

Ponying Horses: Leading a Horse While Riding Another Horse

Our topics for this week are:

- **Definition of ponying**
- **Benefits of ponying a horse**
- **Techniques to avoid risks of ponying horses**

Ponying a horse is the practice of leading a horse while riding another. Despite the name, ponying is not used to lead ponies. Horseback riders “pony” horses.

Ponying can be a great teaching aid for young and other poorly trained horses, a means of providing exercise to two horses at the same time, a way to condition injured horses that cannot be ridden. Ponying positions the rider above the ponyed horse’s head height, aiding a young horses in becoming desensitized to the height of a future rider.

In addition to training young horses, ponying horses is common at U.S. race tracks, during conditioning of polo ponies, and as a means of leading pack horses.

Essentials

Ponying can be hazardous. For safety reasons, you should have certain essentials. The most important is having an older, calm saddle horse that neck reins well and responses well to leg clues to position its body. It should be the same size or preferably, larger than the horse to be ponyed. Geldings are preferred for their typical disposition and should only be used to pony stallions. A saddle horse that likes to walk fast will assist in keeping the ponyed horse well positioned. A Western horned, double-rigged saddle should be used on the saddle horse and a 12 to 14 ft lead rope and a rope halter is needed for the horse to be ponyed. Ponying is much safer with a western saddle than an English saddle and impossible with a saddle horse that does not easily neck rein.

A training pen or corral with good footing should be used for first attempts at ponying a horse.

Procedure for Right Hand Dominant Riders

The horse to be ponyed should be positioned on the right side of the saddle horse, facing the saddle horse’s right shoulder. The rider mounts with the lead rope in their right hand. This keeps the lead rope out of the way during mounting. All rein work should be done with the non-dominant hand, usually the left hand. The lead rope should be gathered by folding excess length

and held, not coiled and putting your hand inside the coil. Generally the lead rope is held. In some instances, a single wrap around the horn (a dally) may be necessary. However, the lead rope should never be tied to the horn. If a dally is needed, remember to hold your thumb up out of the way. Ropes wrapped on saddle horns can cut off thumbs.

Once mounted the leading should begin right away to keep the ponyed horse attention. First, move forward to get the ponyed horse moving in the same direction as the saddle horse. At first, all changes in direction should be to the right. The head of the horse being led should be kept near your right knee, between the saddle horse's right hip and your right knee.

Frequent, brief stops to rub and talk to the ponyed horse and slowly change its position with the aid of the saddle horse will speed its acceptance of being ponyed. Gradual desensitization to rubbing its head, ears, neck, and back should be done. Leaning slightly over its back when rubbing it will simulate the position of a rider. It should eventually become tolerant of having to move its shoulders right or left and its hips to the right and responsive to backing up a couple of steps when asked with the lead rope and pushed by the saddle horse. At this point, forward movement at a trot can be tried. If the ponyed horse is out of position when forward movement is to begin again, turn the saddle horse a little to the left to straighten the ponyed horse out for forward movement again on the right side.

Once the ponyed horse is leading well, will stop when asked, can be repositioned by the saddle horse's movements, and is adequately controlled at a trot, left turns can be tried. The arc of a left turn should be wide at first. As the turn is begun, the rider should slow the saddle horse since the ponyed horse must travel faster than the saddle horse when making a left turn. This may be easier at a trot. Left circles or sharp left turns can be used to slow down ponyed horses that attempt to get ahead of the position of your right knee. Consistent repeating left turns and circles will eventually discourage ponyed horses from trying to charge ahead.

Like all good training tools, ponying can be overdone. Keep first sessions short and interesting for the ponyed horse, and quit when things are going well.

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. A good saddle horse is essential to pony another horse.**
- 2. Never tie a ponyed horse to your saddle.**
- 3. Teach left turns to a ponyed horse after it can accomplish forward movement, right turns, stops, and trotting well.**

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 325 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.