

# Tracy Porter Article

## GIVING TO THE BIT

### Part 3: The Baby Give

By Me, Tracy Porter **Part 3:**

**By Tracy Porter**

John Lyons Select Certified Trainer

The best place to teach our horse is in the environment that you feel most safe with him. A prerequisite to teaching the horse to give to the bit would be to teach the horse the Go Forward cue from the ground. You may also begin to teach the horse to give to the bit from the ground before teaching it from his back. As you walk along next to your horse, be careful not to hang on the horse with your free hand. Begin by letting the horse walk where he wants, at this point, you are only concerned with the horse moving his jaw when you take the slack out of the rein. Note: Although you can teach this and see the first two spots with the horse standing still, we really need the horse to be moving for him to progress further.

We want the horse to recognize that we want something each and every time we pick up the rein. Giving to the bit is an important foundation block in the horse's training, it is something that we want before any maneuver, during any maneuver and after any maneuver for the rest of the horse's life IT'S THAT IMPORTANT!

Most people try to control the whole horse. We don't really need to worry about the whole horse just one part at a time. When the horse gives their jaw toward the rein we recognize that we have control of at least one part of their body. When we have control this one part, we can stop our horse from running away or tell him to calm down in addition to many other things. The whole game is to get control of our horse without force.

When we first pick up the rein, we must wait for the horse to respond. The horse learns this through practice. At first we only have a vague idea of what we are looking for from the horse, well he's in the same boat! This can make it a little confusing for both you and the horse, but through repetition, you'll improve and then the horse will respond better and better. After we consistently see the horse's nose coming to the side as we pick up the rein, we will begin to see more spots soften as the horse turns more control of his body over to us.

There are three parts of a Baby Give :

1. **NO PULL:** When the horse is *giving* he is **NOT pulling!** (When we say the horse is pulling on the rein, he really is pushing his nose away. His jaw is not coming toward the rein, but he is resisting by forcing it away. There is pressure on the rein and this is why we call it pulling .
2. **NOT JUST NEUTRAL:** When the horse is giving, his jaw needs to be light and moving in the direction of the rein. (If nothing is happening we have a dead rein, the horse is just there going along. He is neither pulling or giving. It is kind of like talking to a high school student that just stares at you and doesn't say a word or show any emotion. When you are speaking the student doesn't give you any kind of response and just wanders off when you stop speaking.)

3. **ENERGY & MOVEMENT IN DIRECTION YOU WANT PART TO GO:** In asking the jawbone to give, the horse gives it toward the rein when we begin to take the slack out.

When we first pick up the rein, the horse hasn't a clue what we want. He will give us one of three responses: PULL, NEUTRAL & GIVE. When the horse is not GIVING he has to be either in Neutral or Pulling. The horse sitting in Neutral won't get us very far. The horse must pull (even if it is just a little pull) to learn to give. It is important however NOT TO PULL ON THE HORSE! The slower and lighter the signal from the rider; makes a horse QUICKER and LIGHTER. The faster we move our hands is like scolding the horse. We are telling him he is late. We also are not giving him the opportunity to respond which means he also doesn't have time to try to figure it out. This would be similar to a child learning to tie his shoes. If you jump in and help him finish too early, he will wait for you to do so each time.

The horse will carry its head in one of three zones.

**Zone 1** is in the front, the ideal spot for the horse to be giving in. The horse giving here is our goal. The withers open and elevate here and the front end, feet, etc. get lighter! Think of this area as the Paycheck Window.

**Zone 2** from the front to 45 degrees to the side. The horse consistently working here means we are on our way to Zone 1!

**Zone 3** from 45 to 90 degrees to the side. The nose never passes 90 degrees from the front, the base of the neck with the shoulder. The horse needs to progress to Zone 2 from here.

\*We never want the nose at our knee, if the horse brings his head there we need to straighten it out by pushing the head back forward with our rein. We do not want to put slack in the rein to do this, but we must let some rein out as the horse's head goes back forward.

\*Resistance causes a muscle to sweat. This is a good thing. When the horse pulls, this means horse is locking us out of a muscle. If we wait out the pull, that means we don't release the rein until the horse gives; this resistance will cause the muscle to sweat. Eventually the horse will relax the muscle and turn control of it over to us.

We can think of the shoulders and hips as spots too. Spot #11 is the shoulder. Spot #10 is the hip. When the horse is working through spots #1-spot #7, we don't care about the feet, but as soon as we begin to see #8 developing, we do! At this point it is important for us to move a major body part after the horse has given. If we don't, we'll disconnect the front of the horse from the back of the horse, the horse will be going along with the feet locked in a position and the neck loose, swinging merrily along, this may seem good but really it isn't. When the horse moves a major body part while giving at this level, he is building more muscle. His legs and body will stay sounder and last longer by teaching him to carry himself in a better, balanced manner.

Once you have begun your journey down the "giving to the bit" path, you'll begin to see the path goes much deeper than you originally thought and along the way you discover things you never knew existed! There is no ending to this path as it continues on and never ends! In classes it takes two days of explanation, demonstration and practice time for my students to begin to develop their foundation of understanding. Is previous experience necessary? Although it is nice that a person has seen and smelled a horse before, it is not necessary to learn these concepts. Sometimes we have to change well-instilled patterns, so a newbie to horses may have an advantage over someone who has ridden all their life! However, whatever your horse background has been, success really hinges on how well YOU develop YOUR concentration! You'll have to wait until next month to read about that! As you can see there is a lot more to learn than just hoping up on old Lightning releasing the rein and galloping into the sunset!



Here is the "money" window. It is your optimal place for the horse to give.



This is a normal place for the horse to "give" to when he is first learning...but no further than 12 inches to the side.



Review what the 9 spots are!

[ **BACK UP TO ARTICLES** ]