



# The

Use this low-stress stock-handling technique—and your horsemanship and stockmanship insight—to load cattle into a trailer.

# LOADING

# Mode

STORY BY MARTIN BLACK WITH JENNIFER DENISON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARRELL DODDS

If you enjoy doing your job on a horse and you're around cattle, it's possible that there will come a time when you'll have an opportunity to load a sick or stray animal in a trailer by yourself. If you're dealing with a single cow, you could rope and pull it into the trailer. However, if you're loading several cows, in an open pasture, miles from the nearest corral, by the time you get the first one loaded the others could be long gone.

I have found it to be faster and less stressful for the cattle and my horse to teach the cow to get in the trailer on her own without roping and dragging her, or trying to use a fence to corner her and push her in.

In this article, the fifth in a six-part series, I'll build on the skills discussed in the previous lessons, while explaining and demonstrating a low-stress trailer-loading technique. Not only can it be useful when managing cattle, but it also can be an exercise in sharpening your and your horse's skills.

While working cattle alone in the vast open range country in south-western Idaho, where sorting or branding was done outside and the use of a corral wasn't even a consideration, I had to learn various ways to function independently. That's where I learned the principles of working cattle on horseback, such as this trailer-loading technique. It applies the elements of

flight zone and balance point, as well as offense and a little bit of defense. These concepts were discussed in the second and third installments of this series, respectively.

The more you can maneuver your horse the easier it may be to influence the cow, but proper timing of pressure and relief, and the proper position on the cow will influence her to do whatever you want.

## Select a Location

Before there were fences and trailers, ranchers had to know their cattle well and train them to be worked. The cattle were wild, and they'd jump up and run when they saw a horse and human coming toward them. If the cowboy didn't get the cattle stopped and settled, they could get away and he'd have to spend several hours, or even days, getting them back together again.

Today, cattle are bred with calmer dispositions and they're handled more frequently, so they're accustomed to seeing people. However, if you work your cattle fast or crowd them, you'll likely end up with wild cattle who try to get away from you whenever they see you coming. Instead, I'd rather be able to control the cattle by acknowledging and using their flight zone and balance point to direct their speed and direction of travel, respectively.

Location can be important when loading cattle in a trailer. It's prefer-

able to work in a flat, open area, free of trees and other major obstacles, and with decent footing. You should be able to ride a large circle around the rig so you can gradually work the cattle closer to the trailer.

If your cattle haven't been loaded into a trailer or are afraid of the confinement, you don't want to park near a fence line, because as you put pressure on the animal as it tries to leave, you might cause it to run through the fence. If there are trees or obstacles in the area, you'll have to slow down and decrease your pressure while you get around them. Then the cow will learn to seek the relief provided while you negotiate the obstacles and start hiding there. If you put pressure on the cow for trying to leave and you get close to a wire fence, then back off to prevent her from running through the fence, she'll quickly learn to stay close to the fence. Then, when you apply enough pressure to get her off it, she could go through the fence.

On the other hand, if there's no fence, and the only obstacle around is the trailer, the cow will learn to seek relief at the trailer when you apply pressure, encouraging her to move toward the opening.

