

L

AST MONTH, WE DISCUSSED the first step in teaching your horse to bow, the step I call Bow With the Rope. If you've practiced that, your horse will be ready for Step 2: Hold Up Your Foot.

Hold Up Your Foot

TO TEACH WHAT WILL EVENTUALLY BE YOUR cue for the bow – a tap on the left front cannon bone – I begin with a halter, lead rope and a dressage whip or stick and string. Standing beside your horse's shoulder or slightly in front, begin tapping the horse gently on the cannon bone with rhythm. Your horse should stomp his foot much like he would when stomping away a fly. When he lifts his foot to stomp, stop tapping and pet him. (See Photo 1.)

Now, work toward getting this consistently. Repeat and reward again. For most horses, after you practice this for several days, asking for about 20 cued "stomps," you should begin to notice that your horse is beginning to anticipate lifting his foot and is standing with most of his weight on his right front foot. With more repetition, the horse will begin to stand with his toe rested on the ground in anticipation of lifting it again. When you see this happening, you need to begin to introduce your end cue – the same end cue you use to stop the bowing. In this case, it cues him to stop holding up his foot. Without the end cue, it is his decision when he puts his foot back down.

This is probably the trickiest part of the training, because you need to give the end cue – the kiss or cluck – while his foot is in the air. Even though it is his idea right now to drop his foot, begin adding the kiss and leading him forward while his foot is in the air. Your eventual goal is to teach the horse to hold up his foot. (See Photo 2.)

Combining for a Bow

ONCE YOU HAVE SUCCESS IN BOTH STEPS, YOU can begin to combine the two exercises. With

Take a Bow

the rope around his foot, begin tapping your horse's cannon bone, and when he lifts his foot, shorten the rope and back him into a bow. Give him the end cue and lead him forward. With more repetitions, you will begin to notice that your horse considers bowing when you begin tapping.

His thought process will become something like this: "When she taps, she wants me to pick up my foot. When I pick up my foot, she doesn't give it back until I touch the ground. OK, let's get this over with."

Eventually, as the thought process becomes solid, you will notice that you do not need to hold the foot up and that the horse has his head down and is rocked back and thinking about bowing almost before you ask.

You really know he is thinking about it when he offers to bow when you clean his feet or walk to his side. If you have taken your time and have been consistent, you will have a horse that willingly bows. ☐

Stacy Westfall is an AQHA life member from Mount Gilead, Ohio. For more information, or for a DVD on teaching the bow, visit www.westfallhorseman.com.

By Stacy Westfall

Second in a two-part series on teaching your horse to bow.



HOLLY CLANAHAN