

## **Tying Horses, Restraint by Distraction, and Lifting Feet**

Our topics for this week are:

- Proper tying of horses by a lead rope or by cross tying
- Restraint techniques using distractions
- How to lift a horse's front foot and how to lift a rear foot

### **TYING**

#### **Lead Tying**

The risk that a horse may try to pull itself free from being tied must always be anticipated. Horses should only be tied to solid objects that can hold a typical 1200 lb. horse pulling with all its strength and that does not rattle, clang, or make any other noise if pulled on. This excludes gates, fence rails, stall doors, and unhitched trailers as safe objects that a horse can be tied to.

Unbreakable halters and leads should be used. Slippery nylon leads that do not hold a hitch well should not be used. If a horse pulls back and breaks the halter, lead, lead clip, or object it is tied to, it is much more likely to attempt pull-backs again in the future. Horses should not be routinely tied in a manner that incorporates a string to serve as a breakaway since permitting them to breakaway with ease at their discretion encourages future pull-backs. A horse should be trained in a safe manner that they will only gain untied freedom when quiet and released by the handler.

To create a safer environment for horses that may pull back when tied, leads should be tied with a safety hitch to more easily free a horse in trouble, and a handler should always have a knife ready to cut the horse free, if needed, to prevent injury. If a horse pulls back, it is more likely to become injured if tied too low or with too much lead between it and the hitch. A lead hitch should be tied at or just above withers height, about one arm length from the hitch. Tying longer away can allow the horse's neck to get wrapped in the lead rope or the horse to step over the rope. Tying closer can cause many horses to feel claustrophobic and panic. Tied horses should never be left alone or tied closer than 10 feet apart. If tying to a rail, a horse should not be tied so close to the end of the rail that they can move to the other side of the rail. A horse should never be tied to any kind of stall door.

The problem of pulling back usually begins by the horse being scared, pulling back, and escaping because of being tied to an insecure object or a halter or lead clip breaking. Therefore, a horse should not be tied and then introduced something potentially scary to horses. In potentially horse-scary situations, a handler or handler's assistant must hold the lead rope. Handlers should never duck under a tied lead rope. Horse cannot see under their jaw. This can startle even a quiet horse and cause a pull-back or catch the handler in a very dangerous position. Similarly, handlers should always remain in a position that they can move away from a horse quickly. They should never sit or kneel on the ground next to a tied horse. If a horse panics and a quick release is needed, the handler should hold on to lead after the hitch releases so that the horse does not run backwards, fall, and go over on its back injuring its neck or head.

To discourage pull-backs, some trainers use rubber inner tubes from automobiles around

a stout post to tie to with a nonbreakable halter and lead rope. These can injure a young horse's neck from recoil, or the inner tube can break. Holding the end of a long lead rope that slips through a tie ring while a horse pulls back can prevent injury while teaching escape by pulling back does not happen. A Blocker tie ring is a metal ring with a curved metal bar in the middle that allows horses to pull back with varying degrees of resistance so that they gradually learn there is no escape by pulling back, but they do not get hurt in trying. Another, older method of preventing pull-backs involves putting a loop around the horse's chest with the honda knot underneath, the standing end of the rope is run between the front legs and then the halter. The horse is tied with a regular lead rope an arm's length way from the hitching ring. The chest rope is tied a little closer to the hitching ring than the lead rope. If the horse attempts to pull back, pressure on the chest will inhibit most horses from pulling back, whereas feeling the pull on a halter can make them panic.

Horses must never be tied to a hitch ring or rail by their bridle reins. This can easily break the reins or cause the bit to do great harm to the horse's mouth and the incisor teeth. Horses should only be tied with a regular lead rope and halter or a neck loop with a non-slip knot (bowline). Horses should never be tied with a chain shank lead. In addition to injuring the horse, the chain could break and become a lashing weapon. All head restraint riding accessories (tiedowns, martingales) should be disconnected prior to leading or tying horses.

