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Picking Up A Horse's Hoof

By Jeffrey Rolo

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by: **Jeffrey Rolo**

The idea of picking up a horse's hooves can intimidate some owners since a well-placed horse kick would really hurt! Such caution is good, but in reality if you pick up a horse's hoof properly you provide him with no leverage or ability to kick you. This is a situation where a person's worst fears can cause him to imagine an incident that is highly unlikely to occur with careful handling.

Here's how to safely pick up a horse's hoof:

Starting with the front hoof, approach your horse diagonally from his front so that he clearly knows you are there - you don't want to surprise him. Place yourself even with his shoulder and make sure to face his rear; you will both be facing opposite directions during the hoof picking process.

Making sure that your feet aren't too close to the horse's hoof, start running the hand parallel to him down his shoulder and along the length of his leg, finally stopping just above his ankle. Gently grasp the ankle portion and click (or otherwise verbally cue him) to ask him to raise his leg. If he's well trained, that small cue will be more than enough and he'll do just what you requested. You're now free to begin picking his hoof.

If your horse is being a bit stubborn or hasn't learned how to pick up his legs yet try leaning into his shoulder as you run your hand down the back of his cannon bone. You can also gently squeeze/pinch the tendons to further cue him to what you would like. As you perform these physical cues make sure you provide a verbal one also (I make a clicking sound) so the horse later associates your sound with the requested response. Increase the weight you push against his shoulder until he finally lifts his leg as requested.

When picking a horse's hoof you want to remove all debris from the hoof clefts as well as the rim and frog. Be careful around the frog because it can sometimes be a bit sensitive, particularly if the horse has thrush.

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Once you have finished cleaning the front hoof carefully guide it back to the floor; you don't want to allow the horse to slam it, potentially hitting your foot in the process. Praise your horse and pat him on the front shoulder a bit so he understands that you are pleased with his cooperation, then run your hand along his back to his rear leg. Place yourself in the same position as you did with his front leg and do the process over again.

There is a slight difference between lifting a rear foot and front foot, even though your basic positioning and actions are nearly identical. When you lift your horse's rear foot he will probably give a little jerk that you might misinterpret as a kick. This is a common reflex reaction among horses and nothing for you to worry about.

Secondly, when you raise your horse's rear leg you'll want to step into him a bit so that your hip is underneath his leg. Rest his leg on your thigh, grab his hoof and gently flex it upwards. By doing this

you lend him some support and more importantly the position of his leg and his flexed hoof will prevent him from being able to kick you.

Clean the hoof, lower it cautiously as you did the first and praise him. Congratulations - you're halfway done! The opposite side will be done exactly the same way, but try to return to his front and start the opposite side rather than move around his rear. It's bad practice to approach or circle all but the most trusted horses via the rear in such close quarters since a horse would be within range to strike.

When lifting any hoof try to make sure your horse is properly squared (balanced evenly on all four legs) so that when you lift one hoof he can easily balance on his remaining three. At no time should the horse actually lean his weight on you! Even when you rest his rear leg on your thigh you're not allowing him to use you as a crutch.

Once you have picked your horse's hooves a few times it will probably become very simple and take less than 5 minutes to clear all hooves. Most trained horses will raise their hoof for you the moment they feel your leg run down their leg.

It is a very good idea to control your horse's head while you are picking his hooves. This can be done by attaching his halter to crossties or asking a partner hold your horse's head. By controlling his head you ensure your horse can't move away from you while you're trying to pick his hooves, or worse... turn around and take a bite at your rear!

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Jeffrey Rolo, owner of AlphaHorse and an experienced horse trainer and breeder, is the author of the above article. You will find many other informational articles dealing with horse training and care as well as games and other horse fun on his website:

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How To Use Horse Training Thinking To Solve Dang Near Any Problem With A Horse

By Andy Curry

Horse training can be a relatively mysterious subject to people who have not studied it. Even more mysterious is a behavioral problem a horse has that causes his owner stress and frustration.

What many horse owners don't understand is often the handler, not the horse, is causing the problem.

That being said, that is the first consideration in unscrambling the horse's ill behavior.

For instance, a common problem riders have is a horse being spooky. In layman's terms, that means a horse is nervous and afraid something is going to "get him". Thus, whenever the horse and owner go for a ride it's not usually a relaxing moment.

As a matter of fact, both horse and rider are on edge.

So if we take the premise that the rider is causing the horse to spook, then we must ask, "How is the rider causing this."

An uninformed rider may not be aware that perhaps he is sitting tensely in the saddle. Also, maybe he's stiff as a board and has a white-knuckle hold on the reins.

Believe it or not, the horse can sense and feel this tense. When the horse is in the habit of feeling it then the horse's spookiness is also the rider's.

Picture it like this. Two deathly scared kids are walking home at night. They both hear sounds and see things. One kid thinks he saw something and nervously asks, "D-d-d-did you see that?" Seconds later the other kid hears something and cries, "D-d-did you h-h-hear that?" Together they intensify each other's fears and their anxiety grows leaps and bounds.

So it is with the rider and horse. Maybe not to that extent, but still it happens.

And since the rider is human and capable of reasoning, then he or she must be the one to interrupt the pattern of behavior. The rider must loosen up while in the saddle. Relax. Have fun. Learn to watch the horse's signals that he has spotted something – and then talk to the horse and start giving him confidence.

Soon, the horse's demeanor will change and the result will be a more relaxed, fun to ride horse.

Whether the rider realizes it or not, he or she is training the horse by just riding. The horse simply reacts to the stimuli he gets. If the stimuli is consistent, the horse's reaction will become a habit until changed. If the stimuli is tense, causes fear reactions, and so on, the result is a spooky horse.

This is but one example of how us humans can actually be the reason the horse does or does not do

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something we ask of him. Although it's true that the rider is not the cause 100% of the time, it's a good place to start untangling the problem because it's often where it begins.

Andy Curry is a nationally known horse trainer and author of several best selling horse training and horse care books. For information visit his website at

. He is also the

leading expert on Jesse Beery's horse training methods which can be seen at

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