

On Using Ropes to Lift a Young Horse's Legs and Questions about Secure Tying

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Sometimes people who read my book seem not to believe what they see. Figs. 37-42 (p. 75) show me using a lead rope to teach a weanling to accept having her legs lifted. On the previous page I explain that my intent here is to show that a lead rope is safer than a lasso for this purpose, use of the latter having been described in a recently publication that I cite. An experienced horse person, whom I respect highly, asked if I didn't think the way I did this leg lifting was dangerous because I hadn't tied the filly securely, also noting that I must have generated a very close relationship with the filly to feel safe doing what I did with her lead rope merely dropped over the fence.

I am sure had a close relationship with the filly, but not because she had been handled and led many times or across a long period. As with all but the older horses illustrated in the book, this filly was inexperienced in the training demonstrated in the photographs. She had never had her legs lifted, and had never had a rope placed on any part of her body or legs, except for a lead rope attached to her halter. The photographs were taken in a fenced arena, where, if the filly had spooked, nothing dire was likely to happen. I didn't expect that, and it didn't happen; but I was close by and fully prepared to intervene if it had.

I explained to this questioner that Figs. 37-42 were photographed during either the fourth or fifth haltering and leading of the filly, each leading experience lasting about a half hour. The first two halterings and leadings took place entirely in a stall, the third in a small corral. The first two halterings were like that shown in Figs. 63-69. The third haltering is illustrated in Figs. 43-44. The fourth, and the subsequent leading and handling, are shown in Figs. 76-101.

I don't lift horses' legs with ropes very often. I simply chose this filly to illustrate what I see as a safer procedure than using a lasso, especially for relatively inexperienced horse people.

This filly had not previously been tied securely. The same horse person, upon learning this, wondered if I have an objection to secure tying. I have no quarrel with anyone who needs or enjoys the freedom of being able to tie a horse and leave it for long periods unattended, and I know that this is extremely convenient when two or more horses are being ridden or trained alternately.

As with all training, however, I do not look favorably on ways of teaching horses to stand tied that cause excitement and may lead to injury or a residual nervousness. I also think people who tie up their weanlings and leave them are passing up opportunities to teach the horse multiple things simultaneously while handling it personally. And I object to horses being tied in dangerous locations, and to their being left for long periods without anyone available to help them in case there is a wreck. As with fastening a lasso on a horse's pastern to teach it to give to pressure, I think the somewhat inexperienced horse person needs to be conservative about imitating what other people especially long-time professional trainers do more or less casually with their horses. An experienced professional is more likely to consider a horse a business proposition, and to have it well insured. Too much inconvenience is expensive for the professional, and a horse viewed mainly in terms of dollars and cents is likely to be viewed as somewhat more expendable than the one or two horses owned by the backyard horse person or hobbyist. I am full of caution for that backyard horse person who may have enormous affection for his or her horse, and who may all too casually copy others who not only know more about what they are doing, but may have entirely different agendas. It is easy to feel embarrassed if you are the only one not confident about tying your horse and leaving it. Don't let anyone make you feel this way. There are world class horse people out there who never tie their horses, or at least never leave them unattended when tied.

Most of the time I share the feeling of a famous horseman, quoted not long ago in a prominent journal. When asked why he always led his horse along with him at shows, he said he liked having his horse around, and he would rather have it with him, standing quietly, than have it tied where he could not watch it or get to it quickly if a problem arose. I like leading a horse when I am working with it, and I enjoy having it standing next to me while I am resting or talking with someone. I think I can teach it more when I do things this way. But I have no quarrel with people who know they will need to tie their horses for long periods, and who teach their young horses quietly. One way is by tying them high on a smooth wall with an inner tube tied into in the lead rope to reduce the trauma and danger of pulling back. If I thought highly of my horses, as I always do, I would still wish to remain nearby and in full view, so as to avoid wrecks and undue trauma.

I find that my horses learn to stand tied without excitement by being treated over and over the way I treated the above filly from the start. All through her early gentling and training, including saddling and riding, she stood quietly with the rope merely tossed over a gate or fence, or sometimes wrapped loosely. Figs. 37-44 and 76-101 show her early leading training, and Figs. 167-286 show later aspects of early training with a different filly. When a young horse pulls back, and its lead rope is merely laid over a fence or gate, there need be little or no excitement. The horse can simply be brought

gently back into position, where it will usually stand. If it doesn't stand, the trainer can hold the end of the rope while working with it and avoid all excitement. This procedure is consistent with Henry Wynmalen's first "secret" of horse training (p. 22, TTYTYH), and with my suggested philosophy of maximizing rewards and minimizing punishment. I know of no reason to violate such precepts in connection with any aspect of training, therefore no reason for requiring that a young horse learn to stand securely tied as the first item or one of the first -- in its training.

When I have ridden young horses on week-long trail rides, I have tied them to high ropes strung between trees, the first secure tyings in their lives, and experienced no difficulties. Because my horses all move freely between pastures and barns, and can be caught up at any time with little difficulty, I have no need for exercisers, but I have little doubt that my horses would also accept them quietly. If a horse is treated well, and never excited in connection with repeated mock tying, it can eventually be tied securely with no excitement or unusual danger. But I like to think that I work continually toward doing everything I wish with my horses, and also having my horses do everything I wish, without them being tied.

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