

To Load or Not To Load That Is Life's Question

Scott Schuetz

www.schuetzfarms.com

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This next article that I am going to write goes out to all of you horsemen and horsewomen who have problems getting your horses to load. With show the 2008 Show Season right around the corner I thought this would be a great time to go over some basics trailer loading information.

Younger is better:

That's right the younger and earlier in life you can start loading a horse the better he/she will be. I frequently load my foals into a trailer with mom and take them for a ride into town to Rural King or McDonalds and then back to the farm. The more you load and haul your horses the more "routine" this action will become.

Now you may be asking how do I load a young foal. Well just like with anything else use the ASK, TELL, COMMAND strategy. What makes foals so nice is if necessary you and your strong friends can pick up and "throw" the horse into the trailer if necessary. Usually once a foal has been in a trailer a couple of times they will love it and not have any problems with going in and out on their own.

Trailers, why are there so many choices:

There are many different types of horse trailers out there on the market. The thing I like to consider when purchasing a horse trailer and encourage others to do the same is look to the future. If you have 2 horses now but are thinking about increasing your herd size to 3 or 4 you will be better off purchasing the 3 horse trailer in lieu of purchasing a 2 horse trailer and then having to turn around and update to a 3 horse trailer down the road. You must also consider what vehicle you will be pulling the unit with. For example like myself you would not want to purchase a gooseneck trailer if you are going to be pulling it with an RV. Along those same lines if you should make sure that the vehicle that you are going to be pulling the trailer with has enough horse power, and can support the GTW of the trailer. Also, consider if you prefer to use a straight load or a slant load trailer. Slant load trailers are wider and therefore slant load trailers can accommodate larger horse. Another tough decision to make is purchasing a steel trailer or an aluminum. Aluminum trailers typically last longer and lighter to pull down the road; however, their cost is a lot higher than that of a steel trailer.

HELP!!!! My horse will not load:

Here are some helpful tips that I have seen work in "the field, or barn" to get horses to load.

- 1.) Driving Whip. The driving whip procedure works best when there are 2 people involved. One person should simply circle the horse around the trailer and the other person should have the driving whip and be standing at the horse's left rump. Then when the horse starts to refuse to enter the trailer. Pop the whip behind the horse from a distance of about 4 feet away. As the horse

continues to refuse move the whip closer and make the popping of the whip louder and louder. If the horse still refuses gently whack the horse on his butt and he will then hop right in. It is important when the person is working the horse with the whip that the other person has full control of the horses head and maintains pressure with the head pointed at the trailer opening or in the trailer.

- 2.) Use of a butt rope. Horses hate to have pressure on their bodies; therefore, a rope across a horses rear is an easy and safe way to load a horse. When using a butt rope you should have one person on each end of the rope and should be completely out of the "Kick" range of the horse by standing well to the horse right or left hand side.
- 3.) Tie and Go. I recommend using this technique only as a last resort. This is a dangerous maneuver and you should be extremely careful when using it. Tie the horse to the trailer so that his legs are close to the back end of the trailer. Make sure to tie the horse on the inside of the trailer. Then get in your vehicles and pull quickly forward. This will cause the horse to "jump in." Don't ask me how it works, but it does.

Tips for the Trailer-Shy Horse:

So what's the best way to deal with a trailer-shy horse? Obviously, your best bet is to not give your horse a reason to dread the trailer in the first place. But if it's too late for that, here are some suggestions to take the load off your mind:

- *Allow your horse to familiarize himself gradually with the trailer.*

Put the trailer in the pasture with your horse, open the door, and allow your horse to explore the trailer on his terms. Let your horse walk up to the trailer, look inside, smell it, and maybe put one food inside. The idea, Ridenour says, is to "get your horse comfortable with the trailer when you don't have to go anywhere and you can be totally relaxed, rather than trying to load your horse into the trailer for the first time the day you're leaving for a show."

You might also consider feeding your horse his meals on the ramp of the trailer. "Each day you can move the food bucket or hay bag a little further inside the trailer," Bray says. "The horse learns that the trailer isn't that bad of a place and starts to associate it with something positive."

- *Create a comfortable environment for loading.*

When preparing to load, make the surrounding conditions seem as "safe" as possible for your horse. If your equine is timid around strangers, limit the number of people present to two or three and make sure they are people your horse is familiar with. If your horse seems bothered by the thud of the ramp, put some bedding or padding on the loading ramp to muffle the noise. If you've got a very tall [horse trailer](#) and a steep ramp, park your trailer where you can rest the ramp on a hill so that your horse doesn't have to walk up a steep grade.

- *Back up your trailer to a confined space.*

If possible, back your trailer right up to the stable door so the horse has nowhere to go but into the trailer. Don't give him the option to bolt.

- *Reward steps in the right direction.*

Reward your horse with treats such grain or carrots after he makes some progress, Arledge suggests. You don't have to wait until the horse is all the way in the trailer or even halfway in the trailer to reward him. With an extremely fearful horse, even just a few steps toward the trailer may merit a couple pieces of carrot. That may be just enough incentive for him to keep going.

- *Don't be in a hurry to get somewhere.*

Allow yourself plenty of time to load your horse and to travel so you're not rushing. "If you're in a panic to get out the door, your horse is going to sense your anxiety and he won't want to get in the trailer – especially if you end up getting mad at him," Ridenour says. If you have enough time you can be more patient with your horse and he will be more willing to cooperate.

- *Be confident.*

Lead your horse up to the loading ramp while telling yourself you know he'll go right in. "Horses get their confidence from their rider/handler," Arledge says. "A common mistake is approaching the trailer tentatively and stopping to look at the horse. Just calmly lead him as far as you can. Walk up to the trailer as though it were the most normal thing in the world to get into a narrow, cramped, dark box." Chances are if you have a positive attitude it should rub off on your horse.