

*Alice Trindle Presents:*  
**Developing  
a Willing  
Partnership**

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Alice Trindle was born on a ranch in eastern Oregon, the only daughter in a family of five brothers. She learned to ride behind the back of the saddle holding on to her brother's belt loops. In the past 15 years Alice has continued her relationship with horses, and had the opportunity to study with several true horsemen such as Tom Dorrance, Ray Hunt, Dennis Reis, and Bettina Drummond. She conducts clinics in Oregon, Washington, California, and Idaho, and offers multi-day horsemanship retreats at her ranch in eastern Oregon.  
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# Use of the Lariat

*Clinic #7 in a series of ten*

## **Use of the Lariat... Not just for Cowboys!**

It is unfortunate that so often in our various pursuits with horses that we get caught up in the costume of the rider, the type of horse he is riding, and the rules associated with achieving the ribbon or the score. After all, we are only human and somehow our species seems to need certain identifiers to help us determine status. Fortunately, horses operate by "herd" rules, and for the most part seek comfort, safety, food, water, and a little horse-play as their primary motivators. In this clinic, as we consider the many uses of the lariat to aid us in our horsemanship, I invite you stretch a bit, and take on a "herd" mentality. It really does not matter what specific discipline you are pursuing with your horse...The lariat can help you to become more comfortable, definitely safer, and allow for some very fun horse-play!

## **Getting Started**

**Type of Lariat:** I like to use a very soft rope or rawhide reata. The purpose of the lariat is to act as an extension of your arm or hand... firm when needed, yet soft and giving to allow for the movement. I use a 5/16", XXX soft lay nylon rope, with a cast stainless steel honda, called the Brannaman Horse Training Rope from King Saddlery. (1-800-443-8919). Because I have a small hand, and my round pen is only 50 feet across, I usually use the 45 foot long rope. The metal honda releases more quickly than a rawhide type, but it does carry a little more "zip" when you throw. (Note: If you are left-handed, you can request a left-hand twist when you order. It will save you a step in converting a right-hand twist, and get ya started with less frustration.)

**Becoming Comfortable with Your Lariat:** There is only one way to get acquainted with your lariat... PRACTICE! Your goal is to get the rope to look very used! Here are a few activities to help you develop your relationship with your lariat into a true friendship: (Note: I will be describing all activities for a right-handed human.)



**Coils should lay softly in your hand, and be prepared to flow off without tangling**

**Tossing and Coiling:** Start by developing a good square stance and place the coils of your lariat in your left hand, with the tail end of the rope pointing towards your belly. Begin by just trading coils from your left to right hand and back, keeping the coils organized in your hand. Next try putting most of the coils in your right hand, leaving the tail end in your left hand. See how far you can toss all the coils, starting low and tossing medium high, perhaps aiming for a designated spot. Now coil back

into your left hand, feeling for the twist of the rope as you go. If the lariat gets kinked as you coil, take time to figure out how to get it to lie nice and flat in your hand. You will soon learn how to “feel” for the problem, before you coil into your hand, but it takes a little time. Next try tossing out your coils using the left hand. Hold on to the tail of the rope pointed away from your belly with the right hand and toss the coil with a smooth easy motion out of your left hand. Get proficient at coiling into both your right and left hand, as this will be very important as you apply this skill in the round pen.

**Building a Loop:** (NOTE: For many of the lariat activities we practice it is not necessary that you know how to build a loop in your lariat. However, the skill is one that you will never regret perfecting, and just think of the stir you’ll make at the next dressage show when you demonstrate a houlihan!) There is actually more to properly building a loop than meets the eye, as well as a number of methods. Rather than take up the space here, I am going to make several recommendations for reading that give step by step procedures and pictures to help you easily build and throw a loop:

- Buck Brannaman’s Ranch Roping Book (Western Horseman 1-800-874-6774) and Videos (1-800- cowdogs)

- Series of articles in Eclectic Horseman - Prepare your Horse for Roping (303-449-3537 [www.eclectic-horseman.com](http://www.eclectic-horseman.com))

**Roping a Bucket or Dummy:** Once you have conquered building a loop, start trying to throw a flat, easy loop at something. Again, the articles, books, and videos I mention above give great instruction. Here’s a tip given to me several years ago by a fellow clinic attendee: Before and as you throw, DON’T think too hard about what you are trying to hit! His advice to me was to think of hot fudge sundaes, and sure enough, it relaxed me, let me breathe, and I usually could hit my target!

**Roping a Fence Post:** This game will help you prepare for using the lariat in the round pen. After you have caught the fence post, try skipping rope making huge forward and backward swings. Next turn your coils over one-half turn, and place the coils in your opposite hand. Now try the jumping-rope movement with this new hand. Get handy at turning the coils one-half turn and exchanging them into the opposite hand. Then start again by finding the rope attached to the fence post, and picking up a smooth, big jump rope swing. Finally, try tossing the slack over the fence, as if the fence were the back of the horse. Again, get handy at being able to use either hand to toss, while keeping your coils in good order to flow out of your hand.

**Feeding-out, Dallying-up, and Coiling with a Friend:** Now that you have begun to master the feel of the lariat, find a willing human friend to act as your livestock! (Note: I would not try actually roping them, as this is a sure-fire method to lose a good friend!) Start by having your pal take the honda end of the rope, and slowly walk away. Try imagining yourself on your horse, with your knees a little bent, and no tension in your body. See yourself dallying-up with your thumb up and the rope that is attached to your pal running out the bottom of your fist, past

the little finger. Remember, the dallying motion is more in the form of a ‘Z’, rather than a circle around the horn. Next pretend you’re popping the dallies, as your friend continues to move away softly. Finally, have your pal walk towards you, as you coil up, keeping your eyes on the livestock – not watching your hands coil.

