

September 2007 Essex Rider
(Ground Driving & Knots)

Opening Reminders:

Don't forget to keep non physical contact pressure cues from the girth area forward and never place them behind the horse when lunging if you want your horse to actually expel stress and not just temporarily tire out. Also, make sure to make **all cues** *pressure / release* style.

General Advice for Knots, Ropes and Metal clips

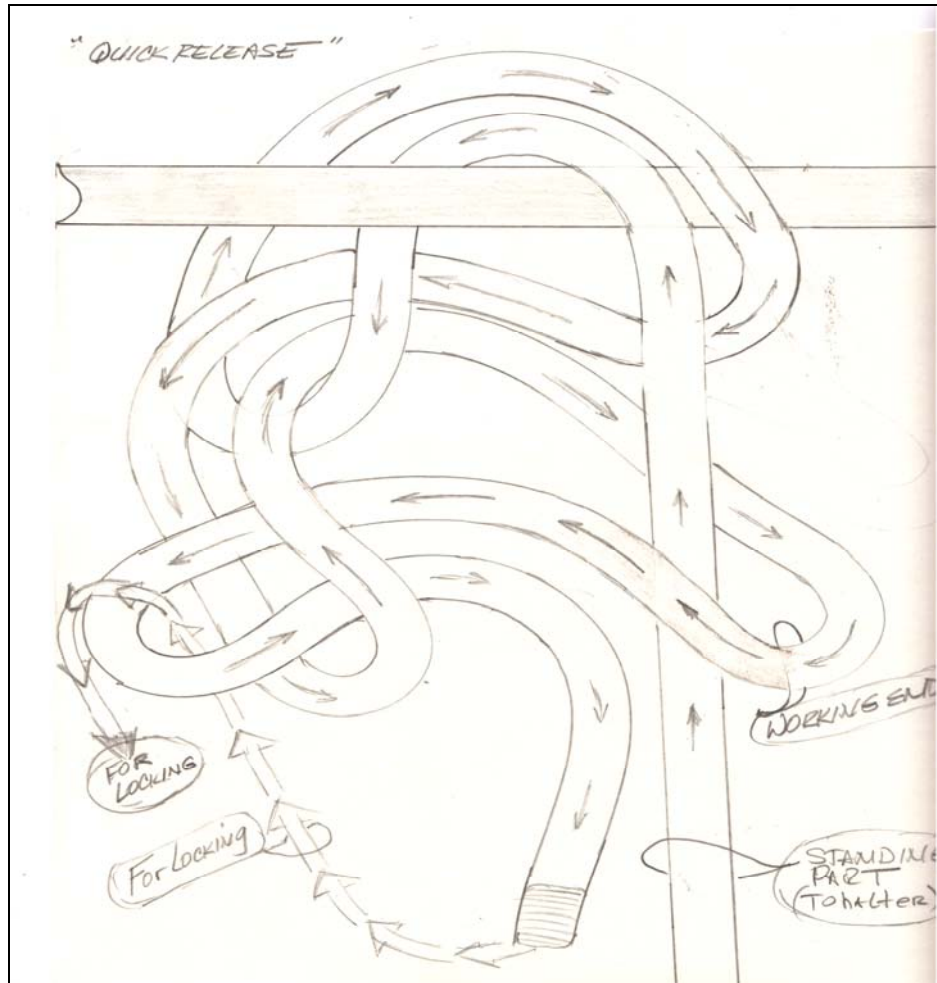
I recommend not using metal clips, etc. when connecting ropes to halters for either leading or lunging in order to protect the horses' face and jaw. Movement of the lead and/or lunge ropes with metal clips causes striking of a horses' jaw or face. Therefore metal clips cause pain and the result is that the horse misses the cues and messages we are trying to train them to recognize due to their preoccupation with the pain.

I also recommend not running ropes completely through tie down strings or metal loops as that is an all too common practice that results in dangerous situations. Dangerous to horses as well as humans and by being strung through the tie down loop often defeats the quick release needed when the horse is putting pull back pressure on the loop. I recommend using a quick release knot that does not loop the end of the rope through the tie down loop or ring and is releasable even under heavy pressure. There is a picture of this knot below.

Another important thing to do is to avoid using short lead ropes. It is good practice to use at least 10 to 12 foot long lead ropes for two main reasons. One is whenever a horse rears you have sufficient rope in hand to let them hit the rope and then allow the rope to slide slowly, with a lot of friction, through your hands thus releasing and not causing them to go farther into their right (instinctive) brain via natural opposition reflex. Another very important reason for longer lead ropes is when a horse escapes our grasp and is running with a short rope hanging down below its chin it cannot see it well, often stumbling and falling which can cause many problems (from jaw to leg to shoulder and more). Whereas, a long rope (10 to 12 feet is usually sufficient) drags alongside them and is generally within their peripheral vision so that they actually run slightly away from the rope and usually do not fall over it as easily.

Of course where horses are concerned, nothing is absolute and these bits of advice are simply improvements on what I see and from my experience with thousands. Another reason for using a longer rope is that it is much easier to tie a quick release knot/tie down and provides more latitude whenever needed.

