

# Foundation Training For the Stop and Back Up



**By Larry Trocha**

**Larry Trocha Training Stables  
Petaluma, California**



Hi – I'm Larry Trocha.

Over many years working with young horses, I developed a series of training techniques to teach horses of any age, to become educated and eager riding partners. I am happy to share this knowledge with you through my foundational training program, available on video and now in this series of e-books.

In this particular book, I will show you how to teach your horse to stop and back up willingly and correctly. When you use the techniques discussed here, your horse will be more responsive and ready for the next step in his education.

And that brings up an important point: each segment in a well-executed foundational training program builds on the next. So, I encourage you to study my entire training series. You will end up with a really broke horse that is a pleasure to ride in the show ring, cutting, working cows or just on the trail.

By following each step in the **Larry Trocha Foundational Training Program**, you will achieve something so many people fail at – either because they are unwilling to spend the time necessary to correctly educate their horses or because they don't fully understand how a horse thinks, feels and learns.

And that is what I will teach you. Successful training requires this understanding, a lot of practice, and patience, patience, patience. You will also learn the real secret to teaching any horse to be cooperative, willing and relaxed partner – timing – knowing when to apply just the right amount of physical or psychological pressure and when and how to reward the horse for responding correctly.

So, read, learn and enjoy –

Larry

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## Foundation Training For the Stop and Back Up

<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<i>Doing your part to reach your training goals</i>	
<i>The training environment</i>	
<i>A quick word about your equipment</i>	
<i>The 4 R's: Request, Reward or Reprimand, and Results</i>	
<b>Preliminary Training Concepts</b> .....	6
<i>Yielding to bit pressure</i>	
<i>Understanding the meaning of "Whoa"</i>	
<i>Doubling gives you control</i>	
<b>Teaching a Green Colt to Stop</b> .....	9
<i>Getting the edge off</i>	
<i>Stopping by letting go</i>	
<i>Creating a brick wall</i>	
<i>The importance of standing still</i>	
<b>Teaching a Green Colt to Back</b> .....	11
<i>Resist, don't pull</i>	
<i>Be quick to reward</i>	
<i>When the horse locks up</i>	
<b>Stopping and Backing Up a Colt with 30 Days Training</b> .....	13
<i>Stopping from the trot and lope</i>	
<i>Flexing at the poll</i>	
<i>When the horse gets worried</i>	
<i>Don't ask for too much and know when to stop</i>	
<b>Stop &amp; Back Up a Colt with 2-3 Months Riding</b> .....	15
<i>Begin collection by rolling back</i>	
<i>Asking for sharper stops and multiple steps back</i>	
<b>Some Final Thoughts</b> .....	17
<b>Larry Trocha Horse Training Program</b> .....	18
<i>Train your horse the Larry Trocha Way</i>	
<i>Who am I?</i>	
<i>The Larry Trocha Training Program Video Series</i>	
<i>Order Form</i>	



## Introduction

The ability to stop lightly and on cue is an absolute necessity if you want a safe and reliable riding horse. And, of course, you do.

Just as important, teaching a correct stop and back up is critical to establishing a foundation for all your horse's future training, whether he is destined for the trail, reining, working cows, or competing in the show ring.

### ***Doing your part to reach your training goals***

The goal of this segment in your foundation training program is to teach your horse to stop in a relaxed way, to give and come back to your hands, and to stay soft in the poll and soft in the mouth.

In the beginning your horse may be confused or frightened and may try to resist. By quickly rewarding his first hesitant reactions, your horse will gain more confidence and a willingness to respond more quickly.

And that's exactly what we want – for your horse to stop within a stride or two and not 50 yards down the line. When your horse consistently stops within a single stride you will know that he is ready to advance to higher levels of training.

To reach this goal, you, the rider, must do your part. You cannot get angry or frustrated. You must be firm but patient. Everything you do must encourage your horse to be light, supple, giving and responsive. Relaxation is the foundation that all the future training is built on, so it's really important you do this right.