**COW-  
HORSE  
CONFIDENCE**  
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BLACK



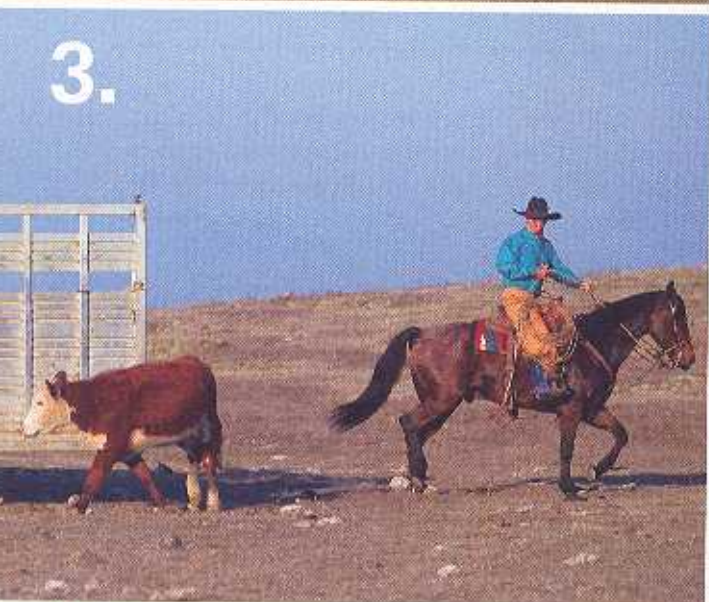
1.



2.



3.



4.



**1.** Tracking this cow off the hill and toward the trailer, my horse is in an offensive position. I'm to the edge of her flight zone, maintaining forward motion and staying on the balance point to keep her heading in the right direction. As long as we're moving toward the trailer, we'll take it easy. **2.** As we approach the trailer and the cow attempts to leave, I'll ride toward her balance point, or her shoulder, and circle her around the rig. I'll wait for her to yield to the pressure and find relief by moving back toward the trailer. **3.** Here, the cow is approaching the trailer door, so I turn tail to her, offering her relief. **4.** This cow has found the opening and is inspecting it. She has to think about it before she's ready to jump inside.

### Help the Cow Find the Trailer

Once your trailer is parked in a desirable place, you're ready to begin the loading process. For the sake of simplicity, I'll explain how to load one animal, but bear in mind that you can use this trailer-loading technique on one cow or a small herd of cattle. The cattle might not all load at the same time, but you can simultaneously train the herd by putting pressure on them when they're trying to move away from the trailer, and then offer them relief when they're looking at or moving closer to the trailer.

Eventually, they'll seek relief at the

trailer, individually or as a herd, and load into it to get away from your pressure.

To work a single animal, begin tracking the cow around the entire rig using offensive tactics. (For more on offensive maneuvers and tracking cattle, see "On the Offense," March 2008 *Western Horseman*.) You need to be able to read the cow's behavior and determine when she's getting tired. Then offer her relief by easing your pressure when she's near the trailer. The cow will most likely set the pace, but try to keep her at a trot or slow lope if possible.

A wilder cow will move fast, and you'll need to take her on a larger circle to get her tired. To regulate the cow's speed, posi-

tion your horse in her flight zone, staying slightly behind the balance point. Back out of her flight zone when she makes a move toward the trailer.

It should take only three or four circles around the trailer to wear the cow down to a point that she starts looking for some relief. You'll know she's getting tired when she tries to slow down. Keep in mind that an overly exhausted cow will urinate frequently and switch her tail. Avoid driving the cow to this point, or getting her angry or snorty, because she'll sulk up and make poor choices, and you'll most likely not be able to get her into the trailer without force.



If you do get the cow too tired, point her toward the trailer, then get out of her flight zone and allow her to rest and air up. Then slightly increase your pressure, gradually riding into the flight zone and on her balance point, directing her closer to the truck and trailer.

Your first goal is to help the cow find the trailer. After she experiences some increase of pressure for trying to leave, push her toward the trailer. If she tries to leave, she'll run into the pressure of your horse and speed up. Maintain the pressure until she starts to tire, and then turn her toward the trailer if she hasn't already volunteered.

The basic principal is that she puts pressure on herself by pushing back on you and learns she can get relief by moving toward the rig and eventually the trailer door. The instant she moves toward the rig, stop your horse or turn him away, and allow the cow to rest. As soon as she moves away from the trailer, ride back toward her and start circling her closer to the trailer again. This teaches the cow that when she moves near the trailer she gets relief, and when she moves away from it she has to work harder.

