

Horse Training How-To from Horsemanship101.com

What I'd Teach Your Horse

Training & Re-Training the Basics

Second Edition

Keith Hosman, John Lyons Certified Trainer

*Part of the "Horse Training How-To" Series from Horsemanship101.com
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Keith Hosman, John Lyons Certified Trainer

Preface

If I had a dollar for every email I get asking “what to do” to make a riding horse out of the mare Uncle Emo just traded for the old RV—or how to retrain a horse that’s grown rusty—or some version on either theme, I’d be the world’s first gazillionaire. With the publication of this book then, I’m hoping to grab that distinction.

If you broke your horse to saddle and got on it for the first time yesterday, this book (chapter 1) is where you’d start tomorrow. If you have an older horse and you’ve taught him everything you know and he still don’t know nothin’, this book is where you’d start, (chapter 2). It’s a road map to building the foundation every horse needs, regardless of age, breed or background, regardless of what you’ve got ultimately planned for that horse.

Afterward, when your horse knows this book back to front, go train for barrels, roping, eventing, jumping or dressage. But today, basics are basics.

Section I is the stuff your horse needs to know. Section II is the stuff (the theory) you need to know. Practice the first handful of chapters in order, as written. Beyond that, you should feel free to mix and match depending on your needs or abilities. Some chapters are dependent upon others—but in those cases, I've spelled out necessary prerequisites.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Hosman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "K".

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Legs Mean Move

(Step 1 if This Is “Day 2” for Your Young Horse) Your young and very green horse has learned to pack a saddle and you’ve sat on it once or twice—but you’d like to do something more than sit there and wave at your friends as they ride off. You want a horse that... moves. Here’s what to do.

If the only experience your horse has with you as a rider is you strapping on a saddle then climbing up there and sitting, then the logical next step is to teach cues for movement. You’ll take up your training with this chapter. If your horse is beyond such basics, skip ahead; begin your training in the next chapter.

Here we’ll assume that you’re breaking a young, green horse who has become accustomed to carrying a saddle around and to you climbing on and off at least fifty times.

With a horse in such an early, early stage of training, we will not initially use our legs to ask for movement. Kicking a young, scared horse is a certain ticket to a bucking adventure. Nor will we cue the horse in the beginning with a kiss for two reasons: 1) We don’t (yet) have a way to force the horse to move if we kiss and it just stands there; we haven’t made the connection in the horse’s mind between the rein and moving

his legs. If it ignores our cue and then we can't get the feet moving, we've taught it that the cue means nothing. 2) Horses at this stage are often looking for things to be scared of—you don't want to do anything that might unnecessarily startle the horse and cause a wreck. Instead, we'll use our reins, then slowly mix in our cues and motivators, our kisses and bumps.

Begin by asking your horse to keep his head off to the side by several inches: Pick up one rein and take your horse's head to the side, let's say to the left, then let go of the rein. (See the chapter "How to Pick Up Your Reins Like a Pro" for tips on rein handling, specifically the section on "one-handed rein exercises") When the horse brings his head back forward, pick up your rein and bring his head back to the left, releasing again when he does. It is important to understand that you are not holding his head in place with constant pressure. You are to drop your rein each time his head moves to the side. Why? Because if you pulled his head over and locked it there, he might feel trapped and react in kind. But also because if your horse begins to associate his movement with your pressure on the reins, it will always require pressure to get the horse to move. We want the horse to move with no pressure on the reins.

In time, your horse will tire of having his head off to one side and he'll move his body to line up, in effect "straightening" his neck. He'll move his hips to the right if you'd picked up the left rein and vice versa. Repeat this sequence until the horse realizes that you will allow him to keep his head forward when he moves his feet.

Hip Control, Part I

Control of your horse's hips is the key to all the "stuff your horse can do." Here we start unlocking your horse's potential with a few basic and easy exercises.

The ability to control your horse's hips is paramount in any training program. It's where we begin training the green horse, the key you'll need to unlock "stuff your horse can do." Stuff like turning; that's an obvious example. (Turn the hips, turn the horse.) But hip control is also critical to gaining shoulder control in the early stages of training and to more advanced maneuvers later on such as the flying lead change or correcting dropped shoulders. Vital to schooling the young, sometimes-rambunctious green horse, it also lends the ability to shut your bronc down when it gains too much speed or to force a change of direction when he's thinking left and you're thinking right.

We'll begin with a quick ground lesson before getting you into the saddle.

Put a headstall, reins and snaffle bit on your horse. (You don't want to start this work using a halter. The signal to the horse isn't as clear as from the bit and some horses who are especially out of control can drag you from here to eternity if they're simply outfitted in a halter.) You'll also need a dressage whip.

