse is ready for mounting if it happily accepts the work that it is doing to this point.

### **Some added preparations for mounting**

1. Walk beside your horse near the stirrup of the saddle. Move your horse forward by putting pressure on its side at the girth area while using the stirrup to tap the horse until it responds. Let the horse wander around at a walk as you touch the horse with your body as it moves. You can lay your arm over the saddle and lean some weight onto the saddle as you walk as well. Repeat this for the other side.
2. With the horse standing still, pull on the stirrups and lean on them (with your hands) Flap them against the sides of the horse. Holding the saddle horn shift the saddle back and forth to help 'ground' your horse's legs. Do these things for several days prior to mounting.
3. Use a safe stool, mounting block or chair and stand beside your horse on it. Touch the saddle, lay your weight on its back and get it used to standing quietly while you do this from both sides.

### **Mounting for the first time**

1. Saddle and bridle the horse as usual.
2. In an enclosed area, lunge the horse, then drive the horse as you have already been doing.
3. Have a helper hold the horse either by the halter and shank or by the reins, close to the bit.
4. Stand beside the horse on the near side and gather the reins to the wither with the left hand.
5. At the same time, take the stirrup in the right hand and lean sharply on the stirrup several times. If your horse stands quietly for this then proceed to place your left foot in the stirrup.

6. Without pushing your toe into your horse's side, stand up in the stirrup placing your weight over the saddle by leaning slightly forward, but do not swing your leg over. Step down.
7. Repeat these steps a couple of times. Stroke the horse's neck and talk to the horse when you are up in the stirrup.
8. If the horse is still quiet after this is repeated, slowly swing your leg over the saddle and lower yourself gently into it. Take care not to accidentally bump the horse with your leg as you do this. Praise the horse.
9. Wiggle and move your weight back and forth in the saddle.
10. Step down from the saddle the same way.
11. If you are coordinated enough, it is a good idea to repeat this process from the right side as well.

### **The first step forward**

After mounting is successful and the horse has relaxed with you on its back while standing still, the horse should be made to move while being led with you on the back.

By having a handler control the first few steps you will save having your horse's mouth pulled on if it lunges or bucks. The handler will have a hold of the shank of the halter. This allows a safer method of control than to expect the horse to understand the use of the bit if it moves too quickly.

The handler on the ground can control the situation while you simply hold onto the horn and try to stay in the middle of the horse's back.

The handler will lead the horse in both directions and stop the horse. The rider will use voice commands and leg aids to encourage the horse to respond correctly.

Soon the handler can unsnap the lead shank (or loop it around the horn of the saddle) and walk beside you while you begin controlling the movement of the horse.

As soon as the horse is responding to your aids, the handler can walk away from its side.

*When riding a young horse remember this:*

*Ask a little - expect even less - praise a lot !*

## What if it begins to buck?

The first few steps might be unsettling for the horse and it may get excited. The following are some steps to take to prevent a horse from bucking and what to do if it does buck:

- Never, never sit completely still and do nothing on a green horse when riding it for the first few times. Riders sometimes get comfortable with a green horse that seems to be accepting everything easily. This is a dangerous thing to do. Always be moving in the saddle or doing something with it. A horse that is 'sleeping' may be watching you out of one eye, and then when it sees you with the other (when you change direction, or make it move after standing for a length of time) it may 'blow up'.
- Sit deeply in the saddle and lean slightly back.
- Keep your legs quietly at its sides, touching the horse, but not gripping the horse's barrel. Holding on with your legs will make an unsettled horse even more nervous.
- Your hands should be as still and quiet as possible - hold the horn for better security and to stay balanced in the center of the horse in case it bucks.
- It is best to use only one rein (let the other go slack) or a lead shank on one side of the halter to pull a bucking or lungeing horse's head up and to the side. If you use both reins, the horse will simply out-muscle you and lean into both reins while it bucks. By pulling up and to the side with one rein, you set the horse off balance and this enables you to push the horse's hindquarters sideways with your leg.
- Try to get the horse to move forward into a trot so that he cannot brace to buck or lunge.
- If a horse is braced against you and will not move forward, shorten the rein on one side, lift straight up from the horse's mouth and kick with the same side leg to move the horse's hip around. This is a good suppling exercise that should be done in both directions.