### **Benefits to Lariat Use**

So at this point you are saying, “This all sounds great, but what do I get out of all this work, particularly when I will probably never rope anything in my life and don’t even own a Western saddle?” Here’s what people tell me they get from developing their lariat skills:

**An Ability to Multi-Task:** If you only teach your body how to toss and coil, you have improved your horsemanship, because it requires you to separate body parts, focus, balance, develop timing, and feel. These are the components of good horsemanship!

Develop a “Feel”: I was shown a video last year of a juggler, who Bettina Drummond said came the closest to illustrating how Mr. Nuno Oliveria’s hands worked with the horse. If for one moment the juggler tightened, lost focus, or forced the movement the ball would have dropped. Use of the lariat is similar, and anytime we can encourage our body to develop “feel”, we should take the opportunity.

**Preparing Your Horse for the Human World:** Using the lariat from the ground, and eventually from your horse’s back helps prepare him for many obstacles in our human environment. It has often been said that the lariat and teaching your horse to give to pressure, can be the kindest piece of barbed wire he will ever encounter. English or Western costume, I can almost guarantee that at some point in your horse’s experiences something will fly up from the ground, or zip across their back, or find itself under their tail. The lariat can help you prepare for the unexpected!

**Developing Specific Maneuvers and Strengths:** I use the lariat to help me in developing proper and balanced:

- Roll Backs – Starting with the hind quarters.
- Haunches-in and Half-Pass Postures.
- Engaging the hind quarters by dragging objects.
- Listening to my aids and giving my horse a job.

### **CAUTION: These activities carry the following prerequisites:**

1) You have prepared yourself to comfortably toss, coil, & jump rope swing the lariat.

2) You have prepared your horse with ropes around, under, & between his legs, girth, tail, and flank.

3) It is highly recommended that you try these activities under the guidance of someone with experience, who adheres to the principles of developing a soft, willing partnership and does not advocate “making” the horse submit.

4) Work first with a horse that is familiar with the requests you will be suggesting with the lariat, then move on to application with your own horse.

5) Double-check that the environment is horse-safe, and that the round pen or small square pen you are using is NOT bigger in diameter than the length of your lariat; Your lariat should be long enough to reach completely across the widest part of the school.

### A Favorite Lariat Activity

**Lariat in the Round Pen:** Begin by placing the loop of your lariat either over the saddle horn, or fastened through the handle-strap on the front of your English-type saddle. Practice the following maneuvers:

1) Send your horse away, softly feeding the coils off the hand which is closest to the tail.

2) Begin a huge jump rope swing with the rope in the hand closet to the horse's eye. Allow the rope to come in and out of the vision of the horse, and let the rope drag so the horse gets acquainted with the sound the rope makes as it passes over the ground and through the air.

3) Change direction by drawing the horse to you with your body language. As he faces you, turn your coils over one-half turn, and change them into the new driving hand (i.e. hand that will be closest to the tail of the horse). Now send the horse off in the new direction with rhythm and flow, and begin to jump rope on this new side.

4) Position yourself slightly in behind the horse, with your body energy projecting more parallel to the horse. Prepare to toss the slack in your lariat over the back and rump of your horse. Keep the coils in the hand that is close to the horse's tail.



**Body language and positioning are important communication tools. Don't rush, breathe, and don't try too hard!**



**Note how the lariat is just about to rest on the outside of the horse.**

5) Let the rope just rest on the rump, hocks, fetlocks, stifle, and be prepared to flow with your horse, allowing the coils to flow off your hand. Don't pull!

6) Once your horse has become accustomed to the feeling the rope on the outside of his body, in any position, begin to put a slight "feel" on the rope, using the hand that is closest to the horse's eye. You are simply suggesting to the horse that he yield

his haunches towards you and that the outside hind foot might seek a track slightly to the inside of the round pen. REWARD the smallest attempt, by releasing the "feel" or "hold" on the lariat.

7) Once your horse is yielding his haunches with the slightest suggestion on the rope, prepare to roll him back towards the fence with a nice turn-on-the-haunches. First, turn your coils one-half rotation and place them in the hand closest to the eye. Next, find the rope attached to the saddle horn with your hand that is close to the tail.

8) Position yourself on a line ahead of the horse, so that you can influence the outside hind foot to step under the horse's belly. As the horse steps under, arch your energy and the hand with the coils towards and past the horse's inside eye. Push the eye and shoulders through towards the wall, for the turn-on-the-haunches, and allow the horse to flow off in the opposite direction. This is a four-part maneuver: first, turn your coils over and exchange hands; second, feel for the outside hind foot to position the hind quarters for the rollback; third, push your coils toward the eye for the haunch-turn. Last, flip the slack in your rope over the rump of the horse as he departs in the new direction. REMEMBER: It is Not about blocking the eye first, it is about positioning the hind quarters for balanced success.



No matter what your riding discipline, I highly recommend getting acquainted with a lariat. You may never actually rope something with the intention of catching to restrain the livestock, but you can achieve tremendous benefits by just becoming comfortable with this challenging tool. The lariat will call you to a higher order in your horsemanship journey, and the benefits to both horse and rider will be immeasurable! TMT