At first, the cow might go around the truck and try to hide under the gooseneck, between the truck and trailer. It's fine to let her experience relief next to the trailer, but don't allow her to get under the gooseneck or she might stay there and hide from the pressure, rather than loading inside the trailer. It's better to ease her away from that area and toward the trailer door.

### Direct the Cow Toward the Door

Now that the cow understands that the trailer is a pleasant place and leaving is more work, hone that knowledge by showing her that the trailer-door area is a better place by moving her toward that spot. When she moves toward the trailer opening, stop your horse or turn away. Then work up to easing her into the trailer. It might take five or 25 minutes to get her to load the first time, but once she figures out that you'll leave her alone when she's inside the trailer, subsequent attempts will become faster.

Don't be in a hurry to close the door. Let her realize the trailer's relief, then ease up to close the door. If she comes back out, just work her some more.



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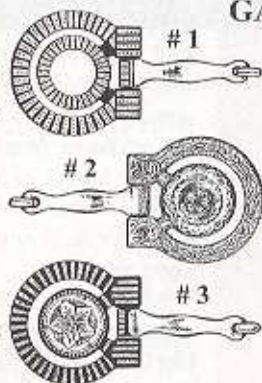


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«5. The cow approaches the trailer, I turn away, giving her instant relief while she investigates. 6. As soon as the cow finds the opening, she enters the trailer. 7. When she stands quietly, I close the door.



It's not natural for a horse or a cow to want to enter a confined space, such as a trailer. Whenever I'm dealing with fear in a horse, I first try to identify what the horse sees as confining and either eliminate it or determine how to show the horse how to accept the confining situation. As with horses, cattle are herd animals, which means they seek out other cattle for security. When training a cow to load into a trailer, you have to reprogram her to be like a ground squirrel and run to a hole, rather than the herd, for security.

Having said that, some cattle jump in the trailer right away, while others need encouragement. When the cow does load, make sure you stop your horse or turn him away from her so she feels a noticeable moment of relief. This is often a situation in which turning tail to the cow is the most efficient and least threatening way to hold her in the trailer.

The cow may spook at the trailer rattling and come out. If she's panicked, allow her to exit on her terms, rather than trying to hold her in there. The more pressure you apply in this situation, the more fearful she'll become, and loading in the trailer will become a negative experience for her. Instead, wait for her to come out and then work through the loading routine again. It shouldn't take as long this time for her to find the trailer door.

However, if the cow is trying to exit the trailer and isn't panicked, you could assume a defensive role and ease toward her, gently blocking her path out of the trailer. (For more on defense, see "Develop a Strong Defense," April 2008 *Western Horseman*.)

With little experience, the cow will seek the relief inside the trailer, and you'll no longer have to worry about loading cattle in an open, remote area without corrals. 🐾



*Jennifer Denison is a Western Horseman senior editor. For more information on Martin Black, his DVDs, or his schools and clinics, visit [martinblack.net](http://martinblack.net). Send comments on this story to [edit@westernhorseman.com](mailto:edit@westernhorseman.com).*

## Martin Black



A FIFTH-GENERATION Owyhee County, Idaho, rancher and horseman, Martin Black started training working cow horses at a young age, using Spanish-California-style horsemanship. He worked with some of the best vaqueros and horsemen in Idaho, Oregon and Nevada, including his grandfather, Albert Black; his great-uncle, Paul Black; Tom Dorrance; Ray Hunt; Gene Lewis and Tom Marvel, all of whom influenced his gentle training methods and equine intuition.

Black has conducted horsemanship, colt-starting, ranch-roping and cattle-working clinics throughout North America, as well as in Australia, Europe and Brazil, and advocates using cow work to train horses.

Between clinics, Black travels between his home in Idaho and his ranch in Sanger, Texas. He still starts horses for the public and for ranches along the West Coast, trains racenorses on the East Coast, and buckaroos on the Alvord Ranch in Oregon. He also offers schools at the Alvord Ranch and at his Texas facility.

For more information on Black and his DVDs, visit [martinblack.net](http://martinblack.net).