

It's important to be sure your horse stays out of your space when you stop. If he doesn't stop when you do, back him away immediately after you halt.



# Manners Matter

Use these tips to make your horse a quiet, respectful partner, in and out of the saddle..

By *Abby Mixon*, With *Kaycie Timm*; Photos by *Kaycie Timm*

Everyone loves the thrill of a good stop or a fast circle, but it's important to teach your horse some basic skills before you ride. While it's tempting to focus all your time on riding, building a foundation of manners on the ground will pay off in the long run. Here, I'll share my advice for making your horse a respectful partner in-hand, which will in turn improve his attitude under saddle by showing him you're in charge before you mount up. →



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### Build a Bubble

The most important thing for developing good manners is creating a bubble. This means teaching your horse that there's a boundary between your space and his that he shouldn't cross. I want my horse to be quiet, confident, and happy, but also respect my space. He shouldn't be scared of me, just respectful of my bubble and in tune with my cues. My horse should be willing to come with me, both in-hand or under saddle, but I don't want him to run over me, push me around, or



Every time your horse crosses the boundary you set, push him out of your bubble.

hit me with his head. That's why it's important to define your boundaries early on and maintain those same boundaries every time you're around your horse.

As soon as your horse crosses that boundary, back him out of your bubble. You can use a lead rope to encourage him to back off, or just push him away with your hand (see photo above). Focus on keeping that space especially when you stop. If your horse doesn't stop with you, immediately turn to face him and push him off. That way, when you stop moving, your horse will automatically give you a little room.

### Consistency Is Key

From Day One with a new horse in my program, I focus on creating space and asking him to give me room every single time. Once you

establish those boundaries, be very consistent. You can't let your horse rub his head all over you one day, then punish him for it the next. If it's okay to be pushy one day, but it's wrong the next, your horse won't know how to act and your boundaries won't mean anything.

It's also important that anyone else who might be handling your horse—in my case, assistants and other staff around the barn—enforces the same space rules. Otherwise, your horse won't learn to respect those boundaries all the time.

Staying consistent on the ground will help that respect carry over when your horse is under saddle, too. When your horse knows he's not allowed to push you around in-hand, he's less likely to be pushy while you're riding. If you teach him





If your horse doesn't respond to your cues, use a rope on his hindquarters to increase the pressure and prevent a fight.



Reward your horse by releasing the pressure when he loads or unloads easily.



These hobbles are made of paracord for an ideal mix of flexibility and durability.



Work your hand slowly down you horse's leg, then ease the hobbles around one leg at a time.



Ensure that the hobbles are secure but not overly tight around your horse's legs.

to move off pressure on the ground, your horse is more inclined to move off your leg or hand when you're in the saddle.

### Stop, Load, and Roll

Loading on the trailer is another area where instilling good manners is helpful. Before you try to load your horse, make sure he's leading respectfully, then take your time and be patient as you approach the trailer. It doesn't have to be a timed event—just take one step at a time and expect some give and take. As long as my horse is thinking about coming forward, I don't mind standing and encouraging them. Put a little pressure on the lead, use your voice, and release the pressure as soon as your horse steps forward. That way, he'll understand that the trailer is where he'll find a release from pressure.

If patience and verbal encouragement doesn't work, run a rope loosely over your horse's rear end (see the second photo above), and use it in addition to the lead to ask him to move forward. If he stalls or

stops, pull the rope so it puts pressure on his butt. As soon as he moves forward in the direction you want, let go of the pressure, then ask again. Keep asking for baby steps until he gets all the way into the trailer.

Remember not to rush your horse, but consistently ask him to be respectful. Just like with leading and ground manners, he needs to maintain a bubble and respect your space while loading and unloading. As long as he's making an effort and following you toward the trailer, don't put a ton of pressure on your horse, especially if he's young or not used to being hauled. Allow him to stop, look at and smell the trailer, but then ask him to step up in there. If he resists, use that rope to encourage him to get in the trailer.

### Train to Tie

Standing tied is a fundamental skill for all my horses. Tying out on a pole, in crossties, or in his stall not only comes in handy when you're out showing, it also helps teach your horse patience.

In my training program, I either tie my horses in a stall or outside after each ride. Even if it's only for an hour or so while they dry from being rinsed off, tying keeps them from expecting to go back to the stall right after working. Standing tied also gives the horse time to look around, think, and be patient for a while. This practice will pay off when you're in a situation that requires your horse to stand tied to a fence or the trailer. If he's used to standing after every ride, a few hours tied won't cause problems later on.

### Helpful Hobbles

I also use hobbles throughout my training program. They can help with a variety of things, because they teach your horse to stand still and become more patient. Using this technique takes away the "leave factor" and the impatient tendency when you ask your horse to stand tied.

The key is to train your horse to accept hobbles in a safe space, such as a stall or an arena, where he's not in danger of crashing into something if he gets nervous. Choose an area

where you can easily get out of the way while he figures out how to stand calmly.

Most importantly, take your time. Run your hand down your horse's leg and put the hobbles on one foot, then the other. Once the hobbles are secure, back away and let your horse feel the new restriction. You might need to ask him to take a step to the side, so he realizes the hobbles are there. Most horses will resist the pressure for a little bit, but even young horses get used to it quickly. If you're unsure or haven't used

hobbles in the past, ask a trusted professional or horse-savvy friend to be on-hand to help.

Once my horses are used to hobbles, I use them to teach colts to stand still while being saddled or when I need an antsy horse to stand tied. Down the road, having your horse hobble-trained is useful to stop habitual pawing or kicking on the trailer and to encourage him to stand calmly when tied in an unfamiliar environment. For example, when you go ride at a someone else's place, you might need

to leave your horse tied to a fence in the arena. If he starts pawing, you can put hobbles on him. The same concept applies if he's tied to your trailer. Using a set of hobbles keeps your horse from being destructive, which keeps everybody safe. ♦



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## HANDLING BAD HABITS

If you purchase a horse that's been handled previously, he may have developed some disrespectful habits before you get your hands on him. Although it can be time consuming to break those tendencies, the good news is that the same tactics I discussed here apply to this situation. When you're correcting a horse that has bad habits, the most important thing is to be patient. Just like with a young horse, developing a bubble, consistently enforcing your boundaries, and asking him to stand tied will show your horse you expect him to be respectful.