

Trust Me

ON THIS ONE...

Touching your horse all over with a stick

and with your hands can build trust.

Editor's note: The following tips are excerpted from Step 1 of "AQHA's Fundamentals of Horsemanship," a book and DVD set done in partnership with La Cense Montana. The books and DVDs are meant to be used in conjunction with each other, as the concepts are demonstrated with both well-trained and green horses, and also explained in writing so they can be studied.

IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO EARN YOUR HORSE'S TRUST AND HELP him to accept humans. If your horse really trusts you, he should allow you to touch him all over his body. He should also accept your tools without fear.

Rubbing Your Horse With the Stick

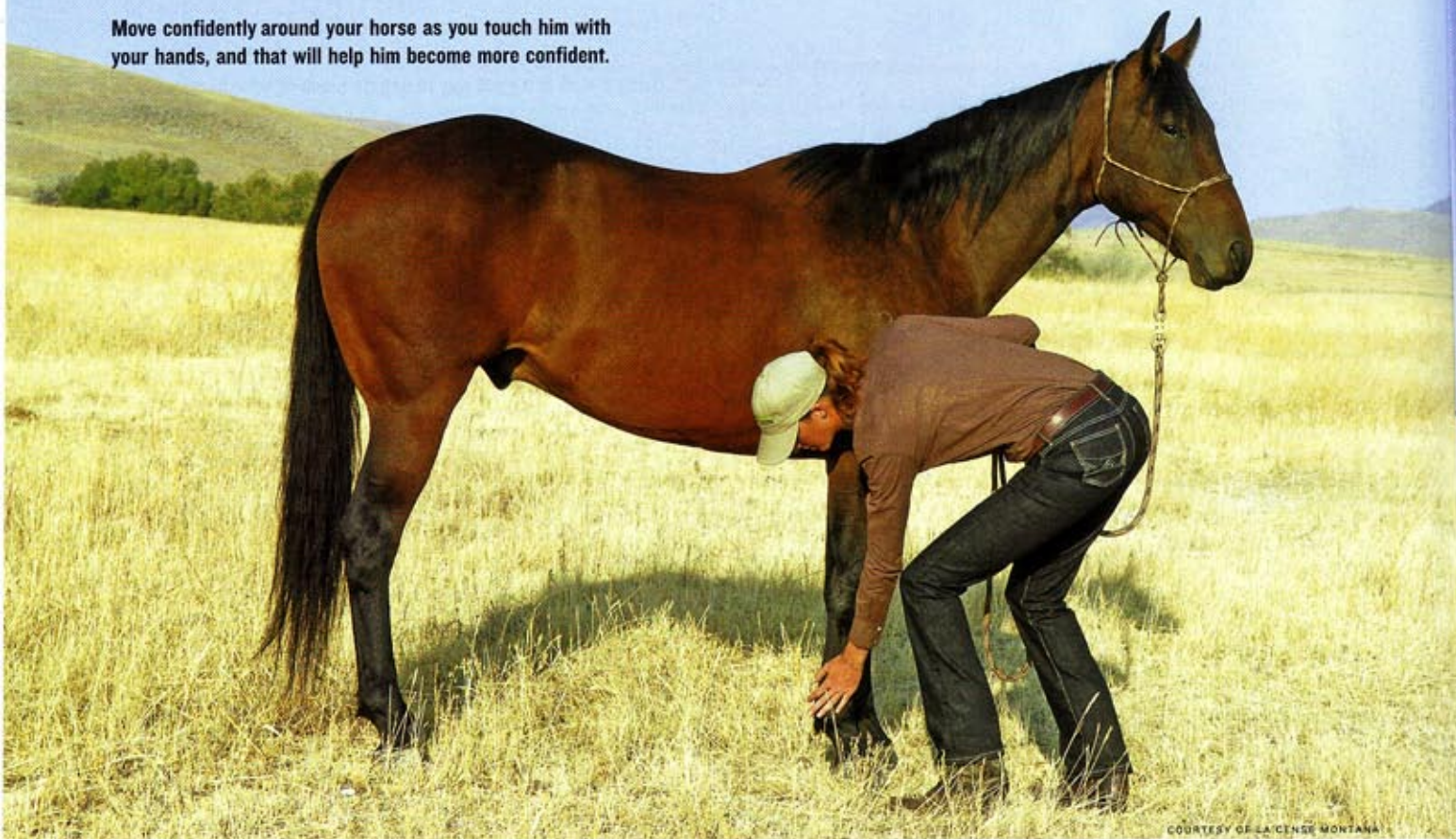
SOMETIMES A TOOL — SUCH AS A STICK — IS THE BEST WAY TO introduce a horse to touch. Think of the stick as an extension of your arm. You should be able to rub the horse all over the body with his stick. But if he was sensitive somewhere and kicked at the stick, you'd be glad that it wasn't you that was getting kicked. You can get into the more sensitive areas



Using a stick is a good way to initiate touching your horse all over.



Move confidently around your horse as you touch him with your hands, and that will help him become more confident.



COURTESY OF LA CENSE MONTANA

with the stick and keep yourself out of harm's way.

To begin, stand at your horse's shoulder, with the lead rope short enough to control him without preventing him from moving. To prevent the mistake – the horse walking off – is to prevent the horse from learning. You'll want to keep the horse's nose tipped slightly toward you, for basic safety reasons.

Initially, just try to touch his withers. To help your horse become comfortable, use the approach-and-retreat concept. Approach the horse with the stick, and before he gets too worried, move the stick away. Slowly approach the area again. Soon the horse will become desensitized and will allow you to touch the area with the stick. If the horse moves, just keep touching him with the stick. As soon as he stops, take all the pressure away.

