

## Loading made easy

A horse trailer is probably one of the most challenging obstacles you can encounter. Many horses and their owners are afraid of them, and bad experiences have made some nervous about loading. In this chapter, I'd like to explain how the right preparation can make loading fun – for humans and horses. The right preparation also means that you will be ready if you ever need to take your horse to the vet in an emergency.

Horses are claustrophobic by nature, and wild horses would never seek shelter in a cave where they couldn't escape quickly if they were in danger. To them, a trailer is just like a cave with no way out. So, if your horse absolutely refuses to travel in a trailer, he is psychologically and emotionally convinced that a trailer is not somewhere he wants to be, and forcing him in is only going to convince him further.



Look at the trailer as one of the many obstacles in the Squeeze Game, just like barrels, platforms or poles. In truth, it isn't about loading; it's about trust and communication between you and your horse. If you can play all of the Seven Games around the trailer and over the ramp, your horse will practically load himself!

### My tips for relaxed loading

**The aim:** for you to be able to load your horse with no outside assistance, even though you are standing outside the trailer, and for your horse to feel at ease in the trailer even with the bars in position and the ramp closed. When you come to unload him, your horse should wait patiently until you ask him to come out.

If you invest time in trailer training, your horse will be relaxed about loading for the rest of his life, and he will see the trailer as a game, as one of many narrow spaces. You will then even be able to load him backwards using your energetic aids alone.

A methodical approach is important for achieving this goal. I will explain a possible sequence of exercises, step by step, and you will find a few notes on troubleshooting at the end of this chapter.

**The basis:** your horse is familiar with all Seven Games and you can also play them near the open trailer.

#### *Step 1: preparation*

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Stand a few metres away from the lowered trailer ramp and play the straight-forward Squeeze Game. You want your horse to walk calm through between you and the trailer. Once he has walked through the gap, get him to turn around and wait. This will help him to relax.



Even the narrow space in front of the ramp can be a challenge for horses who have previously had a bad experience with a trailer or who are generally very anxious. Clear signs of unease and flight behaviour are your horse speeding up as he passes the ramp, freezing, lifting his head, a fixed facial expression and/or a higher respiratory rate.

You can help your horse to relax by giving him enough time to take in the situation from a distance before walking through the gap, or by increasing the distance between you and the ramp to begin with. See whether you can spot the first positive sign. This is a good moment to take a short break to reward your horse for behaving better and to give him the opportunity to reflect on what he has experienced.

Once your horse is able to pass slowly between you and the ramp, you can start sending him across the ramp. This will help your horse to become familiar with the feel of the ramp without having to face the inside of the trailer at the same time.

### Step 2: on line across the ramp

Going across the ramp feels a bit like going over a bridge for your horse. The surface has some give and every step sounds hollow. Horses would naturally avoid hollow-sounding surfaces because of the danger of collapse. Letting your horse see that the ramp can support his weight makes it easier for him to get used to the trailer.

Send him across the ramp again, this time alternating between the two directions and getting him to turn around, halt and reflect. Give your horse breaks as appropriate and watch for signs of relaxation and lip licking. Alternating between going over the ramp from the left and right allows your horse to perceive the situation with both eyes.

*The right systematic preparation makes loading stress-free for horse and human..*

*Step 2: on line across the ramp*



**Juliette sends her horse over the ramp in the Squeeze Game. Look how her horse relaxes, and how relaxed Juliette is as she stands in the middle.**

*It's not about loading; it's about trust and communication*

*Pat Parelli*

**Step 3:**  
*loading zone by zone*

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Once your horse has stopped worrying about the ramp, it's time to send him into the trailer – zone by zone. You now need to invite your horse to go inside the trailer. Stand next to the ramp so that you can show the way into the trailer with the hand closest to it and hold the stick with your other hand.



With some horses, it can be helpful to remove the central partition or move it right over to the side. This gives you slightly more room, but also risks your horse trying to turn around.

Stand your horse straight in front of the trailer ramp so that his head is pointing towards the trailer. Then, intensify your energy and send him forwards. Relax as soon as he takes a step in the right direction. Using this technique, send him further forwards and up, step by step, zone by zone.

If your horse stops after a few steps, repeat the process.



Loading zone by zone – step by step – with the partition open (top) and the partition closed (bottom)



If your horse goes fully or partly into the trailer, but comes back out again of his own accord, don't push him! Just let him come out far enough that you can lead him forwards by the halter again. If you force your horse to stay in the trailer when he wants to come out, you will only make his fear of this enclosed space worse, and he will rush out even faster next time. Keep using your stick now and then to praise your horse and stroke him. It's like an extension of your arm.



Always make sure that your rope is long enough when your horse goes into the trailer. Horses sometimes walk out of the trailer without being asked because you have unintentionally given a backwards signal on the halter.

#### Step 4: waiting in the trailer

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Once your horse has understood how to go into the trailer on your request, the next step is staying in there. He should wait patiently until you give him the signal to come out. If your horse struggles to stand calmly in the trailer without pushing his way out, be satisfied with the time he is able to wait, even if it is only short.



*Ten seconds of waiting quietly in the trailer is enough to begin with!*

Then, use a gentle YoYo Game to bring him out of the trailer, and move away from it. Your horse will see this as a reward and, at the same time, it will give him the opportunity to process what he has learned. From now on you should make sure that you horse can stay a little while longer in the trailer each time.



It's important that it is you who gives the stimulus to leave the trailer, and not your horse who makes the decision.

