

“ He just doesn't want to go out on the trail alone, he has a real attitude. I can get just past the end of the driveway, after that he refuses to go, rears if I get after him and tries to turn around on me.”

A little bit of detective work showed that the horse was only 4 years old and was fine on the trail with other horses, but did not like to be in the lead. So going out by himself was a very scary prospect for this horse and with a few TTEAM tools under his belt he gained enough confidence in himself and his rider that a few weeks later they could safely venture out by themselves.

To start with I would always recommend that if you ride by yourself (with a helmet of course) you leave a note at the barn stating the time you left, the time you plan to return and the route you are taking. If you are an unsure rider it takes a saint of a horse to shoulder the entire responsibility of going out alone and bringing both of you back home safely. Many horses, if they don't feel confident enough in themselves, the rider and their surroundings, simply won't leave the yard. I don't think this is as much aptitude as it is lack of security and with TTEAM this can greatly be increased.

Doing your homework

Of course we all know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and teaching your horse to be comfortable about going out alone will be much easier than creating a problem and then trying to fix it.

Very few horses are natural born leaders, most prefer to follow. This makes training them much easier, as they are generally happy to follow our lead, but when asked to go out alone the horse needs to be bold enough to be in front. Basic TTEAM ground exercises will teach him to come forward when asked. The dingo is an indispensable tool for teaching horses to come forward and it carries over to riding without a hitch. The bodyrope or bodywrap will give your horse a better sense of his body and the containment makes most of them feel more secure. Different obstacles, such as the labyrinth, star, bridge and plastic will help prepare him for things he might encounter on the trail and teach him that he can trust your request to keep going. Teaching him to lower his head from the ground as well as under saddle can be incredibly helpful when you get into a situation where the horse doesn't want to go forward. You should be able to lead your horse comfortably in the ring and all around the yard before attempting to take him for a walk on the trail. The first time you lead your horse on the trail you might want to go out with another horse, or maybe follow a group of riders that are going for a ride and then turn around earlier and lead your horse home alone. If the situation allows, why not set up a few pylons or maybe even a labyrinth somewhere on the trail so the horse meets something familiar that he is good at.

Make sure that the horse is comfortable being ridden out in a group. If he is reluctant to leave home with other horses, or is unhappy about working in the ring, go back to some groundwork. Are you a confident enough rider to be able to stop your horse if he manages to turn around and tries to bolt for home? Does the horse display the same behavior with a different rider, a different saddle or bit?

Exercises under saddle - also very useful for ring sour horses

Before attempting to take a horse out on the trail by himself he should be able to go out with just one other horse and lead the ride. A horse who has to follow will most likely have trouble going out alone.

A fun exercise to teach horses to become leaders is to ride with 2 or 3 other people. Ride following each other and have the last rider pass the others and take the lead. Then again let the last rider pass and take the lead. This teaches horses to be in front, but assures them that they won't have to be the leader for long. Another great exercise is to have the leading horse stop and the others pass. This teaches horses more patience and to listen to the rider. If your horses know each other you can also spread out about 3-horse lengths apart and have the last horse slalom through the other horses to reach the front of the line. These exercises, as well as drill team riding can also be extremely beneficial for ring sour or “lazy” horses as it gives the horses and riders a lot to think about and makes the riding lesson more interesting.

Finally you are on your way

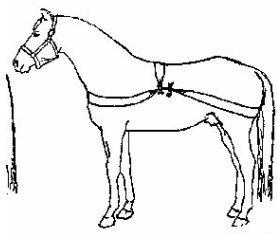
I think one of the greatest myths in horsemanship is the saying that once you start something the horse has to finish it or he will learn to “get away with it”. This goes for jumping a certain jump, loading into the trailer and going down the trail. Humans are much more goal and agenda oriented than horses are and there are no rules about changing your plan halfway through the exercise. Who says that once you are in the saddle you can't dismount anywhere along the ride, lead for a few yards and then remount. Your horse is not winning, he is still going away from home, but you are safe and successful without getting into a fight, which would have told the horse that he was right in the first place, going out alone was not a good idea, look at the trouble he is getting into.

