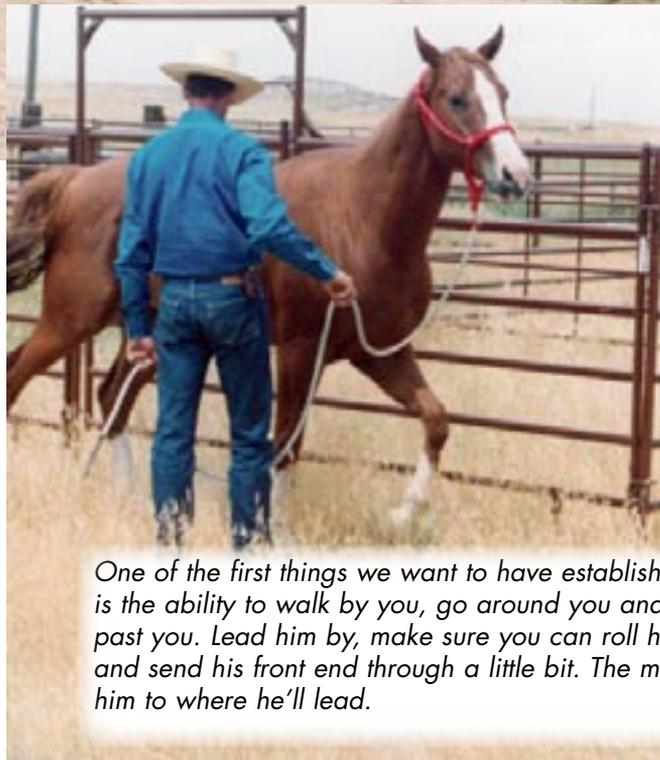


Basic Skills

Trailer Loading

By Peter Campbell with Bob Welch



One of the first things to keep track of before trailering your horse is realizing trailer loading should not be a problem if he's properly prepared. So when a horse doesn't load, it's probably because the getting him ready part is somewhere where we have difficulty. What's keeping the horse from going in the trailer is self-preservation. It looks kind of like a trap.

One of the first things we want to have established with our horses is the ability to walk by you, go around you and go in a straight line past you. Lead him by, make sure you can roll his hindquarters over and send his front end through a little bit. The main thing is getting him to where he'll lead.

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Trailer Loading *continued*

You want to make sure you can back him up. People don't put much thought into the backing up. So they'll get their horse to go into the trailer, but have difficulty getting him out. In a lot of trailers you don't have the opportunity to turn them around. These things are important.



A lot of times they're simply unsure of the trailer. Ask him to walk between you and the trailer, roll his hindquarters around and bring him back. You might do that several times until he is comfortable.

Sometimes they kind of get afraid, so you might have to stand between the horse and trailer, working him in the open country. As soon as you can, work him back and forth between you and the trailer. In the beginning, he may be scared of that trailer and try to come to you, so be ready to not allow him to come to you.



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Trailer Loading *continued*

You may be able to prevent that urge for him to come to you by overriding it with the tail of your lead rope or a flag.

When you first start trying to load them, they're going to get a little troubled. If he does get a little unsure that's not always bad. I'd just as soon them work at the wrong thing so that if they're bothered then you have an opportunity to allow them understand the right thing when they do it. A lot of times a horse just walked right up there and got in the first time, he didn't have to work at it. That horse might become hard to load simply because he never worked at it and learned it, it was merely curiosity.

Never get into a contest with your horse. You want to keep it a secret as long as you can that he is stronger than you. If he ever figures out he is stronger than you, now what are you going to do? So you really want to keep track of that.

Putting them to work is not the answer either. If the horse won't load, some people will drive him around and around, back him and all kinds of things. To me that's a wearing process, not a learning process. You're

wearing it in, you're saying, "If you don't want to go in, I'll make it as difficult as I can for you out here." That might work on some, but it doesn't work on all. When you're talking about the life in a horse's body, you either encourage it, discourage it or rearrange it; you should never kill it.

If he wants to work at the wrong thing, allow that, but as he's working at it, begin to control his feet. Pretty soon, as he comes by this trailer door, you can straighten him out and ask him to go in. You direct and then drive. It's all about getting one ready. You need to direct him, support him and when he gets hooked onto the idea, he'll go in. Beware of a wearing process. Instead, make it a learning process.

Another thing you can do to prepare a horse to load is put a wide plank on the ground on top of an old tire (laying on it's side) and walk him up on that so he can feel his weight push that plank down. Horses feet are very sensitive, they can really feel things through their feet. They can feel the rubber floor mat, the axles and the tires. This exercise might make the feeling they get when they step into a trailer a little less surprising.