*Where the head goes, the body automatically follows.*

It doesn't matter if your horse isn't straight on the ramp when he walks into the trailer – as long as his nose is pointing towards the trailer. If you try to straighten him up by leading him away from the trailer and presenting him again, you will teach him that he gets to leave the trailer every time he doesn't approach it straight. Just make sure that your horse's nose is pointing in the right direction. Where the head goes, the body will automatically follow. If you have learned to bring the hindquarters towards you in previous exercises, you could also use this technique to straighten your horse.



**Backwards out of the trailer in the YoYo Game.**

Now it's a good idea to "play" with "zone-by-zone loading". Send your horse into the trailer. Get him to wait and bring him back out again step by step. Is he now able to stop and wait when you ask him to? This is how loading becomes a game and stops being about loading but about your communication.

### Putting food in the trailer as an incentive

Providing food, e.g. a little hard feed or a haynet, can make it easier to get very food-oriented horses into the trailer.



However, there are a few things to remember: put the food as far forward in the trailer as possible (and definitely behind the breast bar) and don't put it on the ground. Your horse must go completely into the trailer before he reaches the food. If there is food on the floor, your horse might put his head and neck under the breast bar to eat it and then panic when he finds he can't lift his head. Trailers with tack compartments have a fixed feed manger in the front section that you can fill. If you don't have one, then you can secure a full haynet or a feed bucket at the front of the trailer. If your horse finds the food there, he will reward himself at the right moment.

### Step 5: getting used to the breeching bar

Your horse has now learned to stand in the trailer until you ask him to come out, and you can also load him when the central partition is closed. It's now time to get your horse used to the breeching bar. Play a Friendly Game, first with the stick and then with the bar. Stroke your horse's hindquarters with it. Horse who are afraid of travelling will want to leave the trailer as soon as they feel the bar on their hindquarters. If that happens, keep stroking the hind-

*Horses who aren't able to eat in the trailer are usually acting according to their survival instinct. They aren't ready to travel in the trailer yet and need more preparation.*

*Step 5: getting used to the breeching bar*



The Friendly Game with the stick and bar.

quarters until your horse stands still. Then, play a Driving Game with the bar (lifting, swinging, approaching, gentle tapping) – just as you would do with the stick – until your horse moves forwards again. Keep repeating this until you have stroked your horse back into the trailer.

Only once your horse has accepted the bar can you hook it into position and fasten it. If your horse leans against the bar when it is secured in position, it can be helpful to touch his hindquarters with the stick until he takes one or two steps forwards. The aim is for your horse to experience being touched by the bar as pleasant or neutral so that you can hook in the bar without your horse leaning against it and pushing back.

**Step 6:**  
*closing the ramp  
and the first journey*

**Step 6: closing the ramp and the first journey**

Your horse can now enter and leave the trailer slowly and calmly, and he doesn't have a problem with the breeching bar. Now it's time to close and fasten the ramp. When you have done that, go to the front of the trailer and tie up your horse.



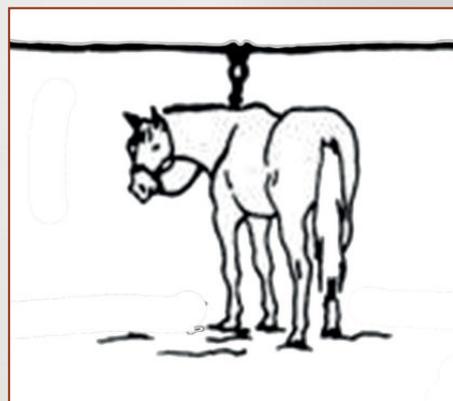
I am assuming that your horse has already learned to stand tied by himself and has stopped pulling against the halter. Tie up your horse short enough. He should be able to stand comfortably and reach his food. If the rope is too long, your horse could get his head under the bar and panic, or get his foot caught in the rope.

**The High Tie**

**My Notes on tying up**

Even though you might be happy that you can groom and tack up your horse with him loose, he still needs to learn to stand calmly by himself when he is tied up. Many horses struggle with this initially.

The High Tie is a safe way to practise standing tied alone. The rope is secured above the horse's eye level, i.e. it hangs down from above. The horse is tied up



short enough that the rope hangs loosely when the horse is standing calmly, but the rope is not long enough that he can get his head below the point of his shoulder. A horizontal rope secured firmly at the right height between two posts has proven to work well. You then tie the horse's rope onto it (see mini diagram). If your horse pulls against it, the horizontal rope offers a minimal amount of give so that he can't get loose and, at the most, can turn around. To check whether my horse

has understood being tied up, I watch him where he can't see me, so that I can intervene at any time to prevent any unpleasant situations.

## Travelling with horses

### My notes on towing

If horses find travelling in the trailer stressful it is often down to the driver's style of driving. Here are five important tips:

1. Drive off and brake gently.
2. Keep enough distance from the vehicle in front so that you don't have to brake sharply to avoid hitting them in an emergency. Your braking distance will increase greatly when you have around two tonnes to stop (trailer plus horse).
3. Uneven surfaces and potholes will cause the trailer to rock so you should only crawl along bumpy roads.
4. Corner slowly. If you go around corners too quickly, your horse will have difficulty balancing in the trailer and, unlike you, he can't see the bends coming. He can only react once the trailer is going around the corner.
5. If possible, do your first trip when the roads are quiet and don't drive through the city at rush hour.

If you are inexperienced at towing, then it's a good idea to practise moving off, stopping and cornering with an empty trailer. If you want to put your driving to the test, try putting a glass of water on top of your dashboard on your test drive...

## Read more about Trailer Loading in the book!



*You have to be patient with horses – and that goes for loading too. If you act as if you only have 5 minutes, you will need a whole day. If you act as if you have a whole day, you will only need 5 minutes!*

*Pat Parelli*