



Come on Down

By Heidi J. Potter

Wouldn't it be nice if every time you went to halter or bridle a horse it tipped its nose in and down so you could easily reach it? Teaching your therapy or lesson horse to do this is not difficult. However, it does take patience to teach it, and consistency to keep it. This one technique will allow the smaller or wheel chair bound students to play a more integral part in the preparation of their equine partners. Here are the steps you can take to teach your horse this valuable skill. Using a rope halter will make this work easier for your horse to understand.

- Stand on your horse's left side and begin by resting your right hand on your horse's poll. Your hand should feel heavy, but it should not push down. When his head drops even the slightest amount you need to remove your hand quickly. Horses learn on the **RELEASE** of pressure. Your cue provides the pressure, the horse offers a response, and you reward by releasing.
- If the head does not drop down after several attempts you can help him understand by applying *SLIGHT* down pressure on the knot (or buckle) under his chin with your left hand, simultaneously with the poll pressure.
- Repeat this exercise until he will drop his head every time you ask. Wean him off the pressure under his chin once he understands to drop just slight poll pressure.
- Once accomplished, switch it up and make sure that he will drop from slight pressure applied only under the chin. You want him to give to pressure in all ways.
- His head should drop down each time you request it and stay down for a couple of seconds or more. Ideally, you would like him to leave it down until you pull up slightly on the halter, asking him to bring it back up. You should be able to get him to drop all the way to the ground.
- Once the head drop from both locations is consistent you will ask for the nose tip. Stand at his left shoulder, wrap your right hand under his jaw and apply gentle pressure to the right side of his cheek. Release your hand completely once he softens to that pressure, even if it is only slightly. Practice so that he will reach way around and leave his head there for you when asked.
- Remember, horses learn on the release. Therefore, you must reward even the smallest try that he offers you.

“Calm, Clear and Consistent” are the mainstays of proper training. Make sure that all of your horse handlers are taught to ask the same thing, the same way. Once the horse understands what is expected of him, he will try his best for you. Enjoy!