



ESI NEWS

Monthly
Newsletter

MAY 2022

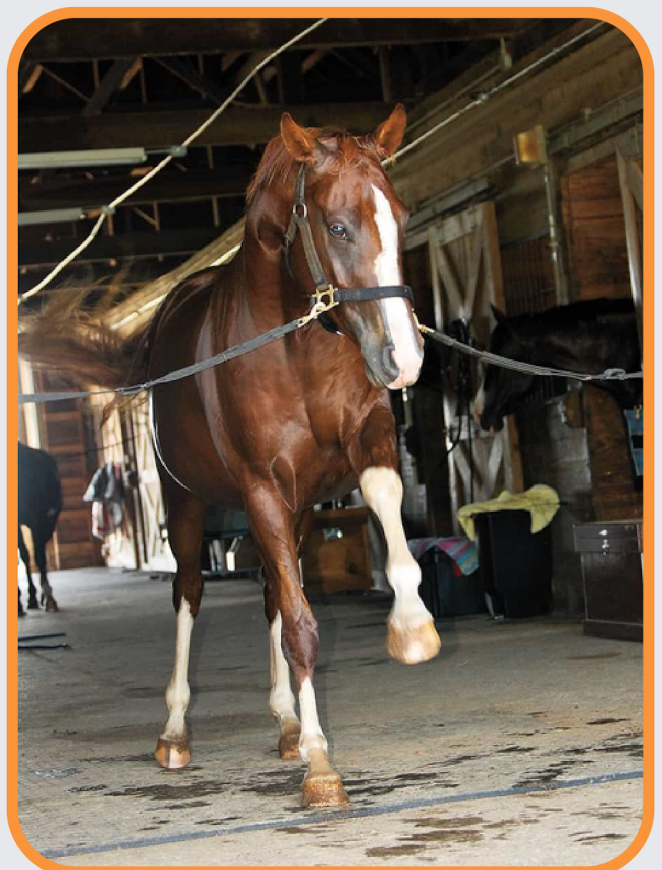
Ask ESI



My horse paws in the tie-ups..... *How can I stop him from doing this?*

What an annoying habit! If you happen to have an ex-racehorse, he might have learned to stand still in the tie-ups, but many horses do not. Surprisingly, it's not very common for people to actually train the habit of standing still unless otherwise asked. Many horses won't 'park' (stand still) at the tie-ups, and they also may not 'park' when tied up at a post or at the truck, or trailer.

Pawing is a sign that if the horse was not tied up, he would leave the area. To fix it, we need to train the horse to stand still, whether tied up or not!



These horses tend to be herd bound to some degree (they are attached to their companion and even us, their humans). They generally show agitation in the tie-up area, seeming stressed. They may lack focus, hold their head high, fidget around, and generally have a lack of obedience to the basic leading aids, as well as stand (and remain standing) until told otherwise. One of the first things we train our dogs to do is to sit and stay, until asked them to to move. It's the same principle with horses (minus the sitting!). We call is being able to **'Park'**.

Before you can train 'Park', it is best to train and practice the signals of 'stop' and 'go' in a place where the horse is most relaxed (he will learn more quickly) before testing them in the tie-up area. Obedience to signals means that your horse will move forward from a forward lead pressure of the lead on the head collar (he feels the pressure on the poll and jaw) and stop from a backward lead pressure that puts pressure on his nasal plane. These responses need to occur from a light aid and in 3 steps.



