

# Bridle Up with Dennis Auslam

## ~LEADING~

### An Imperative, But Often Overlooked Skill

Before one can begin to start obstacle training you must be able to master leading your horse. It is such an important, and often overlooked skill that I feel it is imperative that you understand the 'how' and 'why'. The why is to help keep you safe and to develop the control you will need both on the ground and in the saddle. If this step is glossed over then, at some point, you will get run over. If this step is not done consistently, whenever you lead your horse, he will never respect you or your space and you will not develop the leadership he is looking for in you, hence you will not have the true bond that most of you desire to have with your mount.

So...if your horse doesn't stop with you when you stop and back up with you when you back up, DO NOT attempt any obstacle training. So let's go over how to achieve this. When you are trying to accomplish leading your horse off you need a goal, a plan... choose a point you are going to walk to. Begin in a clear area with good footing. As you walk off your horse is to your right and you are holding your lead rope about a foot from the snap with your right hand, the excess lead is held in your left hand. The lead is attached to a 4-knot rope halter. You will walk off and then stop. If your horse doesn't respond and stop with you, you are going to jerk the lead rope vigorously, straight down until the horse responds by backing at least one step. The horse initially is not going to know what you are asking, so he may try to come forward, or come into you. You may have to move with him, but do not stop popping down on the halter. He may go away from you, so you have to keep working at this until the horse gives you the right answer. During this whole exercise you are not going to turn towards the horse and you are not going to make eye contact with the horse, but you will keep him in your peripheral vision at all times.

When he takes that one step backward, you immediately release him from the pressure you have been putting on him and praise him. Only when he makes that first break, and takes a step back, are you allowed to turn and face your horse and verbally praise him and pat him.

I have found in my years of working with horses that generally the ones that will move into you are the insecure horses or the ornery, spoiled horse. Usually, the ornery one is ornery because he is spoiled and doesn't respect your space, which is something that has been allowed. You are not doing your horse any favors when you allow him to get away with bad behavior or think it is cute. It is what will get you hurt.

Now let's build on that one step. Move forward again and then stop, asking him to stop again. It should come quicker this time and you will build on that one successful

first step back, turning it into 2 steps back, 3 steps back and so on. You stop, he stops and then you back up and he backs up, to the point if you were to back up all the way across the yard, so would he and there would be no fight.

This is something you practice all the time, whenever you lead your horse...practice it and you will continually reinforce this because at some point your horse is going to spook. And I can almost guarantee you that if he hits that line that you have established, he will spook around you instead of over top of you.

What this will do in conjunction with obstacle training is establish a bubble around yourself that the horse will respect and it allows you to get control of those shoulders. The shoulder is the first thing that is going to hit you if that horse spooks and doesn't respect your space, so this will enable you, once you start the obstacles, to control and direct those shoulders. The start of getting control of the shoulders is getting the horse to walk when you walk, stop when you stop and step backward when you step backward. When you have him doing that really well you can start on lunging and gaining more control of the shoulder. You can also teach the horse to move forward on command.

Stay safe and God bless.

About Dennis Auslam: Dennis has been a trainer for over 30 years, working with many different breeds and disciplines. He grew up with horses and has worked with some of the best trainers in the industry. His passion is horses and people and he loves helping people learn how to work with their horses, progress in their riding abilities and make that connection with their horse. You will find Dennis at various horse related events in 2013. He also does numerous clinics and demos, both at his stable, Redwood Stables in Morton, MN and at other venues. His main focus is on confidence building for the horse and the rider.

For information regarding his clinics and demonstrations, please visit his website at:

[www.redwoodstables.com](http://www.redwoodstables.com)

Interested in hosting a clinic? Call 507-525-6691 or email us at:

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