

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 a kind and common sense method 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.

Ledyard declares 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.

"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 will 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."

Shane offers some basic tips for loading a horse on to a trailer:

Never, ever pull on horses' head to get him on the trailer. This is the opposite of what you want to do. This rule applies especially if he backs up while inside the trailer. The "pressure", if any, should be applied from behind the horse—never the front.

Do some basic ground work with your horse that will teach him to "go forward from a cluck" or similar cue *before* introducing the trailer.

Don't bribe your horse on with grain or treats—but definitely reward him when he is good! If he takes a step forward give him a nibble of his favorite treat. Comfort and reward treats are OK by this horse trainer!

Be consistent and calculated with your cues. Many times horses are just confused about what is being asked of them. *Think before you train.*

If you are asking something of your horse and you begin to get frustrated or angry it is probably because *you* are not doing something right. 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. Visit his web site at 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.