If you are riding out by yourself and at a certain spot your horse refuses to go forward ask him to lower his head. For many horses it is more difficult to move forward and to think softly when their head is in the fight-flight position. Sending a very clear and soft picture of your horse nicely walking forward can also make a tremendous difference in the outcome of your ride. Visual-

ize your horse quietly walking past a trouble spot and there is a good chance that the horse will respond to the image. Are you breathing? Also watch that you keep your eyes well ahead on the trail where you are going and not staring down on your horse's ears, which will only help to root him further. If you have done your homework and the horse responds well to the dingo in hand he should also come forward using the dingo under saddle. The horse that is walking too slow and with too much hesitation might benefit from lightly tapping (not hitting) him rhythmically with your wand on his shoulder, rump, shoulder, rump just a hair more actively than he is walking to encourage him to pick up that rhythm and speed up.

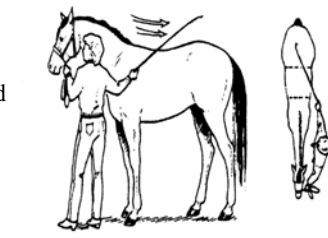
Case History

I once worked with a 15-year-old mare who was extremely barn sour. She was ready for a fight if I turned her towards the driveway and leaving the yard was not up for discussion. She would rear, wheel around and head for home if I managed to get her just a few steps away from the hitching rail. Getting after her would not have worked as she was already very upset and while I might have been able to win a fight I don't think it would have given me lasting results. A fight before every ride was not something that was an option for me. I did not know anything about her background, but she seemed nice enough going out in a group and was easy and confident in the ring. So was she stubborn, willful, had an attitude, wanted the fight or was going out alone really intimidating for her? Since she didn't know me well, how could she know that she could trust me? Since she was a horse that seemed to know a lot about NO and getting into fights with people I decided to surprise her. I tied a bucket with a small piece of carrot in it to every 5th fencepost along the driveway. On our first attempt it was even difficult for me to lead her to the first 2 buckets, so I changed the situation and hid buckets with treats all over the yard. She caught onto the "finding the bucket with treats" exercise very quickly and after a few minutes willingly came down the driveway with me, ears forward, no resistance and no thought about resisting. The next session started us right down the driveway, leading her to the buckets that were now spaced further apart and we ended up with a ½ hour walk on the trail we would be riding the very next day. I mounted on our way back and quietly rode her home. To my surprise when I tried the exercise under saddle the next days she willingly marched down the driveway, feeling confident that I would not get after her and that we would eventually return home.

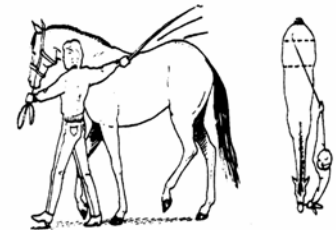


Bodywrap—to give a horse a more confidence, a better sense of self-image and more self-control.

The Dingo: is the leading position we use to teach the horse to go forward from a signal from the wand. The lead line is held in the forward hand, folded safely through, not around, your fingers. The wand is in the other hand with the button end of the wand in your hand. (If you are on the left side of the horse the lead will be in your left hand and your wand in the right.) The exercise has four steps: steady, stroke, signal and scoop.



the Dingo you stroke the horse's back two times with the wand.



u tap the horse three times lightly on the croup.

Steady the horse with a light contact on the chain

Stroke his back from the withers to the croup—two or three times

Signal on the lead with a light, forward signal and release "Scoop" the croup in a forward scooping motion with the wrist to give a tap, tap with the wand on the top of his croup.

At the same time give a verbal command "and waaalk" as you move your feet forward.

Be sure to give the forward signal on the lead BEFORE the tap on the croup. The horse must learn that the signal on the croup means to come forward. This is an excellent lesson to teach a young horse so when the rider is on his back he will understand the forward signal.

Did you ever wonder.....

In doing TTEAM leading exercises we recommend people lead their horses from both the left and right side, however, at most stables you would be considered uneducated if seen leading from the right side.

Where did this tradition of leading from the left side start? In the military, of course. Same reason that we are taught to mount from the left side—the swords were carried on the left which made it practical to mount and lead from that side.

However, in Iceland it is their tradition to mount from the right although in recent years most riders mount from both sides. In asking for a reason of the right sided mounting I soon found out it was for the same reason as mounting from the left, only the Vikings carried two handed swords which were worn on the right side.

It is useful to teach your horse to be mounted from both sides but it can take some practice for the rider. Besides the practical aspect should you be stuck somewhere you can't get off or on the usual side, it helps keep you and your horse more balanced and flexible-mentally and physically and equalizes the wear on your saddle.