

Stocks for Horse Restraint

Our topics for this week are

- **The type of restraint provided by horse stocks**
- **The surroundings needed for proper use of horse stocks**
- **Physical restraint alternatives to stocks**

Most handling and restraint of horses can be and should be done WITHOUT tranquilization, sedation, hypnosis, or anesthesia. However, some handling and restraint procedures should be restricted to veterinary medical professionals due to the potential danger to the animal or handler. These require special skills, equipment, or facilities, and possibly adjunct chemical restraint or complete immobilization by chemical restraint. One of these methods of restraint is horse stocks.

Horse stocks are not the rigid restraint of the head and limbs that human stocks were in the Middle Ages. They are standing stalls for examination and treatment of horses. It is important that the stocks fit the size horses to be restrained. The dimensions for average horses are 36 inches wide, 84 inches high, and 88 inches long. There is a gate at each end. Horses are led into the stocks from the back gate and when done, they are led forward out the front gate.

Stocks must be very strong with smooth, rounded interior surfaces. Stainless steel or heavy-duty galvanized steel is best. Most are intended for being permanently anchored into a concrete floor. Some have wheels for portable use. In either case, the stock should be fixated to be able to withstand the escape efforts of a panicked full grown horse.

Stocks should be located in an area large enough for safety and ease of movement. It should have a water impermeable, level floor with drainage. It should provide good footing and be the same color and texture throughout the area. The area should not be in a trafficked pathway, but it should be well-lit.

Stocks are the safest method of physically restraining horses. Forward, backward, and side to side movement are restricted while in stocks, but the safety of horse stocks should not be overestimated. Horses can rear and strike over the front gate and they can kick over the back gate, if not further restrained. Some horses may need restraint ropes over their back to prevent rearing or high kicks over the back gate.

Separating and restraining mares with nursing foals can be a volatile situation. If the mare must be restrained in stocks, the stock should have a small pen attached to the front of the stocks, so the mare and foal can be face to face until the mare can rejoin the foal.

Introducing a Horse to Stocks

To move a horse into a stock, the horse is led into the stock with both gates open, as if the horse would be going through it. After the handler walks through and passes the front gate, in a calm and quiet manner without ever looking back at the horse the front gate is closed first and then an assistant closes the hind gate. After the hind gate is fastened, the horse's lead rope can be tied. A horse should not be driven into a stock from behind with a front gate closed, or with the handler attempting to lead the horse from the side of the stock.

A halter and lead rope should always be left on the horse. A handler must never approach a horse in a stock while in its blind spot (directly behind it) and startle the horse. A handler or assistant should remain with the horse at all times it is in stocks.

Alternatives to Stocks

If stocks are not available, a horse can be backed into a flat walled, strongly built corner with a ceiling that is high enough that it will not hit its head if it rears. The corners of most box stalls are sufficient. Having the horse's rump in the corner prevents backing and attempted avoidance with right or left movement of its rump. The handler should face the horse standing at 45 degrees to a shoulder to psychologically inhibit forward movement and re-enforce with his voice, halter and lead, and distraction techniques. If a procedure must be done on or near the horse's rump, such as rectal palpation, makeshift stocks can be made of hay or straw bales for protection of the 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. Horse stocks limit movement but can permit sufficient room for motivated athletic horses to injure themselves and their handlers.**
- 2. Horses should be led into stocks with a confident handler who focuses ahead, not on the horse.**
- 3. The corner of a solid walled box stall can be used as an alternative to using a stocks to restrain some horses.**

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 . This website has more than 350 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.