

July 2008 Beyond the Basics
Training Your Own Horse – Six Part Series
Part I – Good Knots to Know!

With the summer of 2008 racing by, I find myself falling into the trap of a “Hurry up...Go faster... Get it done NOW” mentality. Life seems to be speeding by and it is so easy to fall into the whirlwind and forget many of the lessons the horse has to teach me about life, time, and attitude. In my haste I often lose sight of my ‘Horseman’s Protocol’, forget to BREATHE, and sometimes set things up without a clear picture that adheres to the basic principles of good attitude, combining with soft movement, creating willing communication. It is easy to forget the basics and in the process create situations that are not safe for horse, nor rider. Maybe it is time to slow down and go back to ‘dressage’ or ‘training’ ourselves and our horses in the fundamentals!

This next series of articles -*Training Your Own Horse* - is an effort to slow down, and look intimately at some basic practices, exercises, and use of equipment to help us keep horse and rider safe, while building on the rudiments that enable positive attitude, flowing movements, and ultimately create a wonderful partnership. We will examine six areas that will help you in starting a young or new-to-you horse, and perhaps give everyone some new ways to use old tools with a fresh approach. Here are the topics we will be covering:

- Good Knots to Know - Susan’s Quick Release, bowline, QR for latigo, making a night-latch, & use of your ‘Get Down’ lead
- Proper Use of the Flag – Sensitizing rather than De-sensitizing, types of flags and their use as an extension of your intentions to achieve specific, detailed movements
- Use of the Lariat – A Tool for Every Discipline, how a lariat helps you develop ‘feel’, what type of lariat to purchase, how to get started with tossing, coiling, and building a loop
- Liberty Work – Getting Hold of Your Horse’s Mind – Round pen and Square pen positioning, use of the whip and flag, use of tools such as surcingle, side-reins, and draw-reins
- Proper Use of the Whip - Use of the whip in liberty work, for specific maneuvers, and on board
- Working Another Horse from A Top Your Own – The basics of handling the halter lead for ponying not pulling, proper halter fit to keep horse and rider safe, some moves to set up basic maneuvers

Let’s get started with knots! If you are anything like me, my mind goes into rusty, arthritic mode when I am forced to learn a new knot. However, good knots are critical to know in order to keep both horse and human safe. Most of the knots described below were no doubt suggested as a result of graduating from the School of Hard Knocks! Learning lessons in this school have literally killed horses, broken necks, cut off fingers, and drug people. Often times these accidents happened not just out of ignorance, but simply from a lack of awareness, or perhaps never having been shown a way that was more safe. Take a look...Maybe you will see something different and a reason to learn a new knot!

John Wayne – Quick Release Knot

Use This Knot To: Tie horses to appropriate fence, post, or in the horse trailer

Why Use This Knot: First, it does not get tightened to the point that it is too difficult to pull the knot loose; Second, when you pull the knot out, the horse is loose from the post & the rope is not wrapped around the post/pole/hook

Disadvantages & Cautions: The HUGE caution on any knot when you are tying 1,000+ creature on the end of the rope...***Don’t Put Your Fingers Inside Any Loops!!!*** A disadvantage to this knot is that it is a ‘quick-release’, and if your horse is a nibbler, they will have it untied in seconds! Basic reminder for tying your horse is to tie higher than the horse’s eye, and have the distance between horse and post no more than 1.5 feet in the tie rope. When using this or any knot to tie inside the trailer, make sure the tail of the lead is INSIDE the trailer, so that it cannot fly out the window or hole and find its way into the wheel. This would not be a pretty picture.

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Susan's John Wayne– Quick Release Knot

2**3****4****5****6****7****8**

Step 1: Make a kink in your lead rope about 1.5 ft. from where it attaches to the halter

Step 2: Place kink around the post, making sure the object you are tying to is secure and higher than the horse's eye (Horse is at your right)

Step 3: With your left-hand, grasp the edge of the kinked rope, so that you can clearly see the kink, the tail hanging down, and the rope attached directly to your horse

Step 4: Reach across with your right-hand to grasp the tail, and bring it over the top of the kink and over the top of the horse rope

Step 5: Continue around the horse rope, bring the now kinked tail rope to your left-hand

Step 6: Exchange rope between your right into your left-hand

Step 7: Grasp the edge of the kinked-tail rope you have just exchanged, that is now in your left-hand (don't put your fingers inside any kinks or loops!)

