

Tracy Porter Article

WINTER PROJECTS 2

By Me, Tracy Porter

This article is for those dedicated winter riders that dress like the Stay-Puff Marshmallow Man! Nothing hurts your ego more than attempting to get on your horse and doing the dead man hang from the saddle. It's a sure sign that the mercury is in the double sub-zero digits when you have on so many clothes that your leg can't quite bend enough to allow your foot to get in the stirrup! If that isn't bad enough, have you ever turned back on a trail ride because the thought of an unsuccessful remounting and hiking through the snow back to the barn was as predictable as Ronco commercials at Christmas time?

Don't feel bad, years ago when I taught downhill skiing out in Colorado the first thing I had to teach novice skiers was how to get up. A majority of them were first timer Texans that hadn't much experience walking up a slight incline let alone skiing down one. The likelihood of them biffing and doing a face plant was as certain as the sun rising in the east. But at the end of their lesson, they had practiced it so much, the fear of flailing in the snow and becoming a century old well preserved prehistoric skier was wiped out of their minds!

So here I am, teaching you how to mount in winter wear, not really. What we are going to do is teach our horse how to stand next to things. You know those cute little mounting blocks? Well, unless you are carrying one strapped on your saddle, you'll learn to be creative in your choices of mountable objects. I have gotten so creative, that it is almost more work to get on the mounting device than it would have been to have gotten up from the ground. But alas, it's the principle! Soon you too will be mounting off of anything you can find, even if it's onto a 13.1h Icelandic horse!

Prerequisites: It's helpful to have good control of your horse on the ground. You know things like stopping, moving their shoulders and hips away and toward you without running you over. If you can't, it may be a good idea to get that before you decide to get on, even if it is just from the ground!

You'll need a 42-inch dressage whip to cue your horse. Instead of a halter, I prefer to use a bridle with a snaffle bit. It gives me more precise communication to the horse. This allows me to improve my horses leading skills, which are a direct reflection of his riding skills.

In the first phase we begin on the ground. We will teach the horse to move its hip away from the rein. We do this by starting on the horse's left side, using the left rein to move the hip to the right. Then repeat this from the right side of the horse. You may wonder why all the fuss about repeating this from the right side of the horse. Eventually we want to get this same movement when we stand on an object on the left side of the horse. So, don't skip this step.

Next we will get that same movement with a tap from the whip. Bear in mind that the whip is only an extension of your arm, not a torture device. Stand on the right side of the horse, tip the nose slightly toward you. KISS once, then begin to gently tap the hip until it moves away from you. Continue to repeat this sequence until the horse moves on the first tap. Better yet, until the horse moves JUST before you tap. To get this, hold your whip toward the hip, kiss and slowly move the whip (like Tinker Bell waves her wand on the Wonderful World of Disney credits, if you haven't a clue about Ms. Tinker and her wand...you grew up before the television was invented and you should be commended for all your years mounting from the ground **OR** you're too young and you need to do your time polishing your mounting skills

from the ground before you teach this lesson!) Getting this cue soft and nice from the wave of your hand will be handy later if you want to ask the horse to move sideways so someone can pass, so you can wash his other side in the wash stall etc.

Next, we will move to the left side of the horse. Here is the tricky part if you are the perfect height (short) as I, and are teaching a tall horse find a hill and stand on the upside. If you are taller, simply move to the left side and consider getting yourself a larger horse and then find the hill.

You will repeat the same sequence but from the left side reaching over the horse's back and cuing the right hip. It is still really important to slightly tip the nose, KISS: and wave your whip BEFORE tapping, unless you want to be carrying a whip for the rest of your life. Be sure to stop tapping when the horse moves one step.

When the horse is comfortable with this, the next step is to simply stand on an object and repeat from a higher level. Find a big bench, ramp or fence to stand or sit on. I like something to stand on, because if I sit on a fence I sometimes forget what I am doing and have been known to tip off. Repeat the previous step from the left side reaching over the horse's back and cuing the right hip. KISS, wave the whip BEFORE tapping, STOP when he steps sideways toward you. Repeat this until he softly steps over and stands squarely next to your mounting object. In the future you may have arthroscopic knee or carpal tunnel surgery and find it necessary to need to mount from the horse's right side as well as the left. I think it's a good idea to teach it now and then get in the habit of swapping sides each time you ride.

If you find your horse is reactive to a whip, take the time to get him thoroughly comfortable with the whip all over his body before starting this lesson. At any point in the lesson if your horse moves forward, simply pick up on the rein on the side you are on and reposition the horse to the starting position.

Be creative, repeat this from any object you can find where ever you go! Consider it a compliment when someone calls you LAZY after all, you *did* take the time to teach it! Make the most of the short days and cold nights.

PICTURES ARTICLE 2

Picture	Caption
1	Standing on horses right side, ask the right hip to move to the left by tapping it with the whip. Praise.
2	Standing on the left, tip the horses nose to the right. Then reach over the horse back and tap the right hip: cueing it to step to the left.
3	Hip moves praise.
4	Repeat sequence on bench or some sturdy object.
5	Horse moves his right hip to the left Praise.
6	Cue horse each time with a kiss and a wave of the whip.
7	If horse does not move on wave, tap. Then praise.
8	Repeat until the horse squares to object, praising for each try.
9, 10 & 11	Grab the nearest snow bank mount and ride into the sunset! And don't forget to practice on both sides of your horse!

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