## Moving forward

By the fourth ride or so, the rider should have the horse moving forward at a walk and trot in both directions using leg and voice aids. Convincing a young horse to move forward is often difficult, therefore your early training and riding will concentrate on getting good forward movement and a rhythm at a walk and a trot.

All young horses feel rough for the first few rides. Their gait is uneven as they are not used to balancing with a rider and are uncertain about what is expected of them.

## How long do I trot for?

Don't ask the horse to maintain a trot for a long period of time in the beginning. If you do, the horse may begin to sour (be unwilling to work for you happily).

It is difficult work to balance with you on its back while moving forward.

Transitions from walk to trot and from trot to walk and halt will be important. These transitions will help the horse make a quick response to light aids while maintaining

balance with a rider.

### **How much rein pressure?**

During the early stages of riding, the horse is worked on a fairly loose rein. You need your horse to listen to your leg and seat aids more than your rein aids in the beginning.

If you try to develop a 'light feel' of your horse's mouth during all of your riding, your horse will gain confidence in your hands and easily accept the bit pressure.

Do not expect a horse to be soft in the mouth, if you are not soft with your hands.

Pressure and release, give and take is the key to a light feel of your horse's mouth.

### **Turning your horse**

Practice direction changes at a walk, using a direct rein to help steer the horse's head around. This is similar to the feeling the horse had when it was being ground driven, so it should be quite easy for the horse to do. This will be followed by your leg and seat aids to encourage the body of the horse to follow.

Before the turn you can apply a slight pressure at the girth with the inside leg (to begin bending the horse through the barrel) and bump slightly with the outside leg as the horse begins the turn.

Your seat, followed by your upper body, head and eyes will twist in the direction of the turn as you begin applying the rein pressure with your hands.

#### **The timing for the leg pressures on a turn are as follows:**

1. inside leg is used when the horse's inside hind leg is off the ground. (The horse's barrel is naturally bent for the turn when at this position.)
2. outside leg is used in opposition with the inside, when the inside hind is on the ground. (This brings the forehand around to complete the turn.)

Once the horse begins turning more easily and is doing so with leg pressure and a small amount of rein pressure, then you can begin applying a neck rein to turn, in addition to the direct rein.

As the horse learns more, the hands are used closer together. Always use as little pressure on the bit as possible, so the mouth of the horse does not get damaged by heavy pulling. Rein pressure used for flexion should be avoided, except for cues to turn, slow down or stop, until after the horse has learned to move forward well and does not tighten its jaw against the bit.

## How long do I ride for?

Do not overwork your horse when you begin to ride. Stop riding when the horse does what you ask correctly. Praise it so it knows it is right.

A good reward for most young horses is to let them stand quietly for a few minutes before continuing work.

There should be little or no reason for punishment because the horse will not understand what it is being punished for.

If you do not get a response to a new cue, go back to a skill the horse knows. Progress is made only when the horse is ready.

## Shortening the reins

When the horse is going well, you can shorten the reins. They will be shortened until you have light contact with the bit when the horse holds its head in a natural position.

This gives the horse some support while it is moving forward or even when it is stopped.

If the horse tightens its lower jaw against the bit or flings its head around, give the reins more slack, slowly working toward shortening the reins again.

Always support the hand aid with the seat and leg aids. That is, use your legs to push your horse into a light contact.

If your horse is fidgeting with its head, bump it with your legs, not your hands.

## Lope or Canter

The lope or canter is not taught at the same time as the walk and trot.

Like a small child, the young horse often has a problem with balance and may have problems with coordination.

Adding the weight and bulk of a rider can make canter more difficult for the horse.

Lungeing your horse (riderless) is the easiest way to teach it to canter.

Asking for the canter or lope in a circle against a corner helps the horses pick up the correct lead from a trot.

If the horse takes the wrong lead or is cross-firing, slow to a trot, then ask for the canter again.

When the horse is traveling incorrectly, it is uncomfortable and the horse may get upset.

