

## GROUNDWORK; THREE KEY ACTIVITIES

Have you ever felt like you don't have complete control of your horse when you ride them? Or do things scare your pony and you don't know how to handle it? Do you wish you had a better relationship with your horse under saddle? Do you wish you could achieve more with your pony?



Photo by Andrew Hennell

michelle o'neill

If you can answer yes to any of these questions (and I can!) then groundwork might be something that interests you!

When we talk about groundwork, lots of people think about cowboys in big hats making horses spin and turn on the end of a long rope. But groundwork is much more general than that.

Groundwork is what you do with your horse every time you go near him. And the better your groundwork is, the better your relationship will be with your horse when you ride him.

Here are three key groundwork issues that will assist you have a better relationship with your horse;



### 1. Your Space, My Space

It is important that your horse or pony respects your space and everyone else's space too.

If you want to get close to your pony and give him a pat, that is fine, but it must only happen when you want it to; not when your horse decides it is time.

Work with your pony and make sure that they respect you enough that they will happily stand whatever distance you want away from you. You can make a game of it and push them away (wiggling the rope or waving a stick and bag works great for this) or ask them to come closer.

You can ask your horse to stand away from you and just relax and see how long it takes for them to walk



into you. As soon as they do, send them back past where they were standing originally.

### 2. Move Your Feet

Anytime you have to ride a fresh horse or a pony that you don't know, making them move their feet can be a great way to get them engaged with you and get them to listen to what you are asking.

The easiest way to get a horse to move their feet is to get them to lunge around you with lots of changes in direction. The changes in direction are the important moves here; as it makes a horse work harder.

You really want your horse to put all his weight on his back legs and turn; if you feel like you are going to get run over, then something has gone wrong and you need to work on pushing your horse's shoulder away from you more.

### 3. Walk With Me

When you lead your horse, he must want to be with you; not in front and not too far behind.

The easiest way to get your horse to lead with you is to change your direction to make them walk further or less than you. If they are out in front, do a circle to the left and make them walk further. If they are dragging behind, do a circle to the right so they have to catch up.

There are lots of groundwork exercises you can do with your horse beyond these three. But if you could only work on three, these ones would make your life with your horse much more comfortable.

And remember, everyone has a slightly different idea about groundwork. There are a lot of great trainers out there who can help you learn, so check them all out and then put together the exercises that work best for you and your horse or pony.

# ASK MICHELLE

*My pony Rusty is green broken and we have recently started jumping.*

*On the ground, Rusty is an excellent jumper but under saddle he gets nervous and very hot.*

*How can I keep him calm while jumping and encourage him over jumps more? He refuses a lot under saddle but not on the ground/lunge. He also gets very hot and nervous while jumping, but on the ground he is fine. He also has a bad habit of dropping his head before a jump and throwing my balance.*

*Thank you, Morgan :)*

Hello Morgan

How exciting that you are working with a green broken horse! Young horses are lots of fun and love to learn, which will help you to learn lots at the same time.

The thing with a green broken horse is that they do not know a lot about being ridden. They are still learning how to balance and control their body parts with the extra weight of a rider and equipment on their back.

And of course most green broken horses are young; so their bones are still maturing and they need to be ridden to ensure they get exercise without putting pressure on their tender joints or hindering their development.

Perhaps your pony Rusty is not up to jumping yet. If he is getting nervous and hot then maybe a problem; perhaps he is in some sort of discomfort or he is mentally not ready to jump.

I would suggest you go back and get your basic foundation under saddle really well established before you do any jumping. Make sure Rusty listens to your aids and that he is responsive and confident when you ride him. Maybe even get some dressage lessons.

I also think it would be worth making sure that Rusty is not in pain; the fact that he drops his head before jumping suggests that he may be uncomfortable. Perhaps get him checked for saddle fit or for some other soreness.



After you have Rusty confident and have established a strong foundation, then get an experienced jumping instructor to help you start him jumping again. And take your time; you want Rusty to be jumping for many years to come, so there is no rush.

Good luck!



*All the good basics and more!*



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## UPCOMING EVENTS:

- 28th Feb - Horsemanship Clinic at Murrumbateman
- 6th March - Horsemanship Clinic at Albury
- 9 April - Horsemanship Clinic at Cooma
- 1st May - Horsemanship Clinic at Eden

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