

## **Capture and Release of Horses: Part II**

Our topics for this week are::

- **Capturing horses in stalls**
- **Removing a horse from a herd of horses**
- **Releasing horses safely**

### **Inside Stalls**

The horse's attitude inside a stall should first be assessed. If the horse has its rump directed toward the stall door, the handler should not enter until he can get the horse to turn around. A handler can cluck, tap on walls escalating to loud banging on a wall until the horse faces the handler and then the stimulus to face the handler should stop instantly. This may need to be repeated several time to reposition the horse in the stall.

Most horse stalls only have one exit, the stall door. Therefore, the stall door must always be unlatched when inside a stall and a horse should never be allowed to get between the handler and the stall door. A lead should be attached to the halter. The handler's presence should be announced in a soothing voice.

After the horse is facing the handler, the handler diagonally approaches the left shoulder, puts the lead rope around the horse's neck, and places the halter using the bear hug technique. All handlers should use good manners in a stable by avoiding loud noises or sudden quiet appearances that could startle a horse in a stall with another person

Doors should be sliding or alternatively open to outside of the stall. When leading into or out of stalls, the stall door should be fully open. Sliding latches or other protruding hardware should be fully retracted to prevent poking or scraping the handler or the horse.

### **Pastures, Pens, Corrals**

Horses should be taught to respond to a whistle or call to come to a stall or pen for grain. The same whistle or call should be used every time grain will be provided to them. A small catch pen adjacent to pastures where horses can be fed, caught, and individually released can improve safe handling of young or otherwise poorly trained groups of horses.

If a horse that needs to be caught has not been taught to come for feeding and is difficult to capture, it should be gathered with herdmates in a pen. The most willing horse to be caught should be captured first and tied outside the pen in a nearby location. The next most willing horse is caught, taken out, and tied, and so, on until all other horses are tied up outside or the one desired is willing to be caught beforehand.

If the last one that is not captured and tied is the one that is desired to be caught, the handler should walk at normal speed with quiet determination directly toward horse's shoulder. There should not be any efforts to hide the halter. As the horse moves away, the handler needs to apply pressure by keep walking toward him. Eventually the horse will stop and look toward the handler. At that instance, the handler must stop and turn away. After a 10-second rest, if the horse continues to stand still, the handler can walk a little slower in a zig-zag pattern toward the horse without looking directly at it. The handler should continue until he is close enough to rub the horse's forehead and approach its neck to put a lead rope around it. If the horse walks away at any point in the process, pressure should be applied by walking toward him and repeating the release of pressure at appropriate times until he permits capture.

After capturing the horse and haltering it, the horse should remain where he was caught and haltered while being briefly groomed, scratched on its withers, and rubbed on its forehead and throat. The handler should then put the lead rope back around the horse's neck to control its movements, take the halter off, and then take rope off its neck, and walk away before the horse moves. Capture should not be associated only with work or medically treating a horse or it will develop an aversion to being caught. This catch and release should be repeated daily as often as necessary.

Handlers should not work with a horse when other free horses can mill around the handler and the captured horse. If catching or returning a horse in a pasture or pen with other horses is unavoidable, the other horses may try to play or harass the caught horse or the horse to be released may attempt to escape and join the herd too soon. A second handler can provide interference, but if the handler is alone handling a horse grouped with other free horses, he should have a short whip or stick with a flag to control potential troublemakers.

## **Trapping Horses**

Capturing horses by driving them into traps can be time efficient. However, trapping untamed horses forces them to stay still while handlers invade their flight zone. This is counterproductive to the basic training of horses. To learn to be calm around handlers, horses need to be able to move their feet and have some initial control of how far the handler is allowed to invade their flight zone until they learn the handler is a benevolent leader. That is the reason for round pen training.

### **Releasing Horses**

How a captured horse is released affects how successful the next capture of it will be. Release should be done only after the horse is calm and relaxed. The lead rope should be placed around the horse's neck for control during and after removing the halter. Control of the horse is maintained only with the lead rope around the neck while briefly petting it for standing still while talking to it in a soothing voice. The lead rope should be removed smoothly and the handler must walk away before the horse can walk away from the handler.

After releasing a horse, the handler should always move away from the horse; the horse should not move away or be sent away from the handler.

When releasing a horse into a paddock or pasture, it can get very playful just after release and may try to pull the handler or may kick up as it leaves the handler. They should be released when the handler has an immediate exit and in a manner that they have to change directions to go join their herd mates. If a catch pen is adjacent to the pasture, the horse should be released in the pen and then given access to the pasture.

If a catch pen is not available, the horse should be led through the gate and into the pasture and turned back toward the gate. The handler needs to be positioned so that he may exit the gate as soon as he releases the horse and moves away. A handler should never attempt to release a horse by reaching over or through a gate or fence.

New horses should be introduced to established herd members in different pastures separated by an alleyway. At other times, they should also be stalled next to each other with a barred grill between stalls. After the excitement of the new horse and the herd seeing, hearing, and smelling each other wears off, the new horse can be pastured or penned with the most submissive herd members. After acceptance by a portion of the herd, all horses can be kept together. However, dominant herd members may still bully the new horse. Introducing them all to fresh pasture at the same time as introducing a new horse will ease the acceptance of the new member.

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If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

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

- 1. Handlers working with horses inside stalls should always keep the stall door open and stay between the horse and stall door.**
- 2. When catching a horse that is a herd, dominant horses should be separated and removed first.**
- 3. Never allow a released horse to move away from you before you move away from it.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 250 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

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.