This approach-and-retreat method is especially important in the horse's blind spots, where he can't see the stick, and the sensitive areas, such as his legs. The length of the stick should enable you to remain safe while touching a moving leg until the horse stands still and accepts the contact.

Keep your body language relaxed and confident, and remember not to blame the horse for acting like a horse. His reactions might seem wrong to you, but to him, they're perfectly natural. Take your time and reward the tiniest sign of relaxation with a moment's rest. You're building gradually toward your objective.

You'll know you're successful when the horse accepts the contact of the stick all over both sides of his body.

Using Your Hand

THIS EXERCISE IS FUNDAMENTAL IN ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP OF TRUST. If you can touch all parts of your horse's body, it will be much easier to groom him and otherwise take care

of him. And it will help him to more easily accept being fly sprayed, shod, clipped and examined by the vet.

Start by draping the lead rope over the elbow closest to the horse's body and tipping his nose slightly toward you. Rub your horse, starting on the easy parts like the neck or withers where horses love to be scratched. Rub, stroke or scratch, but do not pat him because horses do not enjoy patting. Keep your body close to the horse, and keep an arm, elbow, shoulder or hip in contact with him at all times.

Gradually, using wide strokes, move toward the more sensitive areas, moving a little closer with each stroke. If your horse reacts, stay calm and relaxed, and keep rubbing. If necessary, lighten your touch a little, but try not to stop altogether. Do not try to stop your horse from moving, but just keep rubbing on him. As soon as he stops moving, take all the pressure away.

Try to find your horse's "sweet spot," where he most enjoys being scratched. This is often the neck or the withers, but every horse is different.

Don't touch the really sensitive zones, such as the head, ears, sheath and stifle, until you have obtained a very good result with the rest of the body. You should be able to lift his tail, touch him around the ears, maybe even put your hand into his mouth a little. The horse should be confident enough with you that he allows you to do that.

It's important that you don't sneak around the horse; move around him with confidence. The horse needs your confidence to find his own. ■

"AQHA's Fundamentals of Horsemanship" is available online at www.aqha.com/discover/ah4. Price is \$24.95 for each of two sets, or \$19.95 for AQHA members. Call AQHA Customer Service at (806) 376-5181 to order by phone.

AQHA's Fundamentals of Horsemanship

BUILDING A BETTER RIDER



Steps 1 and 2 Available NOW!
AQHA members... \$19.95 ea.
Non-members... \$24.95 ea.

Each installment includes a
book and companion DVD.

Solid fundamentals are the key to success in the saddle. This comprehensive series from AQHA will give you the inspiration, skills and confidence to create a more rewarding relationship with your horse. It's an incredible value no horse owner should be without!

- New horse owners learn step-by-step methods to a sound riding foundation
- Seasoned riders reinforce and refine core skills
- Much, much more...

AQHA's Fundamentals of Horsemanship - Building a Better Rider
Order yours today at aqha.com/ah4, or by calling (806) 376-5181.

AMERICAN
QUARTER
HORSE
ASSOCIATION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Making Ranch Horse History

RANCHERS HAVE FLOCKED TO DENVER in January for more than 100 years to show off their stock and skill as horsemen at the National Western Stock Show & Rodeo. It was a natural fit for the show to host the crowning of the first AQHA versatility ranch horse world champions.

In versatility ranch horse, exhibitors compete in five classes – ranch cutting, ranch trail, ranch riding, working ranch horse and ranch conformation – and earn points based on their placing in each class. The horse and rider with the most overall points wins, and ties are broken based on the working ranch horse placings.

Thirty-one open and amateur riders vied for the historic championships. No horse and rider ever gave ground, but competitors cheered one another on, and when the dust settled, they were there to congrat-



Sixes Pick is a 1998 stallion by Tanquary Gin and out of Natural Pick by Tenino Badger. The horse's titles include 2005 reserve high point senior versatility ranch horse.

ulate the winners.

When it was time to crown the open champion, it came down to the very last class in the open competition – ranch horse conformation.

Smart Whiskey Doc and Mike Major of Fowler, Colorado, won the ranch cutting and working ranch horse and placed fifth in ranch riding. But a bobble in the ranch trail hurt any lock on the championship.

Sixes Pick and Chance O'Neal of the Four Sixes Ranch in Guthrie, Texas, won the ranch trail and had solid finishes elsewhere – second in ranch cutting, third in working ranch horse and fourth in ranch riding.

By the evening of the last day, horses and riders were tired and eager to crown a champion. Announcer Zeb Bell broke the silence with the judges' conformation placings, and when Smart Whiskey Doc was called for third, the crowd knew Sixes Pick had the championship.

"It was real tough," Chance says. "With all these horses, it's anybody's game; you don't ever know when you show up. We placed good throughout the show, and that's the secret to the game. If you can stay in the top five in every event, you know you're usually there at the front toward the end."

Dr. Glenn Blodgett, a veterinarian and the Four Sixes Ranch horse division manager, was on hand for the win.

"We're fortunate to have won the first versatility class that was held in Fort Worth," Dr. Blodgett says. "To follow it up with this world championship here, the first one, it's really a great feeling. Especially with a horse we raised."

– BY CHRISTINE HAMILTON

Trustworthy & Reliable



We spend over two years creating a trustworthy and reliable partner for the recreational rider. La Cense offers finely trained recreational riding horses.

Come meet your dream horse at La Cense Montana.



www.lacensemontana.com 406.683.8777

AQHA Fundamentals of Horsemanship:
An Educational Partnership with La Cense Montana

For the full story on the first-ever Fort Dodge Versatility Ranch Horse World Championships, see the March issue of The American Quarter Horse Journal.