



Teaching your Equine to Drive

Presented by Lady Arielle de Pontoise & Lord Eachann de Barde
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Getting Started

- For the purposes of this class, we are assuming that your horse already knows the basics of groundwork and saddle work.
 - Horse should know basic commands, such as Walk on, Trot, Whoa, etc. and yielding to the bit.
 - Preferably the equine also has a background in lunge work as well. If not, please get your horse comfortable with lunging prior to starting your training plan.



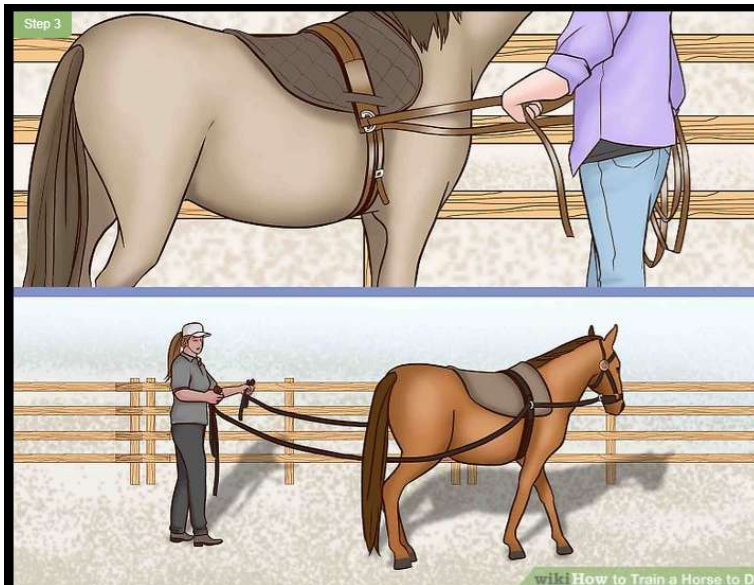
Equipment

- To begin, you will need:
 - Bridle with snaffle bit
 - Two long lead lines
 - driving reins, long ropes, Lunging lines, 20-25 feet is ideal
 - Lunging or Driving whip
 - Driving gloves
 - Driving harness or Surcingle if available
 - (In a pinch, a saddle can be used as well to start)
 - Round pen is very helpful if available



Step 1 - Desensitization

- Get the horse comfortable with the equipment.
- Introduce the pieces slowly as you would any new tack.
- If you have access to a harness, Work up to having all the pieces on the horse, and lead the horse around so they get used to the feel, sound, and movement of the straps, etc.
- If you don't have a harness, you can start with a surcingle and bridle with snaffle bit.
- If you don't have a surcingle, you can run the lines through the stirrups of your saddle
 - English saddle, run them through the stirrups (stirrups at top of saddle).
 - Western saddle, run them through loops off the horn. Alternatively, tie to stirrups together under the horse's belly so they don't flop round and run lines through stirrups. This is a little too low in my opinion, but can work.
 - You are basically aiming to get the reins at the same level as the horse's natural head position.



Train with a long line to get your horse used to 2 lines.

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[How to Train a Horse to Drive \(with Pictures\) - wikiHow](#)

Example using surcingle.

If using a saddle, aim to have your reins at this level.



Step 2 – Long Lining

- In an enclosed space (round pen is ideal), we will begin to teach the horse to respond to rein pressure.
 - Make sure the horse is comfortable with having the reins touching their hind quarters.
 - Desensitize as needed by gently running the lines up and down their legs without pulling.
 - Tie to a fence or have a helper hold the horse while you do this if horse is fidgety.
 - Once the horse is comfortable with the reins, ask them to move off.



Step 2 – Long Lining (Cont.)

- Keep the lines tight enough so your horse doesn't trip, but loose enough that it can feel the slack lines around its rear, tail, back, and legs.
- Stand to the side in a normal lunging position so your horse can see you.
 - If you get behind them too soon, they may try to bolt forward.
- Guide the horse around the circle with your inside rein.
- To change directions, halt your horse and gently pull on the outside rein to change directions.



Step 2 – Long Lining (Cont.)

