

SEND HIM IN

Get him to follow the lead rope

By Joe Wolter

Loading into a trailer is one of the most important things a horse learns. There are few horses today that won't, at some time in their lives, be faced with getting into a trailer.

Years ago I had to deliver a filly to a ranch. I was running late, and I put the pressure on this mare and got her in the trailer in about 10 minutes, but I didn't bother to unload her. It was about a two-hour drive, and when I got there it took me two more hours to get her out. I had made it so difficult for her not to go in, that she went in, but then she found a safe place and didn't want to come out. You know, I wouldn't have wanted to come out either. A horse's attitude can affect both loading and unloading.

When I load one, I would much rather send him in than have to lead him in, and the way to do that is to get

him to where he will always follow the lead rope.

Often, when you are walking and leading a horse, he is simply following you, rather than you leading him. To get him to respond to the pressure of that lead rope, I stand facing the horse, and extend my hand with the lead rope straight out to my side. Then I attempt to lead the horse by me. I want him to respond to the pressure of that lead rope and follow it.

In the beginning, sometimes they go way out around me, and that's okay. They are just trying. But once they feel pretty good about going by me like that, both sides, I'll find a place along the fence so they have to go between the fence and me. They won't be able to swing way out. You can practice this when you put your horse away at night,

With my left arm

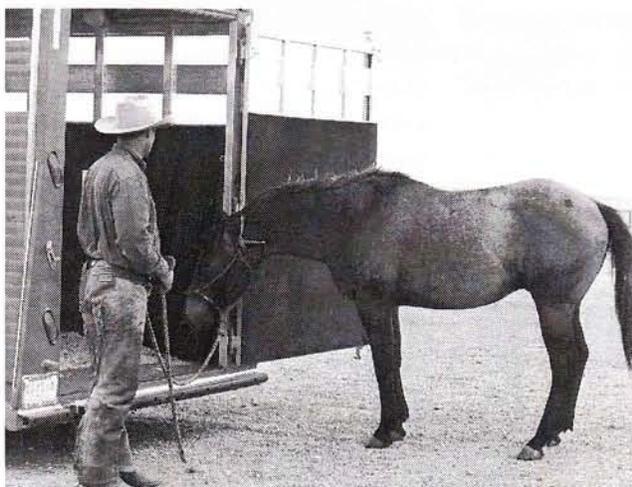
extended and putting pressure on the lead rope, and my right hand shaking the end of the rope, I am urging the colt to respond to the pressure of that lead rope.

putting him through the gate. Send him through the gate ahead of you, and then direct him around and take the halter off. When he responds to the pressure of the lead rope, he's ready to start trailer loading.

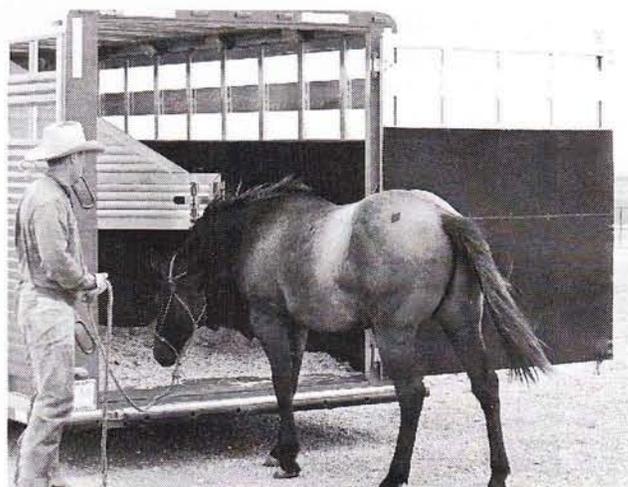
With the trailer gate open, I stand behind the trailer with my back to it so that as I lead him by me, he is headed toward the open trailer door. Howev-



Jim Jennings/Photos



If the colt stops at the trailer, I let him stand there as long as he is interested.



The colt might even drop his head and smell of the trailer floor. I let him stand there as long as he shows interest in getting in the trailer.

er, I am far enough behind the trailer so that he has room to circle around behind me if he wants – almost like I am longeing him on the end of the lead rope. As he's making this circle, I put a little pressure on him by twirling or shaking the end of the lead rope at him, but each time he comes around and starts toward that open trailer door, I ease off on the pressure. I get still. They are so sensitive, they will find where the least pressure is.

Sometimes he'll stop just outside the trailer door, and maybe he'll even smell of the floor. At this point, some people will really pressure him to step in, but in his mind, when we do that, we are punishing him for being there. I let him stand there as long as his attention is on the inside of that trailer. However, once he raises his head and looks around, I know he's lost interest in the trailer, and I lead him away and let him circle again.

When I lead him away and work

him like that, it builds a little more desire for him to be there. The best way to get a horse to stop or stand is to help him go, so before long there is a desire to stand. In a minute he figures out that I let him rest while he was interested in that trailer, and he decides that that's where he wants to be.

Next, he might actually step into the trailer with both front feet. I still won't pressure him to get all the way in. I'll wait until he becomes disinterested, and then I'll back him out and work him again. But I always wait until his mind drifts off onto something else before I back him out, or he won't be able to figure out what I want.

This, by the way, is a good time to work on backing out. Horses sometimes have a harder time backing out than they do going in. First of all, it's kinda unnatural for a horse to back up very far, and then, to back off a step? So right there, when he's halfway in, and thinking he would really rather come out, that's the time to ask him to back

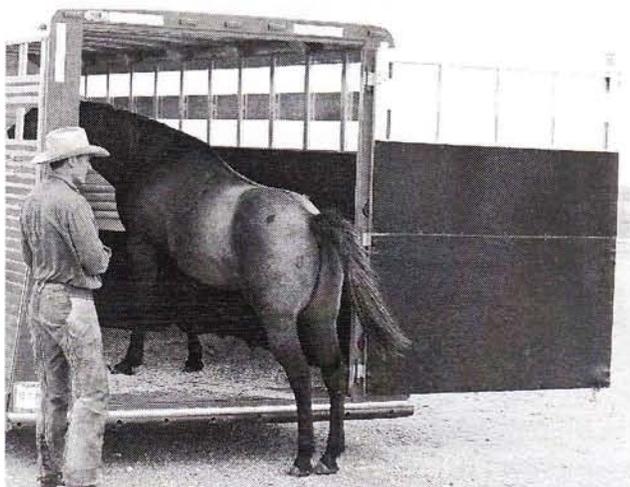
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out. Your idea becomes his idea.

When he does step all the way into the trailer, try not to close the door right then. Let him stand there a minute, and back him out. There are some that go in there, but then they have to get out. They went in, and they don't know why, but they know they have to get out. It's real important to let them come out. Let their idea become your idea.

I try to unload him before he tries to unload. I'll do this over and over, but each time, he stays in the trailer longer. Pretty soon he's comfortable in there, and it's no big deal whether he stays in or not. ☺

Four Sixes ranch trainer Joe Wolter says he's had some horses that just hopped right in the trailer, and others that took up to two hours – but not very many any more. The older he gets, the shorter time it takes because he's learned as much from the horses as they have from him. He also emphasizes that this is what happened with one particular horse, on one particular day. The application can change, but the principles stay the same.



Sometimes a colt might put both front feet in the trailer and still not go in. Even now I don't pressure the colt to go on in, and I allow him to back out as soon as he loses interest in what we are doing.



When the colt loads, I still don't shut the trailer door. I allow him to stand there a few minutes, and then back him out until he feels comfortable with the situation.