Do this exercise with a friend—you'd be surprised what they can see from their vantage point. Their insight and honesty might speed you through this.

Flip the reins over the horse's neck as if you're going to ride. Stand on his left side, near his shoulder, facing him. Take the rein near his mouth just below the slobber strap so that your thumb is toward the rear of the horse. Raise the dressage whip in your right hand as if conducting the Philharmonic and kiss. If he doesn't move (and he probably won't at first), tap him on the rump. If he still doesn't move, relax, you gotta start somewhere. You can tap a little harder, perhaps quicker in order to "kind of annoy" the horse. Don't smack the horse unless you're willing to chance a quick kick to your ribs. Trust me, you'd be amazed how high and far those back legs can reach.

Keep tapping, annoying the horse till it moves; teach him that your body language (raising the whip, for instance) means move forward.

Apply a little "back" pressure with your left hand on the rein—but ask the horse (with your crop and stance) to move forward. He'll have little choice, if you're persistent, than to bend his neck a little. That's what you're looking for: a little give. Release immediately. Skip this step and you'll find that some horses will simply go straight up on their hindquarters (dragging you with them) as the training progresses. So, don't.

Next step: Without your horse, look down at the ground and slowly spin around, being careful to keep your feet within the same 1 square foot of ground. You should be simply turning around in the same spot like the center of a clock. Put your hands out like you're

conducting again, your baton, sorry, crop, in your right hand. Pretend a horse is there, traveling around you like the Earth around the Sun.

Staying in one spot is important; horses think like this: "I'm the boss if I can make you move—and vice versa." And we're trying to gain control—so listen up, this is important. Remember that great line in "A League of Their Own" when Jon Lovitz says to the girl "See, how it works is the train moves, not the station." Same thing here: While you may get dragged when you first begin, try your best to stay in one spot as you conduct this training and your horse walks around you.

Now, get your horse and do the same thing: With the rein in the left hand (as before) and your crop at the ready, ask your horse to walk around you in a circle to the left. Look down and watch the horse's front and back feet. What we want is for the horse to travel around you with the back and front feet on the same track even briefly. If the horse's shoulder is too far away and the hips too close (as if the horse is looking or turning to the right and pulling you along) then take a step back and pull the horse's head with you. If the shoulder is too close (and the hip too far), then simply step away; at this point in your horse's training we have little choice but to get out of the way. In either case, try speeding the horse up to bring him more into line, being careful to guide that oncoming shoulder away from you as best you can, smoothly around to the left.

If the horse turns in to you and tries to stop... don't let him. Immediately get him moving again, in essence saying "That is not what's going to get you a release. Get moving." You may have to do this quite a few times

before your horse learns the mechanics. Be firm and quick about it. Your biggest enemy is the horse losing momentum and rocking back.

At first, turn with your horse. But, the moment your horse takes that second consecutive step with both front and back feet on the same set of tracks, stop spinning but ask the horse to continue walking around you for two steps. (You'll stop, he won't.)

Smoothly step out and bring the horse's nose toward his rear, causing the hips to swing around (to your left if you're standing on the side from which you typically lead and later vice-versa). When you first begin you may need to really try and make the nose touch the hip. Not literally possible, sure, but thinking you are will help. Keep the back legs rotating around the front of the horse until the horse's inside front leg (the one nearest you) stops, however briefly. Walk the horse forward a few steps and release all pressure. Done.

Pitfall: Don't allow your horse to lose its motion and rock back. If he just kind of mulls around, put some energy into him with your trusty dressage whip. Horse and human should always be thinking "forward." The most important thing your horse is going to gain out of this whole exercise is his making the connection between pressure on his mouth (via the rein) and your request to move his hips. To get that you'll need forward motion. Lots of it. A nice side effect of this exercise, by the way, is that it has a nice way of softening your horse's neck—that is, as long as you are kind, patient, and release the moment the horse even thinks about taking the correct step.

Books by This Author

Check out these titles from Keith Hosman

- Crow Hopper's Big Guide to Buck Stopping
- Get On Your Horse: Curing Mounting Problems
- Horse Tricks
- How to Start a Horse: Bridling to 1st Ride
- Round Penning: First Steps to Starting a Horse
- Trailer Training
- What I'd Teach Your Horse (Basic Training)
- What Is Wrong with My Horse? (Problem Solving)
- When Your Horse Rears... How to Stop It
- Your Foal: Essential Training

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Meet the Author

Keith Hosman, John Lyons Certified Trainer



Keith Hosman lives just outside of San Antonio, Texas and divides his time between writing how-to training materials and conducting training clinics in most of these United States as well as in Germany and the Czech Republic.

Visit his flagship site horsemanship101.com for more D.I.Y. training and to find a clinic happening soon near you.