- Practice lunging until your horse responds to verbal cues of walk on, trot, slow down, and whoa and can change directions.
 - Take the time it takes to make your horse comfortable over several sessions (i.e. days, weeks, or even months).
 - Although each command is important, getting your horse to come to a full stop is critical.



Side Note – Verbal Commands

- “Fancy Driving” Vs. “Farm Driving”
 - “Light harness”
 - Carriage horses used for transportation.
 - Less verbal commands, more whip cues.
 - Driver is not multitasking as with farm equipment.
 - Noisy city environment makes it difficult to hear commands.
 - “Heavy harness”
 - Farm horses used for agriculture.
 - Driving relies heavily on verbal commands.
 - Driver’s hands are occupied with managing the farm equipment, such as a plow, so not as able to give cues with reins.



Side Note – Verbal Commands

- Haw (Left)
 - Sometimes “get”
- Gee (Right)
 - Sometimes “come”
- Whoa
- Back
- Easy
- Walk on, Trot, etc.
- Haw/Gee Sharp
- Haw / Gee Step
- Haw/Gee “a little bit”
- Haw / Gee Over



Step 3 – Ground Driving

- At this stage, you can position your body to where you are walking behind the horse.
 - Walk at a safe distance behind to avoid being kicked.
 - Good idea to have gloves on just in case the horse bolts forward.
- Practice walking in a straight line
- Practice gently turning with verbal cues
 - Consider cones and other obstacles to practice steering
- Practice halting and backing
- Use a lunging or driving whip to cue if needed.
 - Note, the whip is used as an extension of your leg, and you should use it as you would leg cues (on hip).



Step 3 – Ground Driving (Cont.)

- Take plenty of time.
 - The more practice you and your horse get with ground driving, the more prepared you will be for actual driving.
 - Spend as much time training as you need and try not to rush anything.
- Once your horse is responding well, it is time to introduce the horse to a full harness if you have not already done so.
 - If you do not have a harness yet, consider buying / borrowing one or finding a used one.

Step 3 – Ground Driving (Cont.)



Credit: <https://theponybunch.com/2019/07/25/training-a-horse-to-drive-with-a-travois/>

- Make a “travois” with PVC pipes to simulate cart shafts. (Ref: [Training a Horse to Drive With a Travois – The Pony Bunch](#))
 - The travois allows the horse to feel what it is like being confined in between the shafts of a cart.
 - By attaching the breeching straps to the travois, he is able to feel pressure coming up from behind him, like a cart would when going down hill or at an abrupt stop.
 - It gives us the chance to experience new, potentially scary, things while mimicking being attached to a cart without fear of having an accident in the cart.
 - The horse is able to learn how to turn with the pressure of the shafts on their body.
 - The noise and movement behind the horse allows them to get used to that of the cart.

Step 3 – Ground Driving (Cont.)



Train your horse to drag objects while ground driving in the harness.
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- Once your horse is responding well to cues while wearing a harness and pulling a travois, you can add some weight.
 - Common techniques include tying an old tire (or multiple tires) to the harness, using a training skid, etc.



Step 4 – Introducing the Cart

- Seriously consider working with a professional trainer or driving club in your area.
 - They can help you assess if your horse is ready for this next step.
 - They can help you find an appropriate training cart (easy entry recommended).
- Place the cart in an enclosed space and let your horse check it out thoroughly (smell / touch).
- Once your horse is comfortable, have a friend pull the cart around while you lead your horse.
 - This will desensitize the horse to the sights/ sounds of the moving cart.



Step 4 – Introducing the Cart (Cont.)

- In an enclosed space, hitch horse to cart and lead horse around the space to get them used to the cart.
- From behind the cart, ground drive the horse until they are comfortable.
- When your horse is responding well, you can then sit in the cart.
- This stage of training is extremely tricky and the stage at which accidents happen.
- Take your time!!!



Step 4 – Introducing the Cart (Cont.)

- Practice commands on the cart the same as you did on the ground.
- Practice in an enclosed space to minimize risk until you are confident your horse is safe.
- In case of emergency, a one rein stop does not work in a cart.
 - “See Saw” reins instead until horse stops.



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