### ***The training environment***

Optimizing your training environment is a key factor in achieving your goals. If at all possible, work in a solid-sided round pen to eliminate outside distractions and focus your horse's attention to the task at hand. The footing should be soft, particularly if you are working with playful young horses, to avoid injuries to your horse or yourself.

### ***A quick word about your equipment.***

With younger horses I always want to use a smooth snaffle that is fairly mild. Overbitting a young horse can cause a hard mouth and could destroy the relaxation and cooperation you must achieve. For a younger horse, everything is new and potentially frightening. You do not want to do anything that causes them pain or unnecessarily stimulates their natural flight-fight response.

With an older horse, however, you might want to use a wire or twisted wire snaffle – something they will respect a little more. An older horse will advance a little quicker because they know what the deal is. But they are also used to doing things in a certain way and you must get their attention when breaking old, undesirable habits.

### ***The 4 R's: Request, Reward or Reprimand, and Results***

All training begins with a request. That request always will result in a response – and remember even no response is a response, just not the one we want!

If the response *is* what you want, you must instantly reward your horse by ceasing the request. If the horse resists, you must react with escalating levels of request (reprimand) until you can reward the horse for a proper response.

Throughout your training program you must use good judgment. You must be patient and allow your horse to understand what you are asking. At the same time, you must be firm and not let the horse get away with avoiding your aids.

You must reprimand when the horse misbehaves or resists. But – and this is important – your reprimands must be proportional. Don't kill him for some little misdemeanor. That will only reinforce his fear and flight-fight instinct. For those times when your horse gets really rude, your reprimand can get a little more severe, but make sure it fits the crime.

A word of caution – as a trainer, you must *never* allow a reprimand to become punishment, no matter the level of misbehavior. You simply make it increasingly uncomfortable for the horse to do anything but give a correct response, whether it is to stop, back up, or just simply to stand still.



## Preliminary Training

Before you can start teaching your horse to stop and back up he must be willing to drop off bit pressure, both laterally and vertically.

We start this training process on the ground. By letting the horse teach himself in the round pen, half the work is done and you can spend your time on the horse's back teaching him to refine an already learned response.

### *Yielding to bit pressure*

Let's assume you have a really green two-year old that hasn't been handled much. You want to make sure he understands how to respond to bit pressure before you get on him for the first time.

Saddle and bridle (smooth snaffle) your horse and lead him into your round pen. Make sure he is relaxed and paying attention to you.

Begin by teaching your horse to give laterally – to the side. Gently tug on one rein and ask him to give by turning his head toward the active rein. Do this several times in both directions until the horse readily yields his head to either side.

Then put one rein behind cantle, snug it up until the horse's head is about 45 degrees to the side, and tie off the rein to the saddle horn. (The other rein should be tied loosely to the horn.) Step back and let your horse figure out himself it is easier to give his head than fight the rein pressure.

Your horse may walk around as he tests the restraint and may even struggle against it. You may have to wait for 15 minutes or so until your horse is standing quietly and giving his head with no resistance.

Repeat this procedure in both directions, to left and to the right. Once your horse is yielding really good laterally, only then ask him to yield vertically.

To ask your horse to yield to vertical bit pressure, thread your reins through the D of the girth on both sides and snug them equally to the pommel. It's important that the first time you do this, you make the reins just barely snug enough so your horse can feel the pressure only if his nose is sticking out. If the reins are too tight you can really scare him, injure his mouth or cause him to flip himself

over backward. You want to make the reins much looser than you think it is necessary.

Once your horse is checked up, don't startle him by forcing him to move. Step away and let him move on his own and figure it out. Once he has dropped off the bit vertically, get him going at a walk and then at a trot around the pen. Repeat this procedure at least over four or five different training sessions so he really learns to give head vertically and is comfortable.