Horses are inquisitive and nimble with their lips. Many will teach themselves how to untie hitches. The end of the lead rope should be dropped through a bight in the hitch to prevent a pull on the end of the lead untying the hitch. A more secure tie is to use a bowline hitch.

### **Cross-Tying**

Cross-tying allows a groom to move 360 degrees around the horse easily. This is advantageous for grooming horses, but cross-ties have several potential disadvantages. Horses have to be trained to tolerate cross-ties, because cross-tying allows little head freedom and horses can feel claustrophobic. If they panic, they are more likely to get free and learn to pull back for freedom or injure their neck or back than if tied more securely by a single lead rope. Furthermore, cross-ties are often not available in a safe location.

Accustoming horses to cross-ties should be done gradually. A horse new to cross-ties should be allowed 1 to 2 feet of slack on each side and close supervision. Gradually the slack is decreased on subsequent tying instances until the slack is only 6 to 8 inches on each side.

Cross-ties are usually 10 ft apart. They should not be more than 11 ft apart to prevent a horse from turning and getting twisted in the tie ropes. Cross-tying should be done where there is a wall close behind the horse so that the horse cannot back up too far. The wall attachments should be 1 to 2 feet higher than the horse's head. The length of the ties should permit the horse to lower its head about 1 foot. Horses that need to lower their head more to clear their airway should not be tied by cross-ties. Cross-tying is often done in barn aisles, but a separate area not used for pass through should be used. If a horse is cross-tied, another horse should never be led underneath a cross-tied to move through an aisle. The tied horse must be disconnected from a side, moved over in the aisle, and the other horse led by with its handler leading on the side that positions the handler between the horses.

Agitated horses restrained by cross-ties can run forward and flip themselves over on their back, or lose their footing and fall with their head hanging from one or both cross-tie leads. If a horse rears, it can get a leg over a cross tie line and cause a fall on its side. Because of this, many

handlers who use cross-ties use string connections tied to the halter so that they will break easily if the horse tries to escape and will not leave a length of rope attached to the halter of a fleeing horse. Other options are using quick release snaps and commercial connectors at the wall end of the tie leads that break easily. This option can result in having broken metal connectors on the ends of cross-tie leads on a loose horse that are dangerous to the horse and handler. Because of its greater versatility and safety, single lead tying is preferable to cross-tying.

### **RESTRAINT BY DISTRACTION**

Distraction techniques work very well in most horses, but they must be applied with constant rhythmic stimulation. Patting the horse once and then holding the hand still instantly loses its effect. Persistent and rhythmic pats of varying intensity will distract a horse for long periods depending on what procedure requires the distraction technique.

#### **Love Pats or Pinches**

These are rhythmic flat hand pats or soft pinches. These work well, if used intermittently and with varying locations, rhythms, and intensity. Light rhythmic taps on a horse's forehead or behind an eye is often enough distraction to have a horse stand still for exams.

#### **Eye Cover and Blindfolds**

Short duration distraction can be achieved by petting the horse on the neck and then sliding the hand back and forth over the head eventually cupping the hand over an eye. The eye should not be reached for directly for this will scare most horses. Blindfolding horses using a small towel can calm many horses. Application also requires an approach-and-retreat sliding method with the blindfold cloth over the horse's neck and head. It can be held in place by tucking the cloth ends under the cheekpieces of the halter.

#### **Front Leg Lift or Hobble**

Holding a horse's front leg up using an assistant or an one-leg hobble can cause most horses to stand still. If an examination or treatment is being performed, the front leg on the same side as the procedure should be lifted. If a second assistant holds the leg, he should pick the foot up with his head toward the horse's rear, but after raising the leg, the handler should rotate his body so that he faces forward with both hands holding the leg up. The rear legs are never lifted up as a means to restrain a horse's movements.

Lifting a left front leg with a left hand while facing the horse's side can permit palpation of the inguinal area with the right hand, reducing the risk of a kick.

