

## **FLOATING – NO PROBLEM!**

Preparation is the key. This information will mean more to you if you have seen it demonstrated, or understand the ‘follow a feel’ concept. There are plenty of variations on this procedure, and the more experience you have, the less time it will take because your feel and timing will get better. Any ‘method’ is OK so long as the horse does not get stressed, sweated up, or rattled to the point where he cannot think, and consequently resorts to self-preservation which can be violent. This is where it becomes dangerous for horse and person. You will not get into trouble if you follow the process outlined here. The whole procedure, to ensure the horse is 100% OK will take multiple sessions.

You will need - a halter and 12’ lead rope  
- no time limit

Make sure you can accomplish the following *before* you start loading your horse onto the float, *especially before* you do up the back bar/chain. These tasks are especially important if you already have a horse that rushes off.

### **Prepare the Horse**

**Unstick your horses feet as outlined in: “The Right Groundwork for the Right Frame of Mind”.**

A prerequisite is that your horse knows how to ‘follow a feel’ on the lead rope, to the right, left, backwards and forwards, also that he easily yields his hind-quarters and moves his front end around, ie; that he isn’t ‘stuck’ in his feet. If he is ‘stuck’ in his feet, he is also ‘stuck’ in his mind, and he will consequently not be easy to maneuver around and will be constantly pushing into your space, even running you over!!

Learn how to recognize a ‘try’. This is crucial to your success.

As described in the above article, educate your horse to back over a pole, back a figure 8 around some cones, back between 2 x 44 gallon drums that are about 3’ apart. Also educate him to walk calmly forwards thru narrow spaces such as between the 2 drums, between you and the fence etc. The reason for doing all these tasks is to ensure that your horse knows how to move his feet in a confined space. Many horses go on to a float but do not know that they can move their feet 6” backwards, sideways, forwards etc to balance.

If your horse is ‘claustrophobic’ about any of these things, *expect* to spend as many sessions as it takes to where he is 100% comfortable with them. Then, when it comes time to load him on the float, it will be much easier.



**Check out your float. Is it safe?** Does it have a good, solid ramp, non-slip mats? No rough or sharp edges anywhere? Nothing the halter could hook onto by accident? If you have a chain, is it encased in some bicycle inner tube or polythene piping? If you have side springs for lifting the ramp, these are a 'booby-trap' for a horse to accidentally put a foot down into, so fill them in with a horse cover, or something similar.

Before you load or go anywhere, check you have done up the coupling correctly!! Make this your habit! It is really easy, (we've all done it),, to get distracted and not actually have it secured on!! As soon as the horse places weight on the ramp, the back goes down and the front flies up!! This wrecks your horses' confidence before you even start!! Or it 'jumps off' as you head off down the road and go over a bump, or when you pull up somewhere!!

Since it is completely against a horses instincts to go into this "tin cave on wheels" in the first place, when you do ask him to go on, you are **guaranteeing** to him that he is going to be all right in there. It is the **ultimate betrayal** to load a horse onto an unsafe float, with slippery or flimsy mats, rotten floor-boards and/or to give him anything other than a first class ride, let alone cause him to lose his balance or slip over by driving badly!!!!!!

### **Loading.....**

Load your horse by first asking him to step up onto the ramp. Apply a light 'feel' forwards on the rope. At first he'll probably want to look at and smell the ramp, then test the surface out with his hoof by pawing.



This all comes under the category of a 'try'. Let him check it out, back him up a step or two then ask forwards again, If he even *thinks* about taking a step forwards, this qualifies as a 'try' and immediately *release*. If there is no perceptible 'try', then apply a little backwards and forwards swing of the tail of the rope behind the 'drive-line' of the horse, ie, somewhere behind the wither. If the horse goes forward even 1/8<sup>th</sup> of an inch, *release!* If there is no 'try', increase the swing by degrees until there is.

Sometimes this may cause the horse to start going backwards. In this case, you just go back with him, keeping the same 'feel' on the rope to indicate that forwards is the desired direction, at the same time maintaining the light rhythmical swing of the rope

until the horse quits backing and goes forward (the 'try'). Immediately *release* and give comfort.

It is futile to try to stop the horse from going backwards by pulling on the lead rope. In fact, this will cause him to jerk his head up, often hitting it on the roof, and even to rear up and go over backwards. This is all completely unnecessary, dangerous and stressful for people and horses. If someone is 'helping' load a horse and this sort of thing is going on, STOP THEM, FIRE THEM and find some better help. Likewise for putting ropes behind, stiff bristled brooms etc. All this is just trying to stuff the horses' body onto the float when his brain has no intention of going on and is liable to end up in a wreck! Get the horse mentally *ready* to go on and the body will follow. You actually want the horse to go on gradually. When the front feet are on the ramp, let him rest for awhile, then ask the horse to back off. Repeat the 'follow a feel forward' part, reward the try, *release*, etc This way the horse is learning to back off as he is learning to go on. You really don't want the horse to go on too soon for this reason. You want him to get plenty of practice backing off from part way on, then from a little further in and so on.

It is preferable *not* to move the center partition over, as the horse gets a false idea of how much room he has. He doesn't have to learn how to negotiate the center partition, then you suddenly 'change the rules' on him by leaving it in place and he bangs into it. It is better if it is in the same place from the beginning, then he learns that it is there and how to negotiate it.

It is usually not *too* difficult to get the horses' front feet up the ramp with his head inside the float. Just keep repeating the 'follow a feel' forward concept. If you don't get a 'try', up the swing of the rope until you actually lightly tap him behind the withers. If this causes him to go backwards, whilst making sure you don't end up pulling on the lead rope, go back with him until he comes forward. This is just practice with your feel and timing of release. When the back feet come on to the ramp, and the front feet are inside the float,, then you *know* you are going to make it. It is imperative that there is no time limit. If you are running out of time, quit on a good 'try' and come back tomorrow.

