

Jigging

Follow these tips to handle jigging on the trail.

By Micaela Myers

“When a horse feels anxious about something (catching up to another horse, or getting back to the barn, for example), he’ll want to go faster to catch up or to get back home where he’ll feel safe,” Falcone explains.

Jigging is a bouncy, uncomfortable cross between a walk and a jog. “Holding the horse back with both reins makes him feel claustrophobic and more anxious. If he can’t go faster forward, he’ll go faster up and down,” Falcone says. Instead of pulling back on the reins, you can try a number of other tactics to get your horse back into a quiet walk.

Make your horse responsible. “Teach your horse that it is his responsibility to maintain gait until he is asked to change it,” Falcone says. “This was one of the most difficult things for me to learn. I used to believe it was my responsibility to hold on to the reins to keep my horses from going too fast.”

Falcone teaches her horses to maintain gait by riding with