### **LIFTING FEET**

#### **Front Foot**

To lift a front foot, the horse should first be standing square, i.e., front and hind legs on each side equidistant, front legs parallel to each other, and hind legs parallel to each other. The handler then stands alongside the horse facing the horse's rump. Placement of the handler's foot should be at least 10 inches to the side of the horse's hoof. Placing the handler's foot too close to the horse or in front of the foot to be picked up increases the risk of being stepped on by the horse. The handler should slide the hand nearest to the horse down the back of the front leg to be picked

up. Many horses accustomed to having their feet picked up will pick their foot up voluntarily at this point. If the foot is not offered by the horse at this stage, then the long hairs on the back of the fetlock are tugged, or the suspensory ligament or the chestnut is squeezed until the foot comes up.

A handler should resist the temptation to push the horse's weight off the leg with the handler's shoulder. This will teach the horse to lean on a handler when holding the foot up or trying to get the foot up. The foot should be held up primarily with a hand on the hoof wall since some horses are uncomfortable with being held at the pastern or coronary band. For the horse to be comfortable and not resist, the leg being held up should be lifted straight up and not pulled to the outside.

Holding the horse's foot up for examination or cleaning can be done with one hand. Only if both hands must be free to use hoof nippers or a rasp does the foot need to be straddled and held by the handler's knees.

If the horse struggles with its foot being held, the handler should maintain hold of the foot until he is done or can place it down. The horse should not think it escaped having its foot held by struggling. If the horse leans on the leg being held up, the handler should drop it suddenly and then pick it back up again. This teaches the horse to stay balanced on three legs when the foot is being held up.

### **Rear Foot**

To begin picking up a rear foot, a handler should be positioned toward the horse with both hands on the horse. A hind foot should not be attempted to be picked up with one hand and the handler facing backward. The latter method puts the handler at risk of being kicked without prior warning or a means of defense.

The handler starts by standing next to horse's flank with his body touching the horse and out of its kick zone. To pick up a left hind leg, the handler should face the right side of the rump with his left arm and hand on top of the horse's rump. The handler then places his right hand on the horse's rump with his thumb up and slides it down the back of the rump, the upper leg, hock, and finally lower leg. The handler's left hand remains on the horse's rump for handler's balance and to monitor for resistance by the horse. If the horse moves toward the handler, it can be pushed away when the handler is in this position. Once the right hand reaches the lower aspect of the hind leg, if the foot is not offered by the horse, the hock can be pinched until the foot comes up or the leg can be pulled up toward the horse's abdomen into a flexed position. While holding the cannon bone up and the leg in flexed position, the handler moves backward and underneath the hock resting the horse's left leg over his left leg and inside his thigh. At the same time the left hand on top of the rump is slid down the rump and inside the leg with the handler's left elbow becoming positioned on the inside surface of the hock. A horse's hind leg should never be straddled in the manner of restraint used for the foreleg.

If the horse struggles when holding a hind leg, it is important to hold onto the leg for safety of the handler and to prevent the horse from learning to escape by struggling. Releasing the leg should be performed when the horse is quiet by reversing the procedure to pick it up. To release the left hind leg, the handler's left hand is slid up toward the horse's rump while the right hand grasps the cannon bone and flexes the leg, and the handler takes a step or two backward toward the horse's belly. The leg is lowered toward the ground with the right hand while the left hand is positioned on the horse's rump.

Now, let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Horses should be tied to strong hitching posts no lower than withers height and at a distance of an arm's length of lead rope from hitch to halter**
- 2. Horses should not be tied in a manner that allows escape, otherwise a horse that succeeds will become trained to try to escape again.**
- 3. Restraint by psychological distraction is preferable to chemical restraint or physical restraint.**
- 4. When lifting a horse's foot, the foot should be held in the manner and with the intention to maintain control of the foot until you decide to release it on your terms.**

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com)

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.