If your horse has a naturally high head set – a neck that comes high out of shoulders with a real high poll – I would also try checking him by putting the reins between his front legs and then tying them up to saddle horn. Again, the first time you don't want to do it real tight. Once your horse is comfortable and has figured out he must yield to the downward bit pressure, you can snug the reins up.

By getting your horse to move with a yielding mouth against both lateral and vertical bit pressure, you will avoid many headaches in later under saddle training. Each time your horse's front legs move forward and back, the alternating rein pressure seesaws the bit and encourages his nose to come in. You will easily be able to duplicate this effect during riding sessions by seesawing the reins to ask your horse to yield to the bit.

### ***Learning the meaning of “Whoa”***

Your next training job is to teach your horse the meaning of the word “whoa”. Again, we start this lesson from the ground. A two-year-old simply doesn't know how to stop. For safety reasons, alone, we want them to understand what whoa means – well before we ride the colt for the first time.

When we ask the colt – or horse – to stop, we want them to stop immediately and wait quietly for our next command.

We use a technique called “doubling” to do this. Doubling is also used when we ride and is important because it's how we maintain control and initiate getting the horse to stop.

## ***Doubling gives you control***

Doubling simply means pulling the horse around sharply in his tracks to stop him facing 180 degrees in the opposite direction. We introduce this technique on the long line. Here is the sequence:

- Step closer to the horse's hip,
- As he picks up speed, say "whoa"
- Stand still and brace yourself, talking a firm hip lock on the line,
- When the horse hits the end of the line, pull him sharply around, and
- Let him stand there and think about what happened.

Do this in both directions at the walk, trot and lope. A word of caution – before you try this be sure to attach your line to curb strap of snaffle – not the bit itself – so when you take that hip lock you do not pull the bit through his mouth. And, by attaching the line to the curb strap you can double him in either direction without adjusting your equipment.

It won't take long for your horse to quickly associate the word whoa with being doubled. After a few times, he'll just stop off the word whoa.

When you ride him for the first time, doubling is the only control you'll have, so it's important your horse understand what it is. You can even use this technique to re-teach an older horse to respond promptly to a sharp "whoa".





## Teaching a Green Colt to Stop

I'm no advocate of giving a colt his head when you get on him, whether it's the first time or the 50th. Not being in control is the quickest way to get bucked off or run through a fence.

Each training session, It's always a good idea to start your colt on the line, let him loosen up and settle into the training routine. Double him a couple of times to remind him about that important "whoa". Once he has quieted and is paying attention, mount and repeat the settling process.

Take your horse in both directions to loosen him up. It's fine if he wants to trot but always be ready to assert maximum control. If riding to the right, keep your left (inside) rein shorter than the right (outside) rein. This way, you can hold onto saddle horn with right hand and rein and double him around with your left rein if he starts getting too rambunctious.

### *Stopping by letting go*

Most of your foundation training will be done at the walk and trot. With young horses you will most likely post the trot, but when you ask for a stop you should always be seated in the saddle.

When asking a horse to stop your **sequence of aids** must always be applied in this order:

- Say "whoa",
- Sit down in the saddle,
- Take a feel of your horse's mouth
- Bring your elbows back,
- Set your hands, and
- Release all bit pressure the instant the horse responds even a little bit.

Say the "whoa" word and ask your horse to stop with a series of real light pulls and releases. If your horse doesn't stop, double him. If he tries to take another step forward, double him the other way. Repeat this procedure until he begins to stop on a straight line. Immediately slack the reins every time he responds.

When you ask your horse to stop, don't pull hard straight back. That is a sure way to get your colt resisting by opening his mouth. A solid pull will teach your horse to root his nose into the pull, try to take your hand away and go through

the bit. We don't want him to do that. It's a habit that once learned is hard to break.

So ask real light, say whoa, set, release, set, release, double him around if necessary, and when stops give him slack. Setting and releasing will keep him flexible in the poll and teach him to relax to bit pressure.