As I have had such a large number of clients ask me about including information for some of the knots I recommend into my articles. Here are a few. A **quick release knot** for safety in cases where the tie down must be released in a hurry. This knot will not tangle in the loop as it does not require the rope to go through the string or ring to tie.

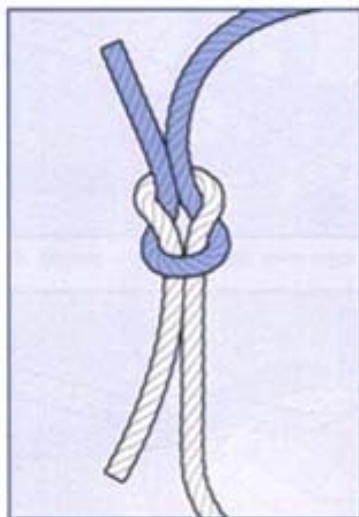


A **reef knot** is a quick and easy knot for connecting a lead rope to the halter loop just below the chin of the horse (easy but not overly secure - only practical for leading but not for training). A **double sheet bend knot** is also for connecting a lead or lunging rope to the halter loop under the horses' chin and is very secure plus easy to untie (better for training). A **single sheet bend knot** is for connecting the over the pole rope of a halter to the loop just below the ear / lying on the jaw.

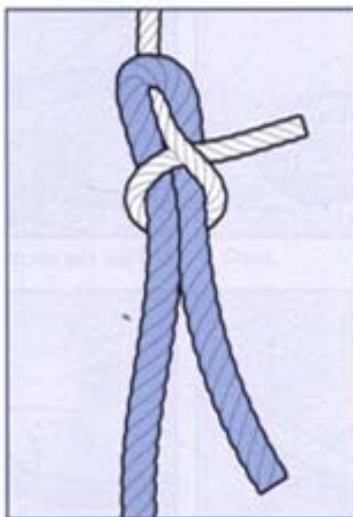
Tying two ropes together

A bend is used to tie two ropes together.

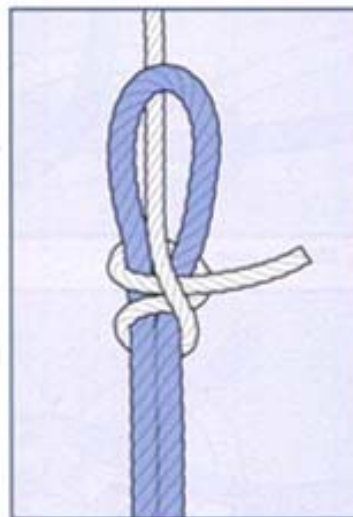
Summary: We have already learned three bends:



A reef knot.



A sheet bend.



A double sheet bend.

Training Advice:

Ground Driving (aka Long Reining or Long Lining) is an important training, starting and restarting method that many clients ask me to demonstrate. Also to put into an article. There are many benefits in using ground driving as one of the starting/restarting exercises. One is to give a horse an understanding of halter and bit pressures whilst still being able to see their leader (us) on the ground and clearly in their sight. Another is for them to learn the feeling of having us behind them (out of their sight) giving cues, in due course. However, they initially need to be able to see us laterally for their security and calmness before we move behind them. In all cases, the cues we use during ground driving / long reining should be consistently of the pressure release style/type.

Before beginning any ground driving / long reining exercises, there are some things I advise your horse learn. All being ground work exercises.

Some of these pre-training needs are : being halter trained, bridle comfortable as well as bit comfortable. I suggest beginning with a straight and malleable plastic bit with a chin strap (not a curb strap). Most importantly malleable and not one of the hard ones that can splinter and cause pain and problems. The horse also needs to have done at least some basic ground work foundation sessions with pressure release exercises on its body as well as head down and backward motion. I also prefer some poll release movements exercises. It is important to have done some feet handling work as well as some rope around the hock and over the back exercises. Don't leave out firm but benevolent leadership exercises (for horse confidence and disengagement understanding) as well as some lateral work.

I begin the work with loose ropes then progress to a circingle then on to a saddle (with the stirrups tied under the belly). I work in all three stages using pressure release cues whilst feeling the horses' stress levels in order to release or apply cues appropriately. I work initially from one side as the horse is accustomed to seeing me there and then gradually work my way to the rear

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and around to the other side then back again. Only then will I begin working from directly behind, whilst bending to each side to see the horses' eye then gradually lessening that visual contact. I repeat this entire process in all three stages to assure each set of feelings tie together in its mind.

During the first stage, where the ropes are not encumbered by a circingle or saddle, I like to condition the horse by looping the rope over the back from time to time. Round pens make a good starting place then in due course working in fields is best for advanced training.

My preference of ropes for ground driving are 12mm English Braid on Braid nylon ropes in lengths of 22 feet each, due to the smooth surface, weight and durability. They also do not get caught up in the circingle rings or stirrups as flat lunge lines tend to do.

Closing Reminder:

1. I was asked recently about the rear/flank cinch as applied to Rodeo Bucking Horses to coax more bucking. A flank cinch is typically not made where it is harsh against the horses' hide. They are generally covered in sheep wool or other soft materials to prevent harm.
2. If anyone wishes for me to cover a specific subject, do let me know.

Until next time, have fun and stay safe.

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