By correcting the horse this way, it learns what is correct and comfortable.

With work, the horse will slow down at this gait and relax as it moves forward in canter on the lunge.

After the horse has been working steadily at a walk and trot with a rider on and having light rein contact, you can begin to ride the canter or lope.

This is done much the same way as beginning to ride the horse.

Have a handler with the lunge line control the horse and give a verbal cue as it trots into a corner.

Sit deeply in the saddle, give the verbal command and bump the horse with your outside leg behind the girth.

As your horse comes off the rail to follow the circle, bump the horse again as you move toward the wall.

The rail is usually enough of an aid to form the other half of the circle.

Do this for several days before working without the lunge line. When the horse begins to canter, lean slightly forward, off the horse's back to allow it to move easily under you. Make it easy for the horse to continue cantering without too much pulling and pushing from the rider.

During the first few rides without the lunge rein, have your helper stand in the center while you both give the verbal command in a corner. The horse learns by association. Your reins should be loose except when using a direct rein to turn and leg aids are used to hold the horse on the turn or curve.

The horse will slow down and relax with continued work as it gets better balanced. Just sit up tall and try to ride balanced with the horse's movement without interfering with the legs, seat or reins.

When the horse is easy to control in a circle, you can begin to ride it on the rail. The canter cue should still be given while circling the horse.

If you are consistent with the cue to pick up one lead or the other, the horse will soon learn which lead you want when you cue the horse to canter on the straight away.

If the horse gets flustered, rushes or is unsettled during this work, you may need to ride it at walk, trot and back up until it is more settled.

Do not rush the process. Remember that all horses know how to canter naturally. It is a problem for some of them when a rider is on their back.

*Important tip:*

When your horse has problems with something, you look at what *you* are doing first, before assuming the horse is making a mistake.

**Backing the horse while mounted**

Backing your horse while mounted should be a review of what the horse already knows.

On the ground you have used 'voice' aids with pressure on the halter to have the horse step easily backwards.

A horse moving correctly backwards should move their legs in diagonal pairs in a two beat motion.

**Backing is important for the horse to learn the following:**

- giving to bit pressure
  - giving to leg pressure
  - getting the hind quarters under the body
1. Halt the horse and have it stand quietly with light contact on the reins.
  2. Squeeze lightly with your legs as if you want the horse to step forward but at the same time apply equal pressure to the horse's mouth with the reins.
  3. Lean forward slightly
  4. Shorten the reins and widen the hands while you apply pressure to the horse's mouth with the reins.
  5. Maintain this pressure until the horse gives and begins to step back.
  6. Immediately release the pressure and praise the horse.
  7. Ask for one or two more steps, praising the horse for each attempt.
  8. Do not ask for too much at first, a little each day will make the experience better and more relaxing for the horse.
  9. If the horse refuses to step backward, ride it forward, stop and try again. Finally if you are still not successful, have someone on the ground touch the horse on the chest as you apply the aids necessary to teach the horse to back. Soon the horse will understand what you want and will do so without a helper.

Backing a horse can help a horse to regain balance if they get feeling 'strung out' in any of the gaits.

Backing a horse a few steps before cantering often places the hindquarters under the body in a position that will make it easier for the horse to 'step' easily into canter or lope.

## Words of Wisdom

### **Make a young horse's riding experiences interesting.**

Don't always do the same thing each day. Add trail obstacles to your riding area and give the horse a 'job' to do. Ride out on the trail as often as you can. This will make the horse look forward to going for rides.

### **Don't expect more from your horse than you have taught it.**

If a horse is having a problem with something, it is likely it needs to be re-taught in order to do it successfully. For example, if you are trying to sidepass to open a gate and the horse is fidgeting and not moving off your leg correctly, you may need to teach it to stand quietly first, then 'one step' at a time ask it to move away from the pressure of your leg. Be sure that you are clear with your aids and not accidentally pressing the horse with your other leg as you ask the horse to step over.

### **Don't teach it more than one new thing at a time.**

Horses can only handle one new thing being taught at one time. Until it is well understood by your horse there is not much sense in introducing something else. Set yourself up for success when training your young horse.