

GROUND TYING

Written by: Addie O'Neil

One obstacle often seen in many of today's ranch horse versatility and trail challenges is ground tying. Teaching your horse how to ground tie is definitely achievable and if done correctly can come in handy in many areas of your riding career. It's important to note that it will take several sessions with your horse until he can ground tie correctly and that ground tying, like most maneuvers we teach our horse, is a step by step process.

When we begin the ground tying exercises, it's desirable to start out with a snaffle bit and split reins along with your saddle and breast collar. In addition, about 18 feet of some type of cord will be used – I use parachute cord as it is readily available to me. On the end of the cord should be two snaps to attach to each side of the bit. One last piece of equipment you will need is some type of feed, whether it is hay or grain, to entice the horse during the session. We want the horse to learn discipline and be able to stand and wait for instruction. If your horse does not understand and respect the word "whoa" it is imperative that he learns this before tackling ground tying.

First, run the snaps up through the ring on your breast collar to the bit. You want to make sure that the cord will not bind in the breast collar as it will cause problems later. Connect the snaps to the snaffle bit on both sides. This creates a pulley type system so when you start to walk away from your horse you have the ability to pull on the cord and tell him "whoa". You should be able to dismount from your horse and walk away in any direction without him moving his feet.

As previously stated, this is a step by step process. When you dismount your horse and begin this exercise you don't have to go clear out to the end of the line to start. We need to build your horse's confidence and explain what you desire of him. Step back a few feet and walk from his left side to his right side to start. Have your hay or grain close enough that he can see it. He



must learn that despite there being food or any other type of distraction around him he needs to stand until given permission to do otherwise. If he steps forward simply tug on the cord and say "whoa". The pressure on the bit will be enough to signal him to back up and stand where he was.

At a competition which includes ground tying, the obstacle may be you must walk 12-15 feet away from your horse and touch something or move something as he stands where you dismounted. You may also need to have your reins on the ground but for this exercise we will keep the split reins draped over the neck for safety purposes.

When your horse learns to stand with you being only a few feet away, walk back and praise him. Each time you step away increase the distance little by little, but each time go back to him and reassure he is doing what you want with praise. When you are walking away and around him



make sure the cord in your hand is not putting pressure on the bit until you need to signal him to "whoa". Our goal is to increase his confidence until you can walk to the end of your cord and go from his left to right side without him moving. If you are having problems as you go just simply go back to the beginning and start at a smaller distance until it's really instilled into his head what you desire of him. We cannot simply jump from 5 feet to 18 feet and it may take several sessions to get to

the end of the cord but that is perfectly normal. If you want to begin to up the ante a little take some grain or hay from where you have it and entice him a little. This will build a lot of discipline into your horse and will test how well he has been taught to ground tie.



I would also like to take the opportunity to touch base on a recent trip to Ft. Worth Texas for the first annual AmerEquine Festival of the Horse last June. I put on various demonstrations, including one with dressage trainer Mari Monda Zdunic, dealing with topics such as desensitizing and western dressage movements. In addition, we also held The World's Most Beautiful Horse contest. We had entries from all around the country who traveled to Ft. Worth for the contest. This contest is unique as it is judged solely on the beauty and movement of the horse. In the next article I will introduce a story about one of the contestants from Seattle, WA.

Do YOU have an idea for an article? If you have a topic you wish to read about or any question you want answered, please e-mail Addie O'Neil at aoneil233@gmail.com.

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 2012. 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. Interested in hosting a clinic? Call (507) 525-6691 or email us at redwoodstables@mtvwireless.com.

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