Step 8: With your right-hand pull on the horse rope to snug the knot.

To Un-Tie: Simply pull on the tail-rope, and the entire lead will be free from the post

Note: If your horse is a nibbler, feed-out the size of the final kink, and wrap the entire loop around your horse-rope, in a half hitch, then run the tail down through your final kink. (Remember: This is not a quick-release knot now with the addition of the half hitch!)

Bowline

Step 1: Run lead rope around post

Step 2: Grasp the horse rope with your left-hand above the right

Step 3: Bring right-hand over the left, along with the rope, creating an 'X' in the rope, or if you are looking straight on it looks like the number '9'

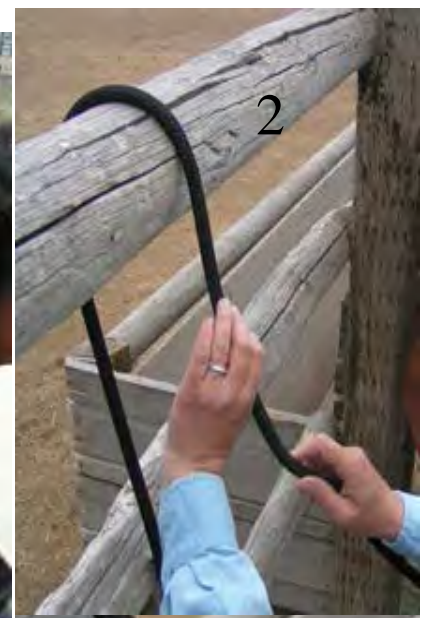
Step 4: (The trick is to keep your right hand securely at the 'X') Run the tail of the lead down through the hole you have created, or down through the top of the '9'

Step 5: Take out all the slack in the tail rope, bringing your right hand with the top of the '9' right up near the post

Step 6: With your left-hand, take the tail rope over the tail of the '9' (Over the horse rope)

Step 7: Kink the tail rope, and begin to feed the slack, until you have completely pulled the tail rope thru the top of the '9'

Step 8: Tighten it up by pulling on the tail rope, and on the tail of the '9' (attached to your horse) to make a nice neat figure '8'



Bowline (pronounced Bow-lyn) Knot

Use This Knot To: Tie a horse that you feel confident will NOT pull back and create a situation where you need to get them untied fast, as it is not a quick-release knot; To tie your 12ft lead to the halter to create a set of reins; To tie your 14ft. 'Get-Down' lead around the horse's neck, through the bosalita, in order to lead my bridle horse; I would not use this in the horse trailer

Why Use This Knot: It doesn't get tight, or slip tight upon itself; It has many other practical uses

