



TRAILER LOADING

How to teach your horse to load himself on to the trailer, wait quietly while you fasten the ramp and unload slowly and carefully – every time!

WHAT YOU NEED

Snaffle bridle (if the horse is wearing a bridle)

Dressage whip

Long lead rein

Safe trailer

PREREQUISITES FOR THE HORSE

The horse should know the cue to go forward when tapped on the hip with the dressage whip and to back up one step at a time with gentle pressure on the bit or head collar. If the horse is not yet in a bridle then teach

the lesson in a halter.

SPOT – front feet

DIRECTION – forward and backwards

MOTIVATOR – pressure = tapping dressage whip on the hip

REWARD – stop tapping and allow the horse to rest and praise

STEP 1

Have your horse in a snaffle bridle with the reins either removed or twisted through the throat lash. Your float/trailer should be positioned in a safe, flat area. Move the centre divider in the trailer all the way across to the left to make the entrance larger. Attach the lead rope to the left hand side of the snaffle bit. Hold the lead rope in your left hand less than 10cms from the bit and place the extra rope over the horse's back or in your right hand with the dressage whip.

STEP 2

Walk the horse towards the trailer from a distance of at least 10 metres. As soon as you feel the horse stop or think of stopping begin the lesson. You may now be at the trailer or you may be 8 metres away, for example.

STEP 3

If you are still not near the trailer, simply point the dressage whip at the horse's hind quarters and ask him to walk forward. Remember to keep his nose pointed towards the centre of the trailer, holding the lead rope close to the bit.

As soon as the horse moves forwards, or thinks about forward movement stop tapping (or simply point the whip towards the ground) and praise the horse.

Continue like this until you reach the trailer ramp.

STEP 4

You now want the horse to put one foot on the ramp. Ask him forward by tapping lightly on his hip with the whip. As above, reward the horse by taking the whip away when he steps forward or thinks about stepping forward.

STEP 5

If your horse is rearing at this stage then a number of things are going wrong. 1) The horse's emotional level is far too high – try taking the horse back to step 2 and ask quietly for forward movement then ask him to back up a step. 2) Your hand is too far away from the bit and the horse is getting his head away from you – move your hand closer to the bit and allow the horse to stand for a moment with his nose pointed in to the trailer.

STEP 6

When you are at the ramp the aim is to get your horse to put one foot on the trailer, stand and be praised and then take the foot off when you ask him to back up and put a little pressure on the bridle.

The horse may put two feet on at this stage and that is fine – two feet on and then two feet off.

If the horse is moving his hind quarters around a lot try not to worry or get impatient. Remember Nugget (second horse) on the DVD; she took longer but settled well in the end. It may be that your horse is rather highly strung like Nugget so you need to make sure that you keep quiet and don't be tempted to put him under too much pressure.

STEP 7

When you are getting 2 feet on and 2 feet off quietly, start asking the horse to move further into the trailer.

Step 7 takes a little time. The horse will move the front feet further into the trailer but will remain reluctant to put the back feet on the ramp. Don't worry – the horse will not split himself in two and soon he will put a third foot on the ramp.

STEP 8

Work getting 3 feet on the trailer, let the horse rest and pat him, then ask him off again. When he gets off he should walk back slowly and end with his feet just in front of the ramp.

The horse may still not be going on and off completely straight but he will work this out himself.

STEP 9

The same as step 8 but now you want to get all 4 feet on and off the trailer.

STEP 10

Move the centre divider just enough so that you have space to walk into the trailer on the other side. As the horse is now putting all 4 feet on the trailer he will be moving further into it. Move into the trailer a little with the horse – just enough to guide his nose up and over the front bar. This is important because if the horse has his head low, perhaps looking for food, he may raise it and hit his head on the bar at the front.

Remember: *No food in the trailer.*

STEP 11

Start asking the horse to move further into the trailer. As he rests in the trailer pat the horse along his back and over his rump. The horse should be calm and standing quietly until he is asked to go off. If he is not, go back to step 8 and give the horse more time.

Note: It is best to complete this lesson in one session. If you need to rest the horse, as I did with Red when it started to rain, it is best if you can tie him up somewhere safe. You want to keep his mind on the job so try not to put him somewhere he could be distracted by food or other horses.

STEP 12

By now the horse should be moving all the way into the trailer and standing quietly. Make sure you move around and make a bit of noise while patting the horse on the rump. If you stand still the entire time the horse is in the trailer and then ask him off the horse will begin to anticipate this and start to move off as soon as you move rather than wait until he is asked.

STEP 13

Increase the length of time that you allow the horse to stand on the trailer and begin to walk around to the door and pat the horse from there. This is also the time to start unloading the horse from the

front of the trailer. Take the lead rope and ask the horse to back off slowly while you are in front of him.

Remember: *Never tie the horse in the trailer until the ramp has been raised and secured.*

STEP 14

If your horse is standing as quietly as the horses on the DVD it is now time to put the ramp up. Ask the horse on to the trailer and allow him to stand. Put the ramp up and then go around to the door and pat the horse. After a few minutes, remember the horse is **not** tied up, go back around and put the ramp down, go inside the trailer and ask the horse to walk off following him out.

If your horse is not standing quietly then go back to step 8.

Remember: *Never lower the ramp if the horse is tied up.*

STEP 15

If you want your horse to trot, or even canter, on to the trailer then now would be the time to teach that. By now the horse is very focused on the trailer and knows that when his nose is pointed to the trailer he goes right on – like a magnet.

After the horse comes off the trailer make a small circle, just as I did with Little Red, and start to speed yourself up. The horse will also speed up. When the horse gets comfortable with this experiment with letting him go earlier.

8 SIMPLE RULES:

- 1) Trailer loading is simply a *go forward cue*.
- 2) Teach *on and off* at the same time.
- 3) Always ask the horse off.
- 4) Never hurry the horse.
- 5) Keep the emotional level down and don't chase the horse outside the trailer.
- 6) Never tie the horse before doing up the ramp and always untie the horse before lowering the ramp.
- 7) Do not have food in the trailer when teaching this lesson.
- 8) Allow yourself plenty of time.