Teaching Phillip to 'Park'

'PLEASE', 'DO IT', 'THANK YOU'

This short phrase can be in time with the aids;

For example: **Asking the horse to step-back (from halt).**

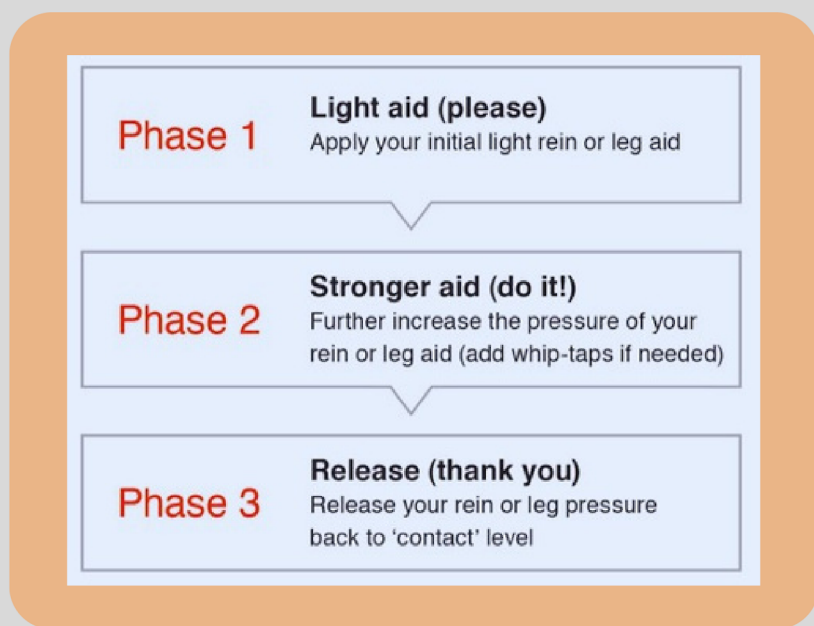
Step 1: 'PLEASE' (light aid) Contact of the head collar on the nose. The word "back" can also be used. The handler begins to brace his/her body.

Step 2: 'DO IT' (stronger aid) A backward and upward pressure on the lead until he steps back. The handler may have to 'keep asking' with increasing pressure if the response does not occur within 3 seconds.

Step 3: 'THANK YOU' (release aid) As soon as the horse steps back, the pressure on the nose is released which tells the horse his response was correct. Adding a word of praise 'good boy/girl' (or you could use a 'clicker'), followed by a nice scratch or food all enhances the training.

It is especially important with more anxious horses to be consistent when using these signals, particularly that nose pressure from the halter always means stop or down a gait. The aim is that the 'stop' response ends up from a light aid.

Once leading, a horse needs to stay in a rhythm and in self-carriage (not pushing on the handler), much like dogs stay in the 'heel' position. The horse should not be held there, he should walk beside you without pulling. If your horse is "pushy", practise many transitions from walk to halt every 6-8 steps until rhythm is achieved. The halting every 6-8 steps will have them anticipating the halt, and they will start to walk slower and quietly beside you.



Pressure/Release diagram

A HORSE THAT PAWS IS CONFUSED

When a horse paws, he generally pushes forward with his nose (putting pressure on the noseband) and begins to move, but of course he can't move because he is tied up. Because he leans on the halter, that backward pressure on the nose that once signalled the horse should stop moving is now meaning nothing. There are now multiple responses to the signal, and we have a problem. This can also occur when leading. The horse pulls with his nose to go faster and you hold him, trying to slow him with persistent nose pressure, essentially de-training the response to stop. He becomes confused about the rules; how can the same signal sometimes mean stop, and sometimes mean nothing at all? Imagine if the rules at the traffic lights changed – the red light used to mean stop, but now people are going. You don't know whether the light now means stop or go. How confident would you feel heading into traffic lights now?



A horse that paws in confused

Yelling at the horse or smacking him is not an affective method, and if anything will raise his anxiety further as he starts to slip further into a 'negative effective state' (or, a negative state of mind).

What will help, is paying attention to leading correctly, and training your horse to 'park'. This will greatly reduce the anxiety that has developed in the tie up area, which will reduce the need to paw.

'PARK' – WHAT IS IT?

When a horse Parks, he stands still anywhere and everywhere, whether tied up or not. Train 'park' in an area where the horse is relaxed first. Once the horse has learned to park, test him in other areas, including the tie up area.