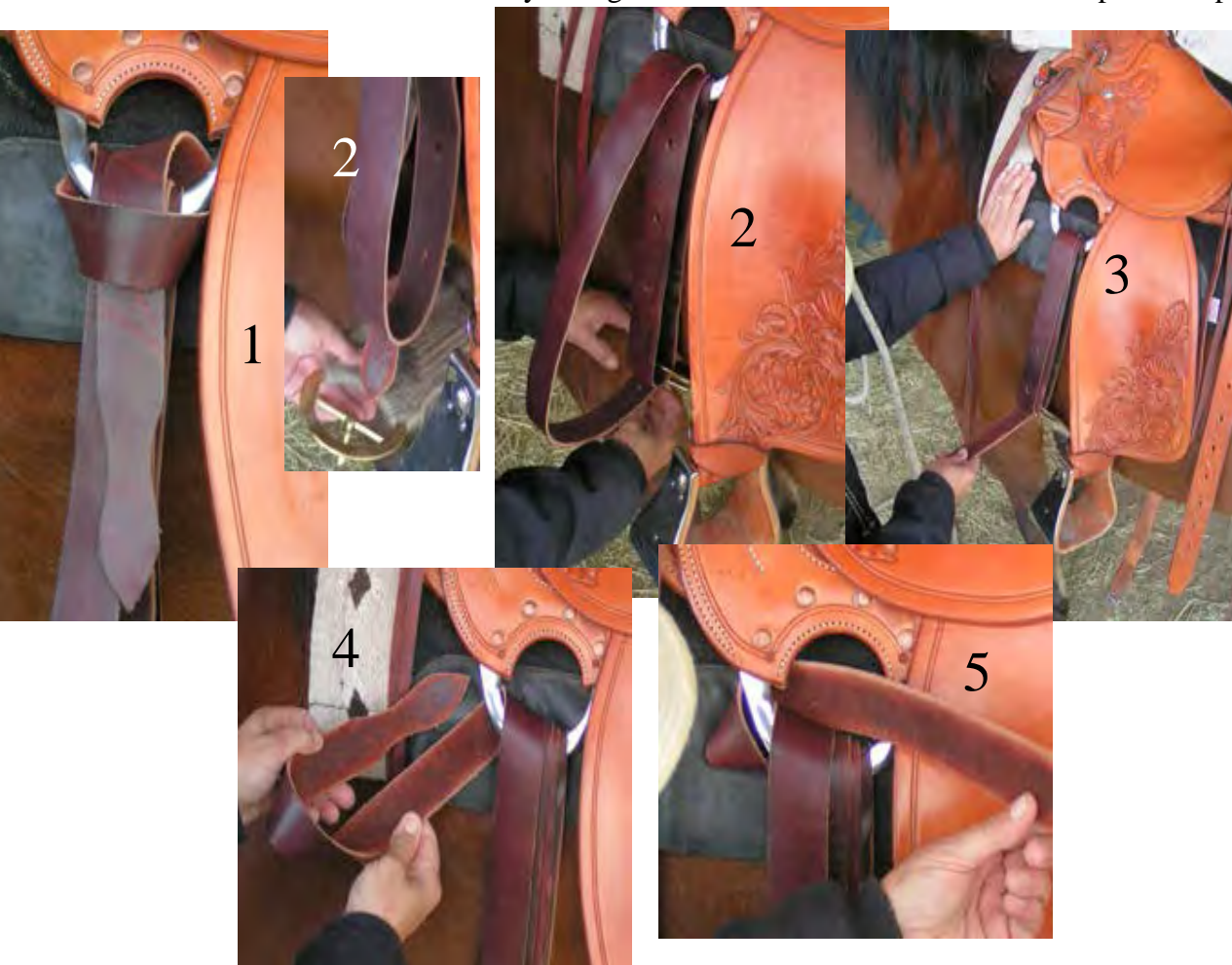
Disadvantages & Cautions: It does not come undone quickly! If your horse is violently pulling back, you don't want to step between him and the post or wall to get the bowline untied – This is where you should have your 'Horseman's' knife handy, so that with one hand you can cut the rope. Better to buy a new halter lead, than pay hospital or veterinarian bills! Make sure your bowline knot is up close to the post to which you are tying. If you have a lot of room between the post and the knot it will create a big hole that the horse could get a foot through if they were to rear-up.

QR or Quick-Release Latigo Knot

Use This Knot To: First, remember that your latigo should be about 6.5 ft. long, with enough length to go through the buckle in your cincha three-times; Second, use this knot to allow you to politely find a snug fit, smoothly, without use of metal hardware; Last, it allows you to quickly un-do the latigo in an emergency situation

Why Use This Knot: It gives you more options for polite tightness of the girth; It places the 'knot' portion ahead of your knee, rather than under the stirrup fender, as with the use of a half-hitch knot; It allows you to get the latigo loosened without being in such a dangerous position, under the horse, when a saddle rolls

Disadvantages & Cautions: Some saddles have a small hole in the rigging for the attachment of the latigo, making it difficult to quickly release the QR knot; Remember, that if your saddle does twist and roll under the belly or on to the side of the horse, to first unbuckle your back cinch, then pop the QR knot! This is where a correctly fitting breast collar can alleviate a lot of the potential problem.



Step 1: Start with a nice neat latigo!
Step 2: Running the tip of the latigo thru the cincha, you will go past the buckle a total of three times
Step 3: Politely pull straight out on the tail of the latigo, while you push in with your left-hand
Step 4: Run the latigo thru the top plate in your rigging & out the front – towards the shoulder of the horse. Next double the tail & turn so the rough side is towards you
Step 5: Push the tail under the plate & store under the stirrup leather

Making a Night Latch

Use This Knot To: Create a 'handle' to pull yourself deep into the saddle

Why Use This Knot: It is just handy to have a 6 to 9 ft. piece of rope on your saddle, and using it create a night latch saves time and money! I use the night latch whenever I am riding a horse I think might be a little prone to buck, or as a teaching devise to help folks feel their seat bones and pelvis

Disadvantages & Cautions: If tied too long, it can create a loop to catch the toe of your boot in, and of course do nothing to help keep you in the saddle!