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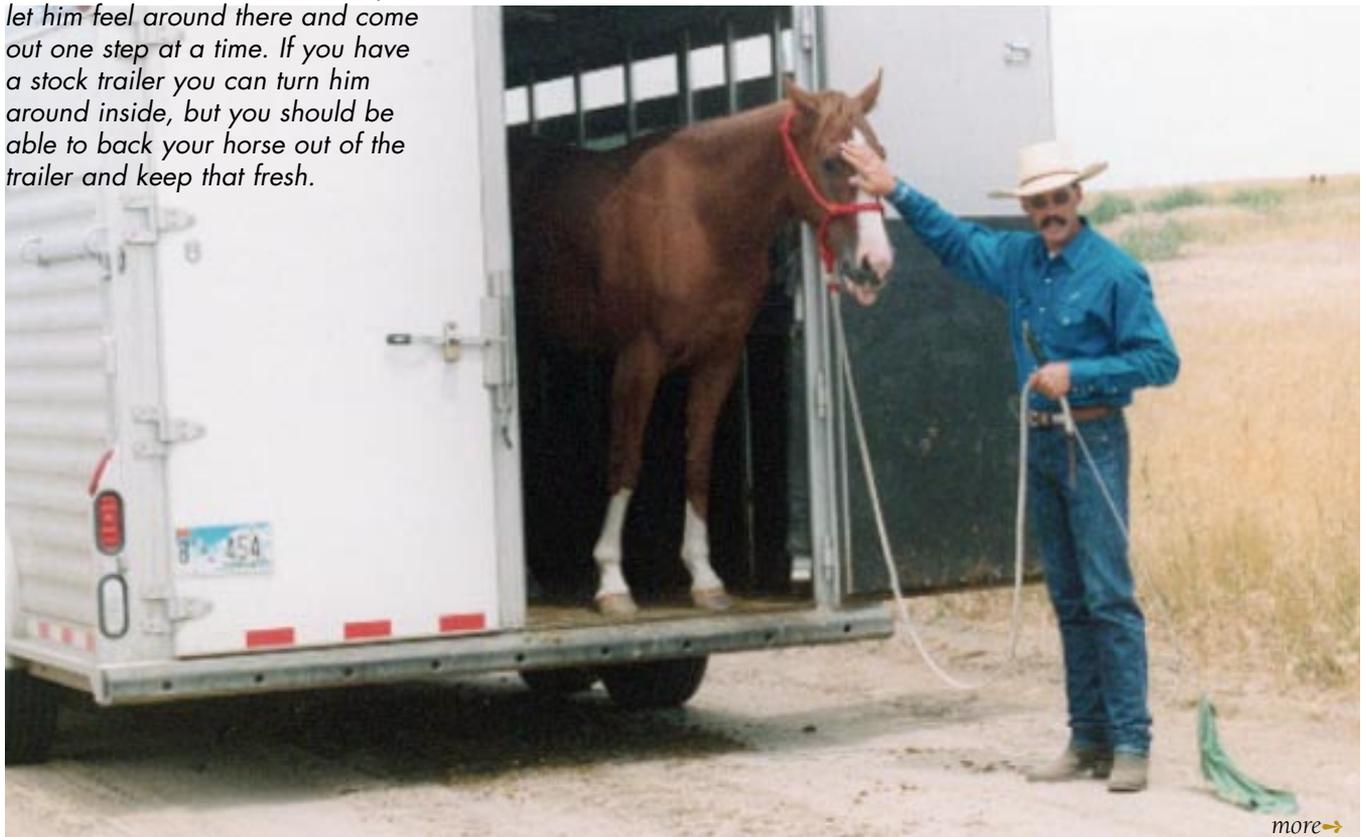
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Driving a horse in with the flag

There are a lot of ways to get your horses in the trailer. I never try to drag my horse or pull him in the trailer. Instead, I'll offer it to him, and if I have the flag I'll send him in there.

If you're using a flag, just make sure he's used to it by rubbing it all over him. He shouldn't be afraid of the flag, but you should be able to do some things with it. Later, you can kind of use it to help get him in the trailer.

One thing you want to make sure of, especially when he's coming out, is to give him lots of time there. A lot of times he'll kind of get stuck there, so just kind of rub him, don't be in such a big hurry to get him out. Get him to move around in the trailer. Ask him to move around to either side. When he does come out, just let him feel around there and come out one step at a time. If you have a stock trailer you can turn him around inside, but you should be able to back your horse out of the trailer and keep that fresh.



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Trailer Loading *continued*

Driving a horse in with the lead rope

You can also use the halter lead rope. But remember, you should direct him first and then drive him.

If he is going in there, be real careful not to bump that rope as he goes in. That will stop your horse from going in and the next you know he's bumped his head. Make sure you give him plenty of slack. A horse will go in a trailer if you get him ready to go, the trailer loading is easy, it's getting him ready that's the key.



Leading a horse in

If you're going to lead him in, a lot of times you can get up to the trailer he'll come up to you and you can kind of rub him so he's not afraid. Sometimes if a horse has never been in the trailer, he'll check out the surface, the footing, with his nose. I see a lot of people discourage them from that, but allow him a little bit of time to feel what's going on around down there. Give him plenty of slack and don't stand right in the entrance of the trailer waiting for him, he might not think there is anywhere to go.



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Trailer Loading *continued*

Step back one step at a time. Your horse might only take one step in and then back out. Just start again. I never force it because it becomes a contest. If he does take a step in and then backs out, it gives you an opportunity to back him up, take him on a little walk and start again.



Once he comes in, just back him out. But don't get in a hurry; he needs to have time to get his feet ready to go backward.

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Trailer Loading *continued*

Then you can get to where you can have him bring the back two out and leave two in, then see if he'll put all four in. Then I'll ask him to step back. Soon he'll get ready to back out more easily.

A lot of people only load their horse from one side, but you need to be able to do it from both sides. I try to do it more from the right side. Don't pull on his head when he's half way out or in, so he doesn't sling his head up and hit the top of the trailer.

One thing to make sure is that there isn't a bunch of stuff hanging off your trailer for your horse to get hooked on. If you can, tie your doors back so the wind doesn't catch them and cause a problem. You should be very aware of where your door latches and such are. If you're loading him by driving him in, you can block him from getting the halter tangled up in the door latches with your presence or keep him from getting away from you with your lead rope. A lot of times, even on a two-horse trailer, you want to load him in the left side for that reason.

However, don't let the horse come through you. Sometimes, if person is trying to drive their horse into the trailer and the horse won't go, I see people back up and allow that horse to go between them and the trailer. Pretty soon the horse just wants to go right through that person. The horse needed to work at the wrong thing.

Just make it all as easy and safe as you can.

