

Training for Competition – Part 9

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Assuming your horse will consistently perform all the exercises discussed in previous articles, it is time to add some additional skills. I cannot emphasize enough that all training, especially using the techniques in these articles, is cumulative, and is most effective when taught in sequence. We build on the horse's previous experience to modify his response to cues he knows and to teach him new ones. At this point the horse knows where his "space" is relative to you. That space may be on your shoulder under lead, standing quietly when ground tied, etc. He should also move his feet (hips over, shoulder over, step back, etc) based on your body position, your aggression level, and verbal/physical cues.

In most cases, we want the horse behind or beside us under lead. However, there are times when we want to "send" him first...go into, over, or onto something, such as a horse trailer, a platform, or a log. In addition, on technical Endurance rides if your horse has been taught to "tail" you can help him by letting him pull you up a hill with his tail instead of having to carry you up.

TEACHING "GO FORWARD"

We want the horse to move forward on our body position and arm motion, but we must first get him to perform the action before we can associate it with a specific cue. You will need a halter, lead line, and a dressage whip. Be sure your horse is desensitized to the whip. He should consider it nothing more than an extension of your hand. Rub the whip over his body frequently. In addition, be sure there is no tension on the lead line....keep a small loop in the lead at all times.

Stand facing your horse's shoulder about a step away with the lead line in your left hand and the dressage whip in your right. Extend your left hand with the lead line about shoulder high, being sure there is a small loop (slack) in the line. Reach back with the dressage whip in your right hand and TAP him lightly (at a rate of about once a second) high up on the hip. Note that if you pull on the lead line, you will tip his nose toward you, which says the tap is a "hip over", which may confuse him. The SLACK in the lead line and the fact that you are further away from him makes this a different cue.



It took me a few tries to get these two pictures because Magic knows this cue so well, he wouldn't wait for the tap to move off! Note that this cue is asking him to walk AHEAD of your shoulder, the very thing we taught him NOT to do in Article 2! But don't worry! He will know the difference!

The objective is to get him to move a FRONT FOOT forward. One step is acceptable. The tapping is a form of pressure, and he will eventually do something to relieve it. He may move his butt or shoulder away, back up, paw... or just take the forward step. The important thing to remember about this exercise is that the horse must grasp that the ONLY motion that will stop the tapping is to go FORWARD. If the horse moves his butt away or backs up, DON'T STOP TAPPING! If you do, you have taught him that this is the action you want. Just go with him in a little dance and continue to tap as he moves, wherever he goes. If he goes backward and stops, but doesn't take a FORWARD step, keep tapping. IMMEDIATELY stop tapping at ANY forward motion and drop both hands. Praise him, rub him, wait a few seconds and repeat. When he figures it out and walks forward, rotate your body left and walk forward on his shoulder for a few steps. Practice this in short sessions. Soon you will find that the horse will step forward when you simply lift your left arm while holding the lead line and point your right hand at his hip without the whip. Eventually, just lifting the hand with the lead line and "thinking" you want him to go forward (or you can use a "kiss") will be enough. He will read your body english. Keep in mind that if you want him to "Go Forward" from his other side, you will have to teach it all over again from that side. A horse's mind simply doesn't work in a manner that allows them to apply "if, then" logic like humans.

Now practice it with an obstacle of some type. When you ride, get off when you encounter a log and practice. Around the barn, a couple of cement blocks and a 4 x 4 work well unless you just happen to have a convenient log lying around. Don't make it too high initially until he gets the idea. Lead the horse up to the obstacle and ask him to "Go Forward" over it. As he gets better, you can make it high enough that he has to jump. Practice with different stuff, such as tarps or a piece of plywood. If it's a platform of some type, ask him to "WAIT" on it. Raise the platform and ask him to step up on it. (Make sure it's stable and will support his weight) Once he has mastered this, getting him to stand on the scale at Endurance rides in the Southeast will be easy! The more stuff we can teach him ahead of time, the less likely he is to embarrass you at a ride!



Linda Pringle works with Mahada Magic on "Go Forward" exercises. The angle of this log will allow Magic to step over it at the low end, but on the high end, he has to jump it.

TRAILER LOADING USING GO FORWARD

The "Go Forward" technique is an excellent method to teach your horse to load on a trailer. It will not be discussed in detail here because there are numerous descriptions available from various clinicians on how to do this. I recommend you look for a video, since it is easier to understand the technique when you SEE it done. It's also somewhat difficult for a novice equestrian because typically you will get more resistance, every horse will behave a little differently, and it takes practice to execute the technique. Here are some guidelines and problems you may encounter and the actions you should take.

- If he backs up or moves his butt toward you or away from you simply go with him, keep his nose pointed at the trailer, and keep tapping until you get forward motion.