Step 1:
Double your rope, and stick the loop thru the gullet of the saddle



Step 2:
Run the tails of the rope thru the loop; Make sure rider's hand is snug inside the rope, but not so tight they can't fit their hand



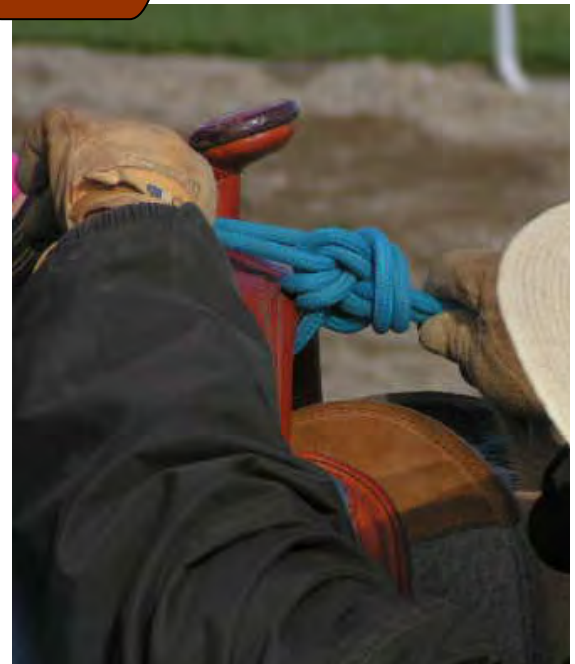
Step 3:
Keep your left-hand tightly above the loop to pinch the ropes and mark the spot



Step 4:
Take the tails around the leading edge, preparing to kink them & push the kink thru the hole you have just created



Step 5:
You're almost done! Run the tails back through the loop you have just created and then tighten down



Use of the ‘Get Down’ Lead

Use This Equipment To: Lead your horse; Keep him with you while you get a gate, doctor a calf; Accomplish ground school maneuvers; Tie your horse, so that your bridle will not be broken.

Why Use This Equipment: For the reasons listed above, it is just handy to have. Of course, if you are using a leverage-type bit, you would never lead your horse with the bridle reins. It is critical that you have a lead, approximately 14 ft. long, to use around the neck of the horse. Traditionally, the tail of this lead would run down through a small bosal, attached either by a hanger or to the forelock of the horse with a small leather thong.

Disadvantages & Cautions: If your ‘Get Down’ lead is part of your 22 ft. mecate, attached to the slobber straps of a snaffle bit, recognize that you are making suggestions more firmly on one side of the month than the other as you ask the horse to lead-up. For ground work in this situation, consider throwing a half-hitch around the slobber straps, to equalize the pressure. Also with this set-up, remember that if you are tying to a post etc., you need to take a moment to properly tie-up your mecate so that there is no pull on your bridle or the bit. (Resource: True Horsemanship Through Feel by Bill Dorrance & Leslie Desmond – Knots) A final caution relates to how you might place the ‘Get-Down’ lead in your belt, on the saddle horn, or coiled and attached with the saddle strings. If it you going to carry the lead in your belt, I highly recommend that you run the tail completely through your belt. I see many cowboys just making a kink in the lead, and putting that through their belt, sometimes with several kinks. Here is the danger...If by chance the tail of the lead bounces into one of those kinks, you have essential half-hitched yourself to your horse. Not a great picture if you happen to come off, while the horse enthusiastically goes the opposite way! If you plan to put the lead over your saddle horn, remember that it is half-hitched pretty firmly to that horn. Should you come off and get an arm or leg caught there, it might not be the best picture. I don’t recommend this method. Last, if you choose to coil your lead and tie it with the saddle strings, make sure you use a quick-release system, which allows you to get the coils loose with a simple tug. Remember, saddle strings should be light enough leather to break if significant pressure is put on them.

So there ya have it. Some good knots to know to keep you and your horse safe, happy, and feeling for one-another. There are several variations on each of these knots, slightly different instructions on how to tie them, but the bottom line in each case should always be towards safety, and thinking *of, for, and with* the horse.