

GET BACK!

The majority of a horse's movement is in a forward motion. If something is causing a loose horse to back up, they will usually shift their weight back, then turn and move away in a forward motion. The horses inherit instinct is to run away from danger and they can easily see behind them at a distance, so they will not hesitate to run if threatened.

A horse may back straight and not turn if they are more curious than threatened but it would be unusual for the horse to get much experience without a person handling them to keep them straight. With this in mind, when we want to get our horse to back straight for an extended length, it will take some understanding on the part of the person to acknowledge that this is one thing the horse has little experience doing.

If we watch different horses and analyze what is taking place some look like the person is trying to push a chain, parts are going every direction. The head may go up in the air, or tuck under toward the chest, the shoulders may go to the left or right, and the hips may go to one side or the other also, but not straight back. Other horses can back and look like the chain is being pulled with every link moving exactly on the same line. In this case the horse's spine will be exactly straight from the tip of the tail to the poll, and the poll may not have any vertical flexion. Why?

Because, the horse has engaged the hindquarters to pull, "the chain", before the person puts too much pressure on the head trying to, push "the chain".

How do we get this? First, the person needs to understand what makes the difference and what it feels like. It may be easier to learn what it feels like if another person is visually helping. It is as simple as knowing if the hind feet are moving before the front or if the front feet are moving before the hind. In other words the front starts to push the hind, "pushing a chain" or the hind pulling the front, "pulling a chain". If the hind foot leaves the ground before the opposite front, the hind would be pulling, or if the hind and front leave simultaneously at least the hind is not causing resistance. The resistance is what you feel in the pushing scenario that would be when the front foot moves before the opposite hind foot.

If the horse is light and supple with the hindquarters moving from side to side, it will be easier to move them back. Start by putting just enough pressure on the reins that the horse acknowledges you. This means the slightest movement of the head, up, down, looking back to one side, anything. Then put one leg on his side to move the hindquarters over, use one rein to reinforce only if necessary. As soon as the hind foot steps over one step, move the hindquarters back over

the other way one step. All we are trying to do is step the hindquarters left and right one step from side to side. If the horse moves forward, be firm on the reins until he is back in his original tracks then resume the light pressure. If they are swinging real free, without stopping, and the horse hasn't stepped back, just put a little more pressure on the reins to see if he will shift his weight back. When he does take a step, just sit still for at least as long as the horse worked leading up to taking a step back so he can realize how he got out of the situation. Two or three minutes wouldn't be too long. This may be a good time to get on the cell phone.

One thing that will make a difference is if the rider will take all the weight out of the seat and stand with their weight more on the stirrups or thighs, when the feet are moving, the horse will raise the loin easier and thus make it easier to position and use the hindquarters. With some practice, and not violating the horse's confidence you can get older horses backing better, or get a colt to come back the first step. It's just a matter of getting the hind feet started first.

Good Luck and God Bless
Martin Black