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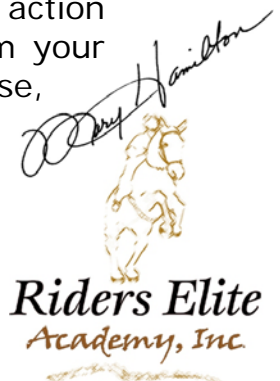
"Tips to Catching Your Horse Safely"

The other day, I went to the pasture to catch my horse, Pepe. Of course, he was in the farthest corner of the 25-acre pasture. Gathering up my halter and lead rope, I imagined expending my 10,000 daily fitness steps in this one activity. Who says horse riding doesn't burn calories? Not long into my trek, Pepe raised his head from grazing and recognized me. He nickered and cantered up to greet me. Wouldn't you like to have a safe, easy to catch horse like Pepe? You can. All it takes is time, practice and a little legwork. Catching your horse can change from a challenging chore to an easy endeavor by using these training tips and techniques. They make catching your horse safe as well as effortless.

Always use *Both* a Lead Rope and a Halter.

Taking shortcuts, like leading from the halter or a rope around your horse's neck can result in disastrous consequences. You don't have control of your horse leading this way, especially if something unexpected happens. I have seen people kicked, trampled and fingers broken by using unsafe methods like these.

The lead rope is one of your most valuable safety tools. My favorite lead rope has a leather popper on the end of it. A popper is a split piece of leather that makes a snapping noise when you twirl it. When catching your horse, place the halter on your left shoulder. Hold the snap of your lead rope in your left hand. Your right hand holds the tying end of the lead rope approximately three feet from the end. Swing or twirl the tying end of the lead rope with your right hand to make a propeller like action with the rope. Practice this technique on a fence post, making the propeller end hit the post. This is the action you use on a horse's shoulder to make them move away from your space. If another horse approaches as you are catching your horse,





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face the space offending horse and twirl the lead rope in his direction to move him away from you. This gives you a safe space to work in. You can also use this technique at the gate if horses are crowded around it. Swing the lead rope like a propeller at shoulder level to move them away from the gate so you can safely enter. Think about keeping a safety bubble of free space around you at all times.

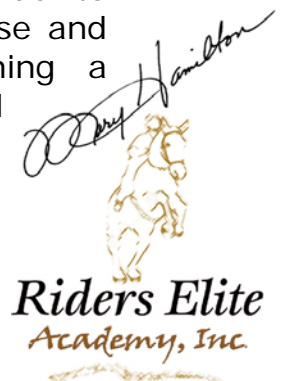
Check your Body Posture

Do you march in high gear right up to your horse in the pasture?

Then wonder why you can't catch him? By using an energetic, direct approach your horse perceives your posture as a predatory and threatening. No wonder he runs. Instead, approach your horse indirectly as another prey animal would. That means a perpendicular approach with your side facing the horse. Move to his shoulder, not his head and approach slowly. If you need to look at your horse, look at his shoulder not directly in his eyes as that is challenging body language. If it looks like he is getting ready to move away from you, stop and wait until he relaxes. When he does, you can move closer. When in position at his shoulder, relax, don't rush and grab his head. Stand quietly and give him a rub on the withers. Slowly and quietly place the lead rope around his neck. Secure it by clipping it on to itself under the horse's neck. Now you have an emergency handle if he tries to move away. Carefully slip the halter on his head being aware of his sensitive ears (no banging around here). Detach the lead rope from his neck and reattach it to the ring on the halter

A Horse that Eludes You

If you have a horse that isn't easily caught and evades capture, our game plan changes. If he moves away from you rather than being caught, directly face him. Then swing your lead rope at his shoulder to move him away from you. Position yourself between your horse and the herd. Get active. Act like the alpha mare disciplining a misbehaving horse. Drive him away from you and the other herd





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members. His natural inclination will be to return to the safety of the group. Prevent his return to the herd by swinging the rope and moving toward him until you see "horse language of compliance". This will be lowering of the head, softening of the eye and focusing on you. Once this appears, try your slow indirect approach again. If he moves away from you drive him off with your lead rope again and wait until he softens. This retraining takes time and a level of fitness but soon you will have a horse that will come and catch you.

Practice Catch and Release

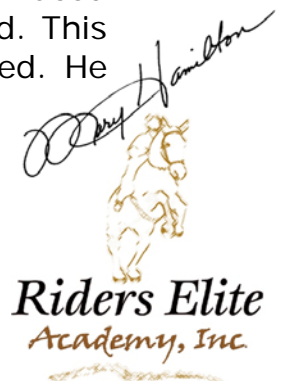
Horses have keen memories. If the only time you catch your horse is for a hard workout he may not look forward to seeing you. He will soon associate you and the halter with hard work. Hmmmm, hard work or eating grass in the pasture with buddies? It's an easy choice to make.

Practice the catch and release method. Catch your horse and do something he enjoys. Catch your horse and feed him his evening ration of grain or spend some time grooming him. Then release him back into the pasture. Make being with you a pleasurable activity and reward for being caught.

Police Story

This story is about the horse that taught me how to catch horses. Trooper came to our police stable from an auction barn in Missouri. He was a long backed, bay Tennessee Walking Horse. His owner green broke him by riding miles through furrows of spring-plowed fields. Trooper had a lot of go and very little whoa.

He came to me for retraining because of several problems. When faced with a spooky obstacle, he ran away with his rider or he reared. This horse was athletic! He could walk on his hind legs as he reared. He was also un-catchable .





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First, I worked on catching him in the pasture. Food rewards and grain in a bucket didn't work. Rubbing horse chestnuts on my hands and catching another horse first didn't work. After several hours of trying to catch him, I threw up my hands in frustration and started driving him away from the barn and the other horses. When I turned to give up and head back to the barn he was right behind me, head on my shoulder. I put the halter on him and walked him to his stall. I fed him some grain and returned him to the pasture as a reward. That problem was fixed.

Trooper was an affectionate horse. If he liked you, his eyes would soften and he would lick your hand in slow, deliberate licks like a Labrador. His favorite snack was a shared banana at lunchtime.

Ride work began and we negotiated a truce. When he became frightened, he didn't rear or run away instead he cantered in place. It was clear, he was not cut out to be a police horse. We needed to find him a job he enjoyed. Where he could go and go and go.

We found Trooper a home with an avid rider who enjoyed eating up the miles on long, smooth, trail rides. A year after Trooper left us, I saw him tried to a camper trailer at Crow Hassan Park. I asked the group around the campfire, "Who owns the bay walker and may I share my lunch with him?" Trooper remembered. His eyes softened and he started licking my hand with his tongue. Then I gave him a piece of banana and he was happy.

