

Tracy Porter Article

WINTER PROJECTS Part Three

By Me, Tracy Porter

Do you find that every spring your horse needs a tuning? Winter is a good time to start! You'll still have to condition the muscles, but the mind will already be running smooth. The past couple of articles have dealt with understanding how to move the hips and shoulders. When we understand how to use these body parts and we take the time to teach the horse a cue to use them not only can we get our horse to stand still to mount, but to do it by an object! We can teach them to shift their weight making it easier to pick up their feet. For those of you with babies, yearlings or 2-year olds these lessons are prerequisites to that all important celebrated day in youngsters life, The gotta break and ride that colt day. You'd be surprised how much easier you will make that day (for you and for them) if you incorporate these exercises into your daily routine. If bonding is all you are interested in go and get a few rolls of duct tape and strap yourself on. If you want to create a relationship based on respect and trust read on.

Again, we are focusing on the winter-weanie few minute lesson. These are lessons that can be established in a relatively short period of time. When incorporated into your daily routine of horse handling, these lessons will dramatically improve your horse's handle-ability. If someone else handles your horse on a daily basis, they may appreciate your efforts, but not want to be responsible for taking the time to reinforce each day. If this is the case you may consider compensating them for their efforts, if that is not an option keep working at it, it will take a little longer, but well worth the time you invest.

Teaching your horse to lower its head is another lesson you can teach in a limited space. This should be the first thing we do before haltering a horse and the last thing we do before unhaltering a horse. We use to fix the hard to bridle horse or leading the excited horse. We compact height people also find it handy to use when clipping our horse. It's also the first step in teaching your horse not to pull back when tied or if he panics, the start toward teaching the demand to calm down cue as well as a cue that can tell your horse exactly where you want him to hold his head in the western pleasure class.

Our short term goal: To teach the horse to drop its head when asked or from pressure on a lead, its halter or our hand. This results in a more manageable horse by improving his haltering, bridling and leading skills. It establishes a pattern of us asking the horse to give and he responds.

Step one: The only thing we are teaching the horse is to drop its ear from pressure. We will want the pressure to be as light as possible, but not more than 2 lbs., maximum at any time. Note that if your horse raises its head, you CANNOT increase the pressure, you're not trying to hold or pull down the head. When the horse begins to lower his head no matter how far up you are from your original starting position, you must reward him for his correct response by releasing the 2 lbs. of pressure. At this point you are only trying to teach your horse to lower his head when he feels pressure on its poll not where you want it.

Step two: The horse now understands that we want him to drop his head. But after we release the pressure he still raises his head up to his original position. We would like him now to drop his head and work this exercise at the next lower

level. Take the slack out so he hits the end of the line just before his head returns to the original highest position. Repeat the previous sequence until the horse's new highest position is now a little bit lower. Continue this process until the horse will lower his head to the ground, with his lips on the floor and leaves them there. Later when you are bridling or haltering this will be the horse's new position. As you practice this, your horse will begin to drop his head without raising it first as you put pressure on the rein or lead. Another change you will notice is that your horse's response to your request will get quicker. It is very important that even though you want this, you do not speed up your request but go slower. When the horse is dropping his head easily on very little pressure on the rein or lead, you can develop a cue that is called the demand to drop your head cue. This cue is handy if you get in a situation where your horse gets excited and you want him to calm down. Doesn't that sound like a handy cue? Well, that means that we need to teach the drop your head cue different ways that will allow us to utilize it from the ground or in the saddle.

We can re-teach and reinforce the lesson with other tools on the ground as well as in the saddle.

- a) Your hand on his mane behind the ears.
- b) Lead rope around his neck.
- c) The lead rope over his ears. When standing on the horse's near side attach the lead to lower ring and run it up the off side and over the ears. You'll hold the rope along side the horse's cheek when you are standing on the near side.
- d) Attach a lead to the bit or use the rein on the side you are standing on. Your hand should be at the angle that it would be if we were in the saddle.

Teach while leading. This works well with all of the above as well as the first way you originally taught the lesson. Very handy to use with horses that walk and holler they will calm down and quit hollering with their nose on the ground.

Teach while riding by simply picking up the rein and watching the ear. By this time, you have the idea of how to teach the cue. You will just be reteaching it from a new position. To make this lesson even more useful be sure to teach your horse to give to the bit first. Then when you ask the horse to drop its head get a give with it! When you have the horse putting his nose down to the ground at a walk, try it at a trot.

Now that you have taught the horse to drop his head in many different ways, the next step is to add pressure and turn it into a demand to calm down cue. But, that is an article all in itself. Until then, you can use it to teach your horse to carry his head in a position without needing a tie down, martingale or draw reins! That certainly will make your horse SMILE!

There are benefits to every good thing we teach our horse. Some have multiple benefits. Once we have the basic idea, we can expand and use it to achieve greater communication in other areas. Those short days and cold nights don't have to be unproductive! Use the time to polish something small, you may not be inclined to do other times of the year.

PICTURES ARTICLE 3

Picture Caption

WITH LEAD in hand

- 1 Slowly take slack out of rein with no more than 2 lbs. of pressure wait.
- 2 If horse raises head, do not add pressure .WAIT.
- 3 Release when horse begins to drop head, repeat sequence until nose is touching the floor.

WITH REIN in hand

4 Take slack out of the rein.

5 Release when horse begins to drop head, repeat sequence until nose is touching the floor later teach from saddle.

WITH LEAD OVER EARS in hand

6 Take slack out of rein as before.

7 Release when horse lowers head RELEASE! You are not pulling his head down!

PRAISE pet and hug

8 Be sure to praise after each release.

9 Can you give your horse a head hug without him struggling? Give him one on each side everyday!

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