There are a lot of different back chain/bar/centre partition arrangements!! I like the ones best where the centre partition stays in place by itself and you can easily walk in and out the other side. When loading a horse, especially a 'first timer', it is easier for the horse if you can go in with him, offering him the feel forwards. With you standing on the ramp and trying to 'send' him in he loses the 'feel' or direction he was getting from you via the lead rope, so it takes a bit longer. It is possible to teach the horse to move forwards with you driving and no supportive 'feel' on the rope, but it is a little harder for him. Once he has gone in a time or two with you going with him to maintain the feel on the lead rope, it takes very little to turn this into a 'send', where you stay on the ramp and he goes in on his own.

Repeat the follow a feel, release, back out, process until the horse is all the way in. Leave the back bar undone. *Don't tie him up!!*

Then practice walking down his body, rubbing the hindquarters, feel the tail and note any signs of tension. This tells you he is NOT ready to have the back done up. If the horse starts coming off of his own accord, let him. It is his way of telling you that he's not ready to stay on. Just put him back on, and go back to what you were doing.

By repetition, get it where the horse happily stands there, (no back chain/bar and *definitely not* tied up) while you jump up and down, bang the sides of the float, play with his tail and rattle the back bar. These activities will at first cause him to back out. Just put him back in and repeat. Eventually he'll stand there quite relaxed about it, no matter what is going on.

Your next project is to get him where he will back off one step at a time, and come forward again at any moment. So standing beside his head, ask him to back one step. Usually what happens is the horse will keep backing until he's all the way out! Go with him, maintaining your light feel until he's ready to come forward again, when he's back in, rest for a minute and ask again. Each time he will back off less and less, and come forward more and more readily, until finally he will just back up one step at a time, you will be able to stop him without him jerking his head up.

Next, hold a strong stick across where the rump bar goes. You back the horse one step at a time until he finally feels the stick and comes forward. If he tries to back thru the stick, you have more work to do before you can do up the back bar/chain. If he starts to panic you can drop the stick and let him out and start again.

More often than not, the horse accepts this and you know it is safe to do up the back and *slowly* put up the ramp.

Ideally this is all taking place in a large paddock, where you can then drive a short distance, unload the horse, load him back up and drive some more.

### **What if ??.....**

#### **The horse keeps going off the ramp to the side every time I ask him to step forward?**

Keeping your 'feel' on the rope, swing the tail in a big overhand swing until it hits and therefore makes a noise on the ramp every swing. As soon as the horse makes a move back towards you, *release*. You may have to repeat this several times, until eventually the horse gives it up because it didn't bring him any comfort.

If the horse swings the other way (towards you) just let him run into your swinging rope, he'll soon give that up too.

#### **You cannot get the horse to 'try', he seems to be taking no notice of my swinging rope?**

Take him *away* from the float and move his feet around. Get him trotting forward off the feel of the rope by tapping him a little harder behind the wither, yield his hindquarters and move his front feet around (unstick his feet), then take him back to the float and ask him to load in again.

On no account do you get mad, aggressive or have any thoughts such as 'that he is going to get on this float by hook or by crook!!'. The horse ***reads the attitude behind everything that you do and you cannot fool him.*** Any 'make' type thoughts are highly counterproductive as they cause the horse to feel unsafe and he's no way going in that float if he feels unsafe!! Have the attitude that you don't care whether he goes in or not, and that you have ALL the time in the world. This way you will be so low molecule, that you have a calming effect on the horse, causing him to be more willing to believe you that going in the float will be OK!!

## **My Horse Scrambles.....**

This is one of the harder scenarios to cure!! It is obviously far better if it is never caused in the first place. However, if you have this problem you need to spend a lot of time teaching the horse to move those feet in a confined space. All of the tasks listed above and more. You need to teach the horse how to move those feet 2" this way, that way. Horses that scramble are 'stuck' in their feet and fail to spread them out to balance.

### ***Causes of scrambling:***

- a centre partition that goes all the way to the floor. This vastly reduces the ability of the horse to spread his feet.
- slippery or flimsy mats. Especially once the horse has manured on them, these are lethal
- incorrect driving (see How to Give Your Horse a First Class Ride)

### **Safety tips**

1. When loading - always do up the back/bar /chain and ramp **before** you tie the horse up
2. When unloading - always untie the horse **before** undoing the ramp and back bar/chain
3. **Always** stand to the side of any ramp when putting it up or dropping it down.
4. Tie the horse to binder twine in the float. In the rare case of a genuine accident, it is necessary that he can break his head free to maybe save himself. Tie him so that he can step back and feel the back bar.  
Use a quick release knot.
- 5 Always carry a knife and a first aid kit in your vehicle

### **How to Give Your Horse a First Class Ride**

It is not just a matter of driving slowly. It is *how* you drive as much as anything. Accelerate *slowly* and slow down *slowly*. If you accelerate quickly you throw the horse against the back bar. If you brake too quickly his back feet slide underneath him, or he gets thrown onto the front bar.

***When cornering, wait until the float and vehicle are lined up before you accelerate. This especially applies to tighter bends and corners. Accelerating when the vehicle has gone around the corner while the float hasn't, really throws the horse off balance and is the number one cause of scrambling.***

**Slow down, preferably without having to use your brakes, before the corner for the same reason**

In general, drive as though the float is a big tub of water and you don't want to spill a drop!!



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