- If he tries to go away from you on the other side of the trailer, pull his head toward you, keep his nose pointed at the trailer, and keep tapping.
- If he tries to shoulder you out of the way and go between you and the trailer, this is aggression. Drop your right shoulder under your left arm and backhand him HARD across the cannon bones with the whip as he comes by. Be careful not to let him step on you. Make a circle and start over as though nothing had happened.
- Keep in mind that you are asking him to GO FORWARD, not load on the trailer. Putting one foot in the trailer then taking it out is the first objective, then two feet, then three, then all four. (Some clinicians recommend putting each foot on the trailer 100 times before moving on to the next foot) This also teaches him how to get off. He does not have to get ON the trailer all in one lesson, but quit on a positive note. Leave the butt bar down until you know he will stay on without it.
- If he gets on, then comes right back off, that's OK. Just put him back on. He will eventually figure out that he might as well stay there if you keep putting him back on.
- The "WAIT" cue is also useful to teach your horse not to rush off the trailer. The horse should stand quietly even with the door open and the butt bar down until you ASK him to unload. A horse that rushes off the trailer as soon as you drop the butt bar is a danger to you and himself. I also teach my horses to "WAIT" with just their back feet on the ground momentarily, and then allow them to load/unload. If your horse ever gets off without being asked, this is a learning moment. Immediately put him back on again...repeat until he will wait for your cue to unload.
- All trailers are not the same. You may be able to go get your horse on some trailers and back him off, but not always, so you should also teach your horse to unload with a tug on his tail as well.
- I never allow my horses to unload by turning around. "Backing" is not normal for a horse so they will always prefer to turn around. If they are allowed to do this they may try to do it when it's inappropriate because of the trailer configuration and injure themselves. Keep in mind that if your horse is injured at a ride or out on the trail, the "ambulance" trailer may be totally different from yours. He should get on ANY trailer. Practice on your friend's trailers when you get an opportunity.
- Teaching a horse to load is easier with an "open" trailer that doesn't resemble a dark, confined area to the horse. The more it looks like a stall, the better. A stock trailer or slant load with drop down doors that allow him to see out when he loads is also beneficial. There should be no feed on the trailer during training to load.



Magic stops as he loads with two feet on with a verbal "WAIT".



Magic unloads with a tug on his tail and stops with his front feet still in the trailer on "WAIT".



TEACHING THE HORSE TO "TAIL"

This technique assumes that your horse has mastered "Go Forward" and leading...that is, walk AND trot along beside you with his head even with your shoulder, stopping when you stop, and backing up when you do as described in Article 2. Your horse should also be comfortable with you handling and pulling on his tail as described in Article 8. For your safety, I strongly recommend you do not attempt this with a horse that kicks. If he gets startled and you happen to be behind him, you could be seriously injured.

Don't teach tailing on hills. Teach it on a level single track dirt road or trail. Do it at a time when there are no flies so he won't need his tail! "Tailing" is essentially a method of driving, such as pulling a cart or wagon. We're essentially asking the horse to lead from the rear. You will need "tailing" reins. There are

basically two types. A long loop rein (I like the 6 foot yacht rope) or a shorter loop rein with a “tailing string” in the middle that you can slide out to the end to lengthen the rein.

Unhook the rein snap from one side of the bridle (I like the NEAR side, but it’s a matter of what works best for you) and use it as a lead line. Ask the horse for a “Go Forward” and move off with him about even with the saddle as he goes by. If he stops or tries to drop back to your shoulder, “kiss” rapidly and ask him to “go forward” again or tap him lightly with your hand just behind the stirrup where your heel would normally be to encourage him to keep moving ahead of you. He will quickly understand that you want him to continue to walk. Practice this until he will walk along with your body about even with the saddle. Then lay the rein across the saddle and gradually slide backward a little at a time paying out the rein with your left hand and your right hand on the saddle or the horse until you can walk along with your hand on his butt. If you progress too quickly or accidentally put tension on the rein, the horse will tend to turn to the left and circle back to you. If he does, walk forward, push his neck away from you, ask for a “Go Forward” and then drop back again until he “gets it”. At you move further back, you will need to flip the rein up over the cantle to support it and prevent any rein pressure. Note that the action of flipping the rein up over the saddle is the same motion as raising your arm for the “go forward” cue. Soon he will anticipate and walk off as soon as you dismount, flip the rein up over the saddle with your right hand and “kiss”.

Continue to slide back until you can walk along with his tail in your right hand...no pull at this point. Scratch and play with his tail just like you did when you taught him to have his tail handled. When he is comfortable with this, slide back behind him with the rein over his butt, grip his tail gently just below the dock with your right hand and lean back. You are now TAILING! Be sure to walk on his RIGHT rear with his tail in your left hand as well. Alternate sides behind him until he is comfortable with both positions and with you moving around back there.



Linda Pringle “Tailing” Mahada Magic. Note that she has switched hands and moved to Magic’s right side.

