



KEN McNABB

HORSEMANSHIP

DISCOVERING THE HORSEMAN WITHIN

Stallion Manners

By Ken McNabb with Katherine Lindsey Meehan

If you own a stallion or have ever been around one, you probably understand the importance of good manners. A badly mannered stallion can be very dangerous to the people and horses around him. This month, we will discuss some simple exercises for establishing respect and control when you are leading your stallion in any situation. You may wonder, are stallion manners different from mare or gelding manners? I say no. Good manners are good manners, regardless of the horse. You may hear people excusing their horses' behavior, saying "he's a stallion, he just acts this way". Being a stud horse is no excuse for bad behavior. In fact, with a stallion, I believe you actually have to have HIGHER expectations for good behavior, not lower. Think about what your level of expectation would be for a gelding in any given situation. Then pick that up a notch, and expect that of your stallion. Stud horses have more distractions and reasons to ignore us than a gelding does, so we need to work harder to be consistent and have high expectations with them to get the same level of good behavior. For the exercises I want to explain today, you will only need a rope halter, lead rope, and a buggy whip.

First, I like to work with my stallion on the basic longeing exercise. The main purpose of this is to establish a cue to get the horse out of my space if I need to. Take the lead rope in one hand (the hand closest to the horse's head) and your buggy whip in the other hand. Extend your arm with the lead rope, asking your horse to move out and away from you. If he doesn't move, tap his hip with the whip. As soon as he moves forward, even one step, stop tapping and reward him. Once he will move forward and out on a circle around you consistently, ask him to stop and change directions. Stop him by stepping forward towards his path. If he doesn't stop, pull on the lead rope to bump his nose and bring him around to face you. Once your horse will longe consistently in both directions, moving out of your space and away from you on cue, you are ready to start the next part of this exercise.

Most of the problems that develop with stallions happen while you are leading your horse. Therefore, the rest of the exercises I want to cover deal with leading and getting your stallion to pay attention to you and your body cues while he is on the lead line. Start by practicing backing up. With a stallion I want to be very careful about how I ask him to back up. Rocking the horse back on his hindquarters and lightening his front end in preparation to back up puts him in a position to strike out, if he is so inclined. So, instead of walking straight at him, which could be seen as a challenge, I like to ask my stallion to back by standing next to his shoulder in the leading position, facing forward. Step back, keeping your body straight in line with his, and if he does not step back with you, tap the ground in front of him with the buggy whip. If he still does not move, tap his front legs **BELOW** the knee, in rhythms of three taps, until

he takes a step back. As soon as he does, stop tapping and reward him. It is important to tap below the knee, because tapping the upper leg or chest is more likely to encourage your horse to rear up. I like to try and avoid pulling on my horse's halter for this exercise. I want him to learn to read my body cues and pay attention to where I am at all times instead of always relying on having a hold on his halter.

The next step is to teach your horse to move forward leading off your body position. Stand next to him and lean your upper body forward. If he does not move forward, take a step forward and reach behind you with your outside arm with the whip. Tap him lightly on his hip to encourage him to move forward. Don't worry if your horse scoots sideways in the beginning. If he moves out in front of you, stop him and practice backing up until his eye is level with your shoulder again.

Next, we want to teach turns on the lead line. First teach your horse to turn with you to the inside. Turn your body, looking over your shoulder, and when you see his tail, give him a tap to bring that hip around to follow you. Soon he will follow your body and move his hip before you need to tap. You will also want to teach a turn to the outside. Make sure your horse is stepping over with his front legs as he turns away from you, not running forward as he turns. Once you have practiced all these exercises and they are going well with the whip, drop the whip and try everything without it.

All of these exercises will take lots of practice before they are perfect. Make sure they are all solid and then if your stallion ever loses focus and starts to act up while you are leading him, just go back to these exercises and get his mind back on you. The key to good stallion manners is to have a goal and a program, and to stick to that. Work on good behavior every time you lead your stallion anywhere.

Finally, I want to mention that I believe stallions need socialization. Yes, they are frequently very valuable and it's easy to want to keep them in a stall so they don't risk getting hurt. But, they are going to be much happier if they can be turned out with other horses at times. They are a herd animal like any other horse, and it's not healthy to keep them in isolation.

Enjoy your horses, and until next time, may God bless the trails you ride.

For more information on Ken McNabb's programs call us at 307-645-3149 or go to www.kenmcnabb.com.