Before you start

The main response you need to train before training the horse to park, is step-back. You can train step-back using a light whip-tap, or a wiggle of the lead rein. Whatever you do, you must be able to elicit a response while standing a few feet away from him.



Step back

Training with the lead rein: he will first need to learn to step back from halter pressure – pushing the lead rein back towards his chest (applying halter pressure on the nose) until he takes a step back, then immediately soften. If he walks forward, sideways or doesn't respond at all, continue until you get one (even small step back). Repeat until reliable and responsive (within 2 seconds). Then you can stand a little further back and jiggle the rein left and right until he offers a step back from a distance.

Training back with a whip-tap: Using a long whip (such as a dressage whip) lightly (but quickly) tap one foreleg repeatedly on the cannon bone (the one in front, or either leg if he's standing square) until he steps that leg back one step. If he lifts the leg or paws, simply continue to tap until he offers a step back. If the light whip-tap does not motivate him to step back, you can include a backwards rein aid to give him a hint of what you're asking of him. Repeat until he takes a step back from two light taps.

To train Park, standing facing the horse, just to the side of his head, and have the reins in one hand. If using a dressage whip, hold it in the other hand.

Do a downward transition to halt, release the contact and while facing the horse, take a step backwards. If the horse takes a step forward or sideways with his forelegs or hindlegs: say "back" and while staying still yourself(!) immediately ask him to step back. Ensure he steps back and doesn't just step sideways or lift his leg.



Lean in to step horse back

If he does that, ask him to step back again until the step is clearly backward. Don't step toward the horse when you correct him as he will be quick to learn that your stepping is a cue to initiate movement, and that is contrary to your goal.

Repeat until you can take multiple steps back without him moving.

When you walk towards him, if the horse moves backwards, ignore it. Continue to walk towards him and scratch him. He will soon learn you moving around does not indicate he needs to move.

When the horse has begun to stand immobile, retreat a little further away, again correcting him if he moves forward or sideways. When this is successful, begin to move away facing the forward direction and from both sides (this one will trick him, as he is conditioned to walk beside you, until now.. Train other contexts too such running away a few steps and moving in circles or arcs around him. You will soon find that you can put the reins over his head and he will stand immobile while you walk around him. Take this in small steps and begin this training in safe places.

When the horse is parked at some distance from you, increase the rein contact slightly and say 'walk-on'. Then re-park the horse. Repeat this all over the training area.



**Moving in an arc around the horse
whilst he is in 'park'**

REWARDING PARK

Remember the power of saying 'good boy/girl', as soon as the correct response occurs and scratch him (where he likes it best) as quickly as possible.

Clicker training is very useful in these situations. The noise of the clicker is used to mark the response of standing still and food is used as a reward. If a clicker is unavailable then a cluck with the tongue is easy to use again paired with food. Make sure you approach with food and ideally feed him with your hand away from your body.

The length of time the horse remains standing can be increased and rewarded and this will stop the habit of pawing.

Remember: You have now trained him to stay still until signaled. So, when you do want him to walk beside you, remember to apply a lead aid first, then start moving your legs.



Rewarding Park with a scratch

PARKING AT THE TIE-UPS

Now your horse has learned park, practise in the area you tie him up. This may take some time as he will have associations with this area and movement. Be calm and consistent. If he paws, treat this as movement and ask him to step back. Begin with him untied. When you can reliably park him in the area without tying him up, you can actually tie him up (purely for safety purposes, as now technically, he doesn't need tying!). If he is cross-tied, start with one side, continue to train Park, then add the other side.

MAKE THE TIE UP AREA A GREAT PLACE TO BE

Horses love food, companionship and touch. Have some hay available for him to eat where you tie him up, make sure he will park before he gets the hay if possible.

If he is more secure with other horses around then do so, he will still learn to park but will be less anxious about it.

Spend lots of time grooming, you are creating a great bond between you and your horse when you do.

This e-Book will help you train these responses, and many other in hand responses: <https://esi-education.com/product/e-book-setting-good-ground-rules/>

Manu xx

