



Halter Breaking Your Horse

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Last month I wrote about getting a 2 year old ready to ride and listed some drills you and your horse can work on to make the riding process a little easier when the time comes. This month, I'd like to continue that discussion and talk about the "halter breaking" portion in greater detail.

Getting your horse halter broke can and probably should be the very first type of training you do with your horse. In reality, it can start the first week or so they are on the ground. However, you don't want to leave the halter on the baby all the time due to safety concerns. With a halter on, your foal (or grown horse for that matter) takes the risk of getting caught on objects in the pasture or paddock. If it were to get caught on something, much damage can be done in a hurry, causing serious injury or death.

First and foremost, most halter breaking sessions for young or older horses does not need to last for more than 10 to 15 minutes at a time. Here are some other considerations:

- The longer you work with them, the greater stress levels can tend to be. Shorter amounts of time achieved on a consistent basis has proven to be easier on the horse both mentally and physically.
- Like most training activities, they are best done in an area that is comfortable for the horse. If you are halter breaking a foal that hasn't been weaned, the best location is most often a stall. You can lead the mare in the stall and allow her to eat while you work with the foal. This area should be comfortable for both foal and mare.
- If the horse you are wanting to halter break is older and/or won't allow you to just walk up to them and touch them, take your time by making contact with them in small intervals. It is also best to not rope them. The younger the horse, the easier it will be to gain their trust. If possible, start making contact with your foal as soon as possible. If you wait till they are weaned, your own safety becomes a greater concern as the horse gets older. I have attempted to halter break horses that were 4 and 5 years old. It's a very stressful process for all involved.
 - You can feed them in a small area and work to gain their trust. Avoid sudden movements and be ready to take your time.
- Initially begin by rubbing on their head and neck. If you cannot successfully rub their poll and ears, getting a halter on them will be very tough. Halter breaking is much like riding; there isn't much need to progress to the next step, until you have mastered the previous or current step. Take your time, there will always be "next time." After you can successfully rub their ears and poll for several minutes for a few days in a row, use the lead rope next. Complete the same tasks, only this time use the rope instead of your rope. Finally, use the halter to make contact. If your horse

stands quietly and patiently, proceed to putting the halter on their head. The first few times you put the halter on, don't worry about leading them. Put it on and take it off several times. This part should be mastered before attempting anything more advanced. If you hurry the process in an effort to lead them, stress may ensue and they could possibly try to avoid you when they see you and the halter coming towards them in the future.

- By this point, hopefully you can put the halter on them and take it off of them comfortably. You should now begin to think about leading. Start by simply flexing your horse to each side. The moment they flex and give their head to the pressure, you should release. Repeat this process several times. If your horse moves while flexing, that is certainly ok. Allow them to move freely during this process without pulling on the lead rope too much.
- After a few sessions of flexing and comfortably putting the halter on and taking it off, you should begin to ask for some type of motion with their legs. If there is any type of resistance from the horse or pulling back at this point, take a few steps back in the process and create more trust. If there is no resistance and your horse is listening, feel free to advance to asking for motion from your horse.
 - You are simply taking the flexing part of the previous exercise and asking for more movement when you pull to the side. This teaches the horse to move when there's some type of pressure. You are essentially asking the horse to step to the side and walk in a small circle. Any small step is good and should be rewarded. The first few times you ask for a step, be sure to emphasize the reward. It is best to not stand in front of the horse and pull. This teaches them to brace against the halter and lead rope rather than give to pressure. This can also create tension between you and the horse, and can take away the trust you have hopefully gained at this point. The end goal of teaching a horse to lead in this manner is be able to walk your horse in a circle with ease and slowly make that circle bigger and bigger over time to the point that you are eventually walking in a straight line. Don't forget to do both sides of the horse in this manner.