

Exercises: Groundwork – Refined Backing Up

This exercise is the refined level of backing a horse up from the ground. This will help to build the feeling, lightness and softness that will be necessary later on the saddle.

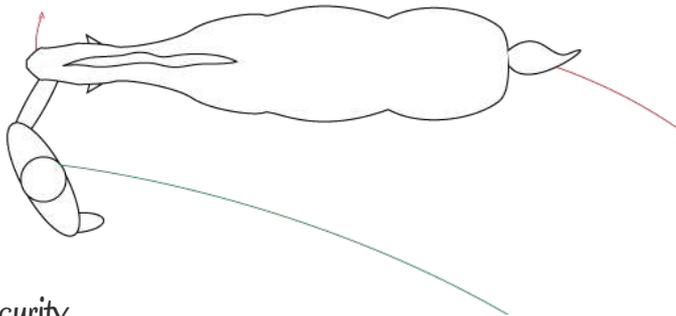
The goal is to teach the horse to back up gently, to be very light and to move smoothly backward on a curve.



Position

Taking into account that all the fundamental exercises have been practiced with your horse, you can now get closer without any risk. Place yourself at the left of the horse's head, looking toward its hindend.

Grab the slobber strap, or the fiador knot if you work with the halter, or the rein a couple of centimeters from the bit. You should hold this with your thumb pointing down.



Security

As mentioned hereabove, the previous work has been done to reduce all the risks. Your horse should now be a lot more respectful. Anyway, just make sure your elbow is positioned higher than your horse's muzzle. If it decides to suddenly turn its head toward you, you can protect yourself with your forearm. Moreover, that will teach your horse to remain straight when you are close by.

Process

Tip gently your horse's head to the outside. Then, jiggle gently the slobber strap or the rein. At the beginning, you may obtain no response from the horse, so you should offer the second-deal: shake the slobber strap or the rein firmly (not hard) from one side to the other, tapping the horse's cheek with the said piece of leather. Keep shaking until the horse shifts its weight on its hindquarters: release at once and rub it.

Repeat the process until the horse backs up, just one step. Then, wait until it backs up two steps. My advice, once you reached this point, is to end this exercise for the day and let your horse soak it up over the night.

Next time, you will probably not need to shake the strap or the rein, simply jiggle it. Yet, keep in mind that you should leave some time to your horse to proceed with the cue: jiggle for about ten seconds before you start shaking the strap or the rein.

Pretty soon, your horse will start to back up as soon as you jiggle lightly the rein. That is the moment when you can add the last piece of exercise: tipping the head outside, you can bend your horse to your right and make it follow the path of a circle.



Q&A

What if my horse does not move at all?

You probably have not worked the Fundamental Back Up enough then. Go back to this exercise before you resume this more sensitive way of backing a horse up. You should proceed through a feel, do not force the cue into your horse, let it understand it, soak it up. Moreover, be careful to your timing: as soon as your horse starts to back up, stop shaking the rein or jiggling it. Otherwise, you will teach your horse to become dull to such cues.

What if my horse gets spooky?

One more time, when you have reached this level of groundwork, spooky behavior should belong to the past. Such reactions mean that you have not desensitized your horse enough. Some horses need A LOT of desensitizing.