

Bridling: How to Achieve this Simple Task

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Throughout my many years of being in and among various horsemen, I have noticed how some riders will make the simple task of bridling into a complex and, often times, aggravating experience for both horse and rider, with the end result being a hanked-off rider and a horse with banged-up teeth after having a bit forced into his mouth. Each time I've seen this happen, I've told myself it doesn't have to be this way. Teaching a horse to drop its head and willingly accept a bit and the entire bridling experience is as simple as allotting some training time prior to heading out on the trail. Bridling should be done with fluid movement and be a steady and smooth process. The mouth and head of a horse are very sensitive. Many horses will adversely react to roughness or an overly invasive and timely production of getting the bridle set. Following are some training tips that I have utilized in training my horses to be bridled.

- The first step is to teach your horse to drop his head. I have utilized one of two methods to do this. The first is to place my hand on his poll (area just behind his ears and top of his neck) and apply gentle pressure. Applying too much pressure will be met with resistance and your horse trying to raise his head up. Gentle pressure will induce him to drop his head. Initially, when he drops his head release the pressure and reward him with a pat. Continue with gentle pressure at the poll until he stands with his head dropped. The second method I have used to affect the lowering of his head is to apply pressure to his forehead with my finger. Follow the same steps until you get the end of result of his standing with head dropped.
- After your horse drops his head have your bridle ready, holding the poll straps with one hand and the bit with other, with the reins draped over (not wrapped) your forearm. Along with the bit have a horse treat in hand. Standing to the side of your horse's head, hold the bridle in form (poll portion up and bit approaching mouth). Do not allow your horse to have the treat unless he takes the bit. He will come to associate accepting the bit with receiving a treat.
- Gently set the bit along the bars behind your horse's teeth before you move the poll portion of the bridle upward. Once the bit is comfortably positioned, move on to correctly place the poll straps behind the ears and buckle the chin strap loosely.
- Adjust/check the curb strap/chain, if you ride with one. You should be able to insert two fingers between the strap/chain and chin.

The process for removing the bridle is just as important as installing it.

- Remove the reins from around the horse's neck and drape (not wrap) them over your forearm.
- Ask your horse to once again drop his head by implementing one of the above methods.

Standing by the side of your horse's head, undo the chin strap. Place one hand on the poll straps and position the other on the bit. Remove the poll straps over the ears and proceed using a downward angle that matches the pitch of your horse's face. Once your hand reaches just below the eyes, gently remove the bit, making sure you don't rattle the metal against your horse's teeth.

Perfecting the art of bridling before you ride will make the experience much more pleasant for you and your horse. Practice bridling and unbridling any time you are grooming or working with your horse. The time you take to teach your horse to drop his head and become comfortable with bridling will make the process go much smoother when you are ready to hit the trails.

Happy trails