

Tying Your Horse

A recent discussion on tying up horses prompted me to sit down and write a little about this.

I have noticed in recent times that there are (on a whole) two schools of thought about how horses should tie up.

Theory no.1: All horses should tie solid and learn not to pull back or escape.

Theory no.2: All horses should be tied to something that breaks relatively easily like bale twine.

I believe all horses should be taught to tie solid and never test the lead rope. This should be taught at an early age and I will outline how to safely teach this to a young horse later on.

I am aware that at Pony Clubs etc. the method taught is to tie to bale twine. This comes from a largely English influence (in Australia) on what should be done and how it should be done. I see many horses that have only ever been tied to bale twine. In most cases they stand ok whilst they want to but they also will pull back and break away at a time of their choosing. Once they have broken the bale twine once or twice a tying up problem has been created. The horse has found that for a small pull back he is rewarded by his freedom. Tie one of these horses solid and they panic when the “break away” does not happen. This causes them to thrash or break gear or fall backwards or throw themselves down. These are all dangerous for the horse and handler. I see many horses with injuries caused through poor training in regards to tying up.

I guess in Australia our horsemen discovered that due to vast open spaces they could not afford to lose their horse. Horses had to tie without pulling so that work could be carried out on the ground etc.

I believe many peoples exposure to how to teach a horse to tie up is “off putting” and seen as risky and in many cases cruel to the horse. This is true. Many people believe the only way to teach a horse to tie solid is to tie it up and then let it thrash it out until it gives up. Please do not do this.

Many people are taught that the above is ok if a neck collar is used. Again this should be avoided. The days of tying a horse to a snubbing post with a collar and bagging it down should be gone by now. Beware if you do subscribe to this method that some of the neck collars sold in Australian chain type saddlers are poorly made and the rings are far too weak for this job. To sell them is negligent and a horse can be easily killed if gear like this breaks.



Have a look at an example of this equipment. The rings on the pull-back collar are cheap welded ones that easily break. Couple that with a \$2 toy lead rope and you are destined for failure. Risk to the horse with equipment like this is high. The people who make and sell this stuff are either not horsemen or they don't care. This gear would not withstand a Shetland pony's efforts in a pullback let alone a full sized horse. This gear is being sold to beginners and kids every day.

How then should we teach our horse to tie up or help a horse overcome a tying up problem?

I will explain in step format how I go about this.

Step 1: train your horse to respect the halter first. Good groundwork is the key to this and if you do not understand this or know how to teach it, find professional help. Ground work is not just for natural horsemen. All horses and all people can benefit from this. It creates horses that are soft safe and easy to handle on the ground. It makes horses respectful and easy to train. Never tie a horse that is disrespectful of the halter in hand. Never use tying up as a means of creating respect for the halter it is a dangerous shortcut. People who think groundwork is unnecessary limit themselves and what they can teach their horses. The classical dressage masters do much of their training on the ground. It is not some new phenomenon.



Step2: Teach your horse to step forward from halter pressure.



Stand directly in front of your horse and take a gentle pull on the halter. Wait until your horse steps forward and then immediately release the pressure by letting the lead rope sag. Repeat this over and over until your horse never resists. Ponying your horse off another is really beneficial to teach this as well.

Step 3: Use a [Tie up device](#)!

A [Safe Clip](#) or Tie Ring is a relatively cheap piece of equipment that makes teaching horses to tie up a breeze. They remove the need for other equipment fancy tie up areas tire tubes (which I have seen break) and create a safe way for the horse to learn.

Basically they create a resistance as the rope pulls through causing the horse to feel the halter and if he has been taught steps 1 and 2 properly he will step forward. The beauty of this system is that because although there is resistance the rope gives at a level far below what is dangerous to the horse's pole etc. Because the rope gives horses tend not to panic and thrash. They learn very quickly that stepping forward releases the pressure just as they were taught in step 2 and after a very short test period will just stand there.

As the horse learns not to panic the level of resistance can be increased.



Because nothing breaks as he pulls back and he achieves nothing but making himself uncomfortable it is a very effective system.

I would like to see many more of these [devices](#) around the properties I visit.



Kendric starts to pull back.



Kendric feels the resistance as the rope pulls through the [device](#).



Kendric steps forward and the pressure releases



Very soon you will be able to leave your horse there and he will never test the rope.

When you are confident your horse is good with the [tie up device](#) you can either; continue to use it or tie your horse solid. Make sure you test your horse when tying solid for the first time or two and encourage them to feel the rope then help them to step forward with a stick or dressage whip.

There is no reason that the tie up devices cannot be clipped to the side of your float for outings etc.

Remember these work best when mounted above the horse's pole height but should be at least higher than his wither.



The end result: Horses that are relaxed and happy about being tied up like these at [Mountain Creek Stud in Victoria](#)

Some remedial horses may require extra work and this done incorrectly may be dangerous to both the horse and handler. Professional help is important in these circumstances.



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