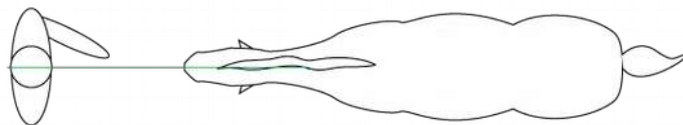


Exercises: Groundwork – Backing Up

Backing a horse up is the second fundamental to build a strong and mutual respect. You do not run over your horse and it should not run over you: especially because it weights more than four times your weight!
This exercise is designed to teach horses the notion of our personal space.

Position

Stand right in front of the horse, about one meter far from its head. Always keep that distance between you and the horse as you do not want to be surprised by it jumping toward you. Hold the rope in your right hand if you are right-handed and vice-versa.



Security

Keep the horse straight all the time. As it backs up, it might try to turn right or left to avoid your pressure: timing is important as you should bring its head back right in front of you. On the other hand, some horses will try to avoid pressure by running over you. In that case, keep the flag in your other hand to block the way by waving it in front of the horse. If this occurs often, you should work the lungeing exercise first.

Education principles:

- 1) horses learn when you release pressure.
- 2) timing is essential to good horsemanship, recognize the signs of relaxation to make sure you release right on time: blinking eye, lowering the head and neck, chewing mouth, cocking a hind leg.

Process

Raise your hand at the level of the horse's eyes, that will catch his attention and you are sure it is focused on your cue. Wiggle lightly the rope and wait for your horse to shift its weight back, then stop and rub it as a reward. Repeat the process and keep wiggling until the horse moves one leg back, whatever the leg, just one step back, release pressure and rub. You will ask a little more every time you reach a new level: a couple of steps back, a couple of meters, etc.

What if my horse does not respond when I bump the rope?

There are two possibilities, either your bumping is too light and does not disturb your horse enough, then adapt your gesture to be firm enough to get a response; or, the horse is very dominant and disrespectful, then you could use the Australian method as a second deal: take your flag in the other hand, go through the normal process first, then if you have no response wave the flag under the horse's chin, finally tap its breast until it moves back.

What if my horse starts to move from one side to the other?

Your horse explores the different possibilities as it does not know naturally what you ask for. That is the reason why you should be particular with your position and timing: stay right in front of your horse and make sure you keep its head straight in line, every time you feel it tries to go left or right rearrange your position and pull the head in front of you. Pretty soon, your horse will understand that the only direction that offers peace is in its back, then it will start to back up and that is when you should release pressure, rub it and let it soak the information.

What if my horse gets spooky every time I raise the hand?

It does not trust you and needs to feel comfortable around you before being able to understand this cue. You should desensitize it more around the head. Wave your hand quickly in front of your horse and stop this as soon as it stands still and shows a relaxation sign.



Q&A

What if my horse does not move at all or shows disrespect?

Make sure you leave enough time to your horse to understand what you ask. Yet, if you have no response after ten to fifteen seconds, then you ought to offer the second deal, that is to bump on the lead rope. That move should not be hard or aggressive, but clearly firm enough to obtain a response (shifting the weight back, raising a foot, moving one step back, etc.).

Next time, you start with the gentle first deal, wait for ten to fifteen seconds, and use the second deal only if you did not have any response at all. Pretty soon, you will not need to use the second deal at all.

Tip: Horses need some time to process the information and exercises.

During the working session, always keep in mind that you ought to let your horse a few seconds to soak the information, as soon as it gets your cue, let it think! Once you feel your horse got it, stop working, leave it for the rest of the day and you will see the difference the day after.