

## Trailer Training Basics

"Get the broom! I will get him to go on."

"No, no--just put the chain over his nose--that will get him in."

"Let's just blind-fold him! "

"Here, I will just get some grain, we'll bribe him in!"

It is phrases like this that has motivated Shane Ledyard, a horse trainer born and raised in Bucks County, PA to develop kind and common sense methods for loading horses onto a trailer.

Ledyard has been active in the horse business since he was a teenager and has loaded countless horses onto all types of trailers. Besides his regular training business he now travels all over the Mid-Atlantic area to teach proper loading and trailer safety skills.

Shane believes the most common reasons why a horse won't load onto a trailer include; fear from a bad experience while being loaded, negative association from a bad trailer ride, or simply because the horse is not truly broke to lead.

Here he offers some basic insight about loading a horse on to a trailer:

I have seen campaigned show horses refuse to get on to a trailer—not because of a bad experience, but from poor, inconsistent handling. A horse that leads properly and goes forward from a recognizable cue should walk through anything when asked. A horse should load on a trailer or go forward because he is he *trained* to do so--not out of fear of the consequences if he doesn't listen. You can beat a horse up a couple of times and he may do what you want him to, but it won't last in the long run. Eventually every horse gets wise to the negative association of rough or inexperienced handling. At some point they may start behaving badly just when they see a trailer.

I do extensive ground work with a horse *before* introducing the trailer. I stop him, back him and jog with him. He should float beside me—it should never feel like I am dragging him. I teach him to turn on the haunch and on the forehand—anything that I can think of that gets him handier and listening to me while leading. Next, I teach him to "go forward from a cluck" or similar cue. I will use light taps with a whip on the horses' near side hip that stop when the horse moves forward (even the slightest), along with a cluck. This will get most horses responding by going forward just by hearing a cluck, which is the goal of this method. If he starts to back up I increase the tapping frequency until he goes forward. I keep in mind that not every horse will tolerate even light use of a whip—so I don't force the issue if he comes apart. This is conditioning of an animal, so I apply common sense in my approach. That leads to the next my next tip.

Some horses respond well to poll pressure. That is to say I add pressure to the horse's poll via the halter, and release it when the horse goes forward the slightest bit. I never pull on a horse's head when I am in the trailer, as they may throw their head up & hit the ceiling of the trailer. Just like any technique that I may use for a horse, it is paramount that the horse understands the cues before he even sees the trailer. I practice in a safe place like a ring or dry paddock. I will spend time figuring out what technique works for that particular horse, because each animal is unique. The underlying theme of all horse training is to add pressure to the horse in some sympathetic fashion and then to release that pressure the split second the horse does what I want. It is OK to be creative when training, as long as I am kind to the horse and common sense is at the core of the technique.

I don't desperately bribe a horse on with grain or treats—but I definitely reward him when he is good! Once he loads on the trailer I give him a nibble of his favorite treat. Comfort and reward treats are OK by this horse trainer! Most times a strategic combination of pressure and release, along with a reward for good behavior is the recipe for success.

If you are asking something of a horse and begin to get frustrated or angry it is probably because *you* are not doing something right. If that happens, stop and assess what is going on. Loading a horse on a trailer should be **fun** and relatively easy. If it isn't then something is definitely wrong and it's time to get help from an experienced and competent trainer.

The main thing to remember is to make everything positive and soft in front of the horse and apply any needed pressure from behind. Also, the horse is always learning and training—and training means you practice until what you are trying to accomplish is second nature for the horse. Trailer training should always be straight forward, be common sense, and offer a clear signal to the horse. While some people may have more experience or have been blessed with “a way” with horses-- there still should be nothing vague or mysterious about the approach. There is simply no substitute for common sense and practice.

**Shane Ledyard resides in Sellersville, PA. He is available for private sessions and clinics both locally and throughout the country, and offers a DVD on Trailer Training. Visit his web site at [www.LedyardHorseTraining.com](http://www.LedyardHorseTraining.com) or call 267-446-8392 for more information.**

*Training horses can be dangerous and inexperienced training can do more harm than good for the horse. Horses will sometimes kick, strike and bite when being taught how to load. If you are not confident in your skills, be sure to hire a competent professional with extensive references to help you do it right.*