### ***Creating a brick wall***

When setting your hands you are not really pulling – you are simply applying about a pound of pressure on the horse's mouth to create a "brick wall" that will break his forward motion. If you were to put a real 10-foot brick wall in front of your horse and he touched it with his nose, he'd instinctively not try to go through it. He feels it's solid.

We use the bit the same way. Take a pound or two of pressure, lock your arms, lock your elbows, close your fingers on the bit and set it solid. You should feel your horse hesitate as he feels the pressure. Keep repeating: release and set solid, release and set solid, release and set solid. Eventually, the colt will drop his nose off of this repeated pressure, come back to your hands and stop.

If you were to actually pull, your horse's head would come up, he'd open his mouth, and get rigid in the jaw and the poll. We don't want that. We want him to stay relaxed and flexible in the poll.

As you teach your young horse to stop, remember it's not going to be perfect right away. Don't reprimand when the horse makes mistakes but is obviously trying to respond. Perfection only comes with patience, repetition and lots of practice.

### ***The importance of standing still***

Letting your horse stand quietly is both a great reward and a great training tool. If you're always running your horse, spinning it, jerking it around, he's not going to want to stand still. You've got to let him know standing still is an enjoyable thing. Once you say whoa and stop, let your horse know it's OK to stand still, that it's a pleasurable thing to just stand there and relax.



## Teaching a Green Colt to Back

I don't normally teach a horse to back until he's been ridden about a month. Before we teach the back up, we want the horse responding quickly to the "whoa" word, to be soft and flexible in the mouth, to be relaxed in the poll and readily yielding to bit pressure.

In other words, don't start trying to get your horse to back until he has learned to stop and stand still. And always remember that some horses just have a really hard time getting the backing up thing. Your horse may be one of those. Backing is very unnatural for a horse – when was the last time you saw your horse back up voluntarily in the pasture?

### ***Resist, don't pull***

Just as when we taught our horse to stop, it is very important – in fact it is critical – that we don't pull on him. Ripping his head off will only cause problems. We want to advance the horse, not set him back.

Begin when your horse is quietly standing still. Set the bit solid by making a brick wall so he can't go forward. Wait and see if he'll take a step back to get away from the bit pressure. If he takes even a half a step, instantly release the reins. You should reward any kind of backward movement – even a rock – by immediately releasing the reins.

### ***Be quick to reward***

If you get a backward step, give him the slack and just sit there. Let him think about what has happened. Then ask again. When you get another step, give him the slack.

Remember to resist with about two pounds steady pressure. Don't pull. If your horse drops his nose to the bit pressure but doesn't move backward, shift your elbows back and set again. Each time his head comes back, take up the slack and maintain bit pressure. This may take a couple of minutes. Wait it out.

### ***When a horse locks up***

There are limits to how long you should wait. Some colts will stand there all day when you set your hands. They just won't move. You need to bump this kind of colt in the shoulder with the side of your boot to encourage him to move. Set your hands, bump him in shoulder with side of your foot, one foot at a time, and see if that will encourage him to move back.

But there are colts that even this trick won't work. For these colts, pull their head around to left, and kick them with your left leg to disengage their hindquarters. Then pull the rein to the right and disengage their hindquarters to the right. It's important to get those hindquarters moving. By pulling his head to the side and back at the same time, he'll not only disengage his hindquarters, but will move back a little bit. It may not be in a straight line, but it will be backwards.

Do this a few times, and then ask your horse to back up again. Set your reins and wait for the backward step. When it happens, and it will, instantly reward your horse by releasing all bit pressure.

Especially when first introducing the back up, it's important to quit when your horse responds consistently, even if its only one or two steps. Come back the next ride and ask again. Build toward correctness with repetition and practice.



## Stop and Back Up on Colt with 30 Days Training.

Let me caution you here. One mistake many trainers make – amateurs and professionals alike – is to ask for too much, too soon. In general, you want to ride your colt for at least a couple months before trying to put any advanced moves on him. It's much better to be too slow than too quick. Your horse will thank you and you'll achieve your ultimate goal with fewer setbacks.