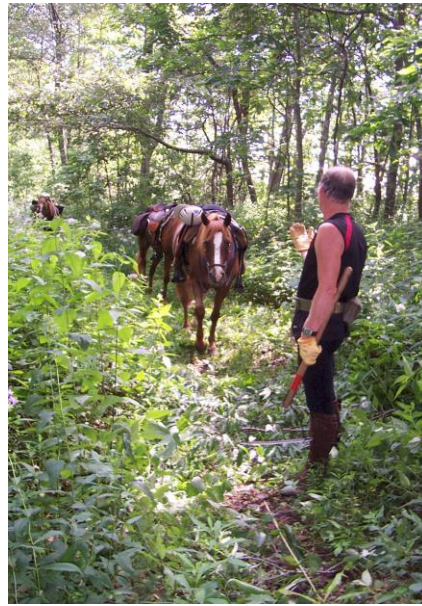
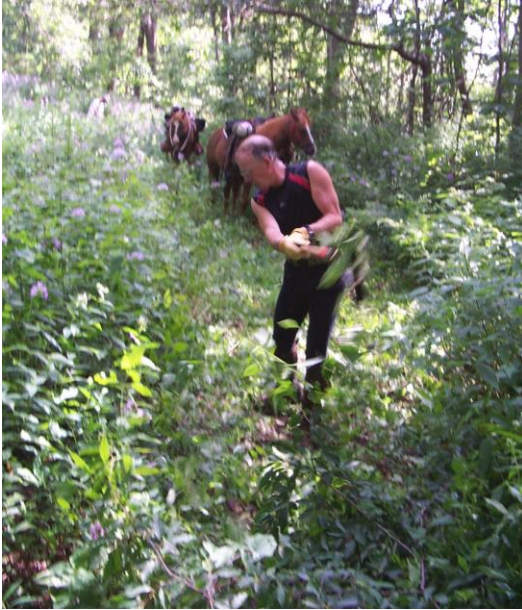
Move on to some gentle hills and then steeper ones. On a steep trail, I like to grip the tail with both hands with the rein in my palm...just bundle it with the tail. It’s easier to keep your balance. Eventually your horse will realize that this is a pretty good deal! When you come to a hill, he will expect the tailing and continue to walk as you roll out of the saddle, disconnect the rein, toss it over the saddle and grab his tail as he comes by. Late in a ride, my guys will stop and ask me to get off on hills when they get tired! As an advanced exercise, I teach tailing at a trot. The cue is for me to start trotting in place behind the horse while giving a light slap on the butt with my hand and a “kiss”.

Teaching your horse to tail takes a little work, but it’s useful, good exercise for you, and fun to teach. Your non-Endurance riding buddies will be amazed!

REVISITING THE “WAIT” CUE

Review the “WAIT” and “C’MON” cue exercises described in Article 5, “Demand Come to Me”. Be sure your horse understands that he is to park his feet on this verbal command and allow you to walk all the way around him, both ground tied and without the lead line, and come to you on a hand/verbal cue if the lead line is not on the ground. It is important to work with your horse unrestrained as well as under halter. You may find that his behavior is significantly different unrestrained. Without a halter or bridle, he has the option of leaving anytime he wishes, and you get a better feel for his attitude. He must now CHOOSE whether to be with you or leave. If he leaves (actually when he indicates that he is going to leave), then you move his feet by herding him around a small enclosure. This is the concept behind round pen training. As long as he is attentive and stands quietly in your presence (or follows), he gets no “pressure”. If you do this enough and are consistent in your behavior toward him, he will know when you require his presence

and when he is “dismissed” by your behavior. With my guys, I can walk out in the pasture and ignore them and they will ignore me and continue to graze. If I walk out there a little aggressively and look at them while “thinking” I want them to come over, they will immediately do so, usually before I give them a “Come to Me” cue.



Here is a practical use of the “WAIT” command and “Demand Come to Me”. There are three riders clearing trail here, two in the rear and me in the front, with the horses between us. Sunny is always asked to be the lead horse because he will stay where I park him and move up when I call him. The other horses follow and move up with him so we don’t need to hold or tie them. He would stay, even if the other horses left.

I practice “wait”, “ground tie”, “head down”, and “go forward” EVERY day with and without restraint when I bring my horses in and put them out. It requires no scheduled training time. When I put them out, I bring all of them out into the hallway and let them “WAIT” for a few minutes sometimes unrestrained and sometimes with halters and lead lines. When we reach the pasture, I ask them to drop their head and remove the halter but they must “WAIT” until I leave or give them permission to leave.

When I bring them in, I park them in the barn entrance side by side, then alternately choose one, lead him to his stall door, ask him to drop his head, remove the halter and ask him to “WAIT” until I give him a “GO FORWARD” to enter his stall, then go back and get the next one. They will do this, even with their feed in the stall. Consistency and the little things you do every day have the greatest impact on your horse’s behavior.



Magic, Wiedy, and Sunny stand quietly awaiting their turn. Magic goes first while Wiedy and Sunny wait until I put Magic in the stall and come back for them. I vary the position in the “line up” in the door and which horse I take first to discourage anticipating the exercise.