

Lead Tying of Horses

Our topics for this week include:

- **Quick release hitches**
- **Unacceptable tying of horses**
- **Escape artist horses**
- **Cross 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.

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. Slippery nylon leads that do not hold a hitch well should not be used. Horses should not be routinely tied in a manner that incorporates a string to serve as a breakaway since permitting them to breakaway at their discretion encourages future pull-backs.

Quick Release Hitch and Knife

To create a safer environment for horses that may pull back when tied, leads should be tied with a quick release 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 further away than one arm's length 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.

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 to something potentially scary to horses. In situations potentially scary to horses, a handler or handler's assistant must hold the lead rope.

Handlers should never duck under a tied lead rope. Horses cannot see under their jaws. This can startle even a quiet horse and cause a pull-back or catch the handler in a very dangerous position.

Handlers should always remain in a position that they can move away from a horse quickly. They should never sit or kneel with both knees on the ground next to a tied horse.

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.

An older method of preventing pull-backs involves putting a loop around the horse's chest with the honda 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 away from the hitching ring, while 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 their head by a halter can make them panic.

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. This method is not recommended.

Unacceptable Tying

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, like a 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.

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.

Escape Artist ("Houdini") Horses

Horses are inquisitive and have nimble lips, and many will teach themselves to untie hitches. The end of the lead rope should be dropped through a bight in the quick release 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 have 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 for cross-tying. If a horse is cross-tied, another horse should never be led underneath one arm of the cross-tie 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 they are tied without breakaways. If a horse rears, it can get a leg over a cross tie line and cause a fall on its side.

Because of potential injuries with cross ties, many handlers 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.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

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

- 1. Knowing how to properly tie a quick release hitch in a lead rope is among the most basic skills of a horse handler.**
- 2. Horses should be tied to a hitch an arm's length away and at a height at or above their withers.**
- 3. Cross-tying of horses is helpful in grooming horses but it more prone to escape or injury than single lead tying.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my recent 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 . This website has more than 150 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.