

Handling Young Horses



with **DAVID STUART**

David has more than 25 years of experience all around the world, from starting young horses and dealing with behavioral issues, to teaching people the foundations of horsemanship. His coaching enables people to become safer and more competent around horses, giving them a solid foundation to build on.

With tasks like clipping, washing, rugging, shoeing and trimming, trailer loading, etc. I believe that the best way to approach these situations is with good preparation. This way when the horse does get exposed to new situations they already have some grounding.

As an example, in the UK I have started young horses for the polo industry, and while I still cannot swing a mallet, as a polo player can. I would have those young horses to where I could swing a rope off them and ride them with a flag etc. Then for the polo player to swing a mallet and stick and ball those horses, it was not that big a deal.

RUGGING PREPARATION:

When introducing the rug for the first time, start in a round pen or a safe area and prepare your horse by running through the following steps:

- 1 Try rubbing your horse all over and then maybe throwing the rope over your horse's back.



- 2 Holding a plastic bag in your hand and then rub your horse all over with the plastic bag.

- 3 If your lead rope is long enough and while attached to the halter on your horse, see if you can move the lead rope up and down your horse's hind leg in preparation for the rug's leg straps.

- 4 Rub the horse with a flag, or equally you can rub your horse with a saddle blanket or a coat as well.

- 5 You can then trade your saddle blanket, coat or flag for your horse rug. Rub your horse with your rug, folding it up a few times if you need to, so as not to overexpose your horse.



A young horse leading through water for the first time. Leading through water and walking over tarps are good preparation and confidence building tasks.

PUTTING A RUG ON:

When putting the rug on for the first time, initially I will not do the leg straps up or the neck strap. That way I can still get it off if I need to. I will try not to have the rug fall off and spook my horse. Let your horse walk around a little or take a few steps while your horse is on the end of the halter. If your horse will walk around a little and not panic, take the rug off your horse and repeat.

If your horse is accepting of the rug, then you could go ahead and do the neck strap and leg straps up. While the above are my guidelines for rugging, most horses will be okay if you do the preparation. Again as a precaution, I will keep them in a small pen or round pen to limit any negative reaction that they may have.



By folding up the rug for the first time, you minimize the risk of over stimulating the horse.

“The best way to approach these situations is with good preparation.”

HANDLING FEET:

- 1 Use a lead rope or lariat rope around the horse's fetlock and teach them to follow a feel and lead forward from his front foot.

- 2 Use the lead rope to assist in picking up the horse's foot for the first time and stay safe.

- 3 Once you can pick up your horse's feet without any adverse reactions, try holding them for a little bit longer and then getting to where you start taking the foot into the different positions for trimming or shoeing.

- 4 You may then want to tap the horse's foot, to simulate the noise of a shoeing hammer, etc.

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Before you need to shoe or trim, regularly pick up the horse's feet using the approach outlined above.



David using a lariat rope to teach a young horse to lead from his foot.

Having had the opportunity to travel to many different countries and across different disciplines and sports, horses are horses and people are people, we are all trying to get along better with our horses and understand them.

For the most part when a person asks the question of how do I get my horse to pick up their feet or to worm or to rug etc, the answer is to prepare your horse better, help them to understand that they can be

safe and secure. If we look at things more from the horse's perspective and through more educated eyes I believe we will have better questions.

I often say to people in my travels, make your goal to develop a nice saddle or riding horse. In doing so, you will have a horse that is nice to be around, both on the ground and when you are riding. Stay safe and enjoy your horses. ■

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