

## Exercises: Groundwork – Fence

The fence exercise consists in teaching your horse to pick you up from a fence or from a mounting stool for instance. Interest is obvious for those who mount high horses, as for those who start problem horses that would be difficult to mount from the ground.

This is actually useful for all horses as it will help to build confidence and partnership between horses and riders.

### Position

The best position for this exercise is to climb up a fence in a round-pen. With more advanced horses, you can start from a stool that you will place in a corner of the arena, so you will not need another person to put it away after you mounted. Sit securely on the fence, legs apart over it. Your horse should stand still in front of you, head toward the fence of course.

### Security

Being on the fence is quite a safe place as if the colt gets spooky, it can not kick you. In this exercise, we do not want to use the flag anymore.

### Process

Since you have practiced the sending exercise, you can point the right direction to your horse and make it yield its hindquarters, which will bring it almost parallel to the fence. That is when feel, patience and timing all become quite important: bump the rope lightly until your horse steps forward, getting closer to you and to the fence, then release and pet it.

Step by step, your horse will position itself in order to pick you up from the fence. Once it moved to the right place, along the fence, saddle right in front of you, leave your horse a couple of minutes to rest, rub it and spend some peaceful time with it.

Eventually, you can desensitize it with the rope from that point of view, throwing the leading rope over its back and neck, etc. Finally, it is time to place your leg across the saddle and mount your horse.



*Tip: Tom Dorrance mentions a pretty useful tip in his book True Unity: a good method to accomplish an exercise is to give it up!*

*Take your horse's mind away from what you want to teach it, enjoy some time together practicing something fun or easy for your horse. Ten to fifteen minutes later, start again the initial exercise you were working on, your horse will get it a lot quicker.*

*Tip: If starting a colt or a problem horse, remember to keep your left rein short and to be ready to flex its head.*

*If it is the very first ride, it might be a little upset and get jumpy, so you want to keep control of the hindquarters.*

### Q&A

*What if my horse does not move along the fence?*

The sending exercise is an important step to this exercise, as it builds this feel between the horse and the horseman or horsewoman. Yet, sometimes, this new way of seeing the rider from below can disturb some horses. The best tool to help your horse get over it is patience. You might bump gently on the rope until you get your horse shift its weight toward the desired direction. Next, you keep bumping until you obtain a step, then a couple of steps, eventually you keep bumping gently until your horse comes along the fence.