Just as you did when first riding your young horse, it's important to get his edge off before beginning a new lesson or refining a previously learned lesson. Once he is relaxed and paying attention, start asking for him to stop. Move him forward at the trot or lope, say "whoa", set, release, set, release, double, go the other way, repeat until he stops willingly. Then ask him to back up. Remember, at this early stage, you've got to completely release *every time* your horse takes a step back.

Next, let's see if you can get your horse to stop a little harder, a little quicker. Lope him a bit to get him going forward again. Ask him to stop. Double him. Lope forward. Stop. Double him back.

Then get a little more aggressive. Ask for a stop and put more pressure on his mouth to give him some incentive. Pull, pull, pull, kick him and then release. Turn and go other way, do the same thing. Pull, pull, pull, give a little kick and then release. Then pull a couple of times without saying anything just to get him to respect the bit.

Although we are using the word "pull" here, be careful that to your pull does not become too severe or too sustained. You do not want your horse to become so frustrated that he fights the pressure.

### ***Flexing at the poll***

If your horse backs on command but doesn't stay flexed at the poll, seesaw the reins until his nose comes down. Then release. Don't do this too hard or his nose will only go higher.

Your horse may try to brace against your pull by locking his hind legs. In this situation, you need to kick him in the belly or shoulder get him to unbrace and willing to move. When his drops nose, release. Then ask him to back again. Pull, back a couple steps and release. If he is still resistant, lope forward, kick with your legs, and seesaw the reins until he drops off the bit.

By getting his nose to drop, you are starting to teach him collection and preparing him for his next lessons: *Teaching Your Horse To Stop Light And Collected*, and *Teaching Your Horse To Stop Light And Collected II* (advanced techniques for show stops).

### ***When the horse gets worried***

When asked to do something unfamiliar, sometimes a colt will get worried and try to flee by going faster. They think if they can somehow get away, we'll stop asking for new stuff.

You must let him know in no uncertain terms that where he wants to go is just plain uncomfortable; and that where you want to go is his comfort spot, the only spot where get he can find release from pressure and get to rest.

- If he doesn't guide well, double him. Ignoring cues is a form of trying to get away from the rider. By doubling him you let him know he's to go where *you* want.
- If he wants to go to the fence, make him not want to go to the fence by doubling, and doubling again. Make the fence uncomfortable for him.
- If tries to run away, double him until he no longer wants to go forward.

When he does what you ask, sit still for a bit. The "reward" lets him know obeying your cues means he can go to a place where he can rest and relax. Wait for a few minutes and then test him. Repeat doubling, if needed.

### ***Know when to stop***

When you accomplish what you want and he's being good about it, stop. To stop within a stride and a half is pretty darn good for a horse that's only been ridden for a month. You want to end each training session on a positive note with your horse relaxed. Tired is OK but frustrated is not. If you push too much and don't get a good result, all you are doing is reinforcing your horse's desire to evade you.



## Stop & Back up on a Colt with 2-3 Months Riding

Once your horse is stopping willingly and with consistency it is time to work on the correctness of the stops. Refining that correctness will come later in training. Now we just want him to react quickly when we ask for a stop. Start by warming up at the trot. Horses are more likely to make mistakes when they are fresh. If you school him until his gaits are smooth, the training session will go a lot better.

When he is ready to really work, test his lateral flexibility. Use your inside leg and ask him to bend, making sure he gives you his head. Only after he is giving laterally in both directions, should you ask him to give vertically.

### ***Begin collection by rolling back***

Now lets try a little collection at the trot. Put pressure on your colt's mouth, ask him to slow down, and release him immediately when he does. If he is strung out, you can get him back on his butt by rolling him back into fence. Rolling back is different from doubling, which we use when colt isn't stopping to take away the desire to go forward.

Instead of doubling away from the fence, we change direction by rolling the horse into the fence to force his hind legs under his body more and increase his collection, at least for an instant. This is how you do it:

1. Trot your horse about eight feel away from the fence,
2. At the trot, turn him into fence,
3. As he begins to change direction, bump him with your outside leg and
4. Ask him to leave briskly forward in the new direction.

If he doesn't leave quickly enough, pop him on the butt with the end of your reins.

Your horse may turn one way really good, but not the other. So, sit down, lean back and pull on the rein next to the fence with one good hard pull. Then double him a couple of times to let him know he's got to listen to you.

### ***Asking for sharper stops and multiple steps back***

Now you are ready to ask for brisker stops and a series of steps backwards.

As you trot forward, do a couple of light set-releases to ask him to collect a bit, and then ask for a stop with a pound or two more pressure than you used when first teaching the stop.

Double him and double him again to make sure he respects your request. Pretty soon he will be stopping within a stride or two with his butt underneath him.

Every couple of times you ask for a stop, let him stand still for a second or two and then ask him to back a few steps. Be sure not to do it every time and to wait a bit before asking for the back so he doesn't associate the stop with immediately backing up. On the finished horse, the hands set head position and legs regulate speed of the back up.

As he backs up we want him to flex at poll and stay light in the mouth. To get the horse to relax at the poll, we use a pull and release so there is nothing solid the horse can brace against. Repeatedly bump him lightly in the mouth and seesaw the reins until his nose comes down.

Sometimes, as you become more aggressive with your demands, your horse may react by getting rigid in the poll. If this happens, shake his head down by seesawing the reins, ask for a back up, bump him with your legs, roll back into fence, go forward and ask for a stop again. Repeat the procedure in the other direction.

By using these training techniques, your horse soon will be stopping with a steady head, a soft mouth and engaged hindquarters. He will move instantly back when you set your hands and continue moving back step by step, each time you ask.

He is now ready for the next stage in his training.





## Some Final Thoughts

### *In this training segment you have taught your horse:*

- to respond to your voice and stop when you say “whoa”,
- to yield his head to the side and vertically whenever he feels pressure on the bit,
- to make a balanced stop within a stride or two,
- to back up willingly, and
- to stand relaxed and still.

### *You have learned:*

- to be patient but firm,
- to use the 4 R’s to achieve a willing and correct response
- to double your horse to retain control,
- to roll back to engage your horse’s hindquarters,
- to flex at the poll, and
- to successfully stop and back your horse.

### *Congratulations!*

The next step in your horse’s training is **Teaching Your Horse To Stop Light And Collected**, which includes tips on timing your horse at the lope so you can stop him on his rear end every single time. For those of you who want to teach long sliding stops required in the show ring, get **Stop Light And Collected II, Advanced Techniques**.

These and other training segments of the **Larry Trocha Horse Training Program** are available in video and soon will be available as electronic books. You can order on our Web site – [www.horsetrainingvideos.com](http://www.horsetrainingvideos.com) – or print and mail in the order form included at the back of this book.

All of my training segments are 100 percent guaranteed to work. In fact, if in six months you don’t feel they contain the absolutely best information you’ve ever received, just return for a prompt refund, no questions asked.



## The Larry Trocha Horse Training Program

### *Train your horse the Larry Trocha way*

*Picture this* – you're running your horse smooth and fast, straight down the center of the arena. You softly say "whoa" and lightly lift the reins. Your horse responds instantly, giving to your hand by dropping his nose and shooting his hind legs far underneath his body. As your horse goes into the stop, his mouth, neck and shoulders stay soft and supple. His front legs move freely and continue to trot as his hind legs lock, making long, deep sliding tracks in the dirt.

*Or* – your horse performs flying lead changes smoothly and correctly without any lurching or missing a hind lead

*Or* – your horse loads in your trailer willingly, without the help of another person or begging or bribing him to get in.

### *Who am I?*

My training stable is located in the heart of Northern California's beautiful Sonoma County where I train top notch cutting horses and working cow horses.

My professional career with horses started in the late 1970s when a ride on a top cutting horse locked in my life-long goal: to train and show champion cutting and reining cow horses. Since then I have trained:

- *Cal Filly Bar*, an AWHHA Supreme Cutting Champion,
- *Willy A Dell*, Champion of two Cutting Derbys,
- *Nap O'Lena*, WCHA Open Reining Champion,
- *Home Remedy*, NCHA Novice Top Ten,
- *Cal's Condor*, Aged Event Finalist and Multiple PCCHA Champion,
- and
- *Mollie Montana*, Pacific Coast Cutting Stakes Classic Champion.

I believe this record is the direct result of my unshakable belief that successful training is based on logic without unnecessary harshness – that properly timing the use of pressure and reward will motivate a horse to willingly obey commands.

## The Larry Trocha Training Program Video Series



### Teach Your Horse to Stop, Light and Collected

**Teach Your Horse to Stop Light and Collected** will have your horse stopping like a highly trained reining horse. *Including...* Three great methods to teach your horse to stop correctly... spectacular sliding stops... what to do if things go wrong... success secrets of winning trainers... tips on shoeing, equipment & conformation... & more! (2 hour video; \$59)



### Teach Your Horse to Rollback and Spin

**Teach Your Horse to Rollback and Spin** shows you exactly what you need to know. *Including...* simple, easy methods to teach green colts to turn on their hocks, what a correct rollback is and how to achieve it, how to put more speed in your spins... the three biggest mistakes... the proper form for a winning rollback... & more! .....(2 hour video; \$59)



### Teach Your Horse Flying Lead Changes

**Teach Your Horse Flying Lead Changes** contains six sections packed with information. *Including...* mechanics of the flying lead change... preparatory training... changing leads on a green horse... timing the lead change... solutions for lead changing problems... refining performance... & more! .....(90 minute video; \$59)



### Teach Your Horse to Stop Light & Collected II

**Teach Your Horse to Stop Light & Collected II** expands, refines, and adds to the training techniques introduced in Teaching Your Horse to Stop Light and Collected. *Including...* a good head position... making your horse light & responsive... schooling your horse for long, sliding stops... training spoiled & problem horses to stop... & more! .....(2 hour video; \$59)



### Advice on Shoeing the Reining & Cutting Horse

**Advice on Shoeing the Reining & Cutting Horse** explains why a good shoeing job is critical to a horse's health and performance and how to recognize a bad shoe job. *Including...* correct hoof angles... sizing the shoe to your horse's hoof, not the other way around... corrective shoeing... & more! .....(40 minute video; \$29)



**How to Start Your Horse on Cattle** explains effective training techniques to train your horse to be a darned good cow horse. *Including...* what you need to know before you start ... motivating your horse... maintaining a low head position... stopping with the cow... & more! .....(90 minute video; \$59)



**Cutting Horse Training using the Mechanical Cow** show how this device can be a wonderful asset to your training program. *Including...* proper set up... how to move and stop the mechanical cow in a way your horse understands... working with green & advanced horses ... & more! .....(90 minute video; \$59)



**Colt Starting Magic** details a safe and logical way to start unbroke horses. *Including...* training without a round pen... developing good manners... reining before riding... reducing the risk of being bucked off... stopping run aways.. pros and cons of hobbles ... & more! .....(2 tapes, 3 hour video; \$69)



**Trailer Loading Magic** takes the frustration out of teaching horses to load, whether a first-time yearling or an old spoiled trailer fighter. *Including...* a simple technique to quickly load your horse... doing without helpers and bribes... how to safely tie and close the divider, trailering tips ... & more! .....(45 minute video; \$29)



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_____	LT #1	Teach Your Horse to Stop Light and Collected (2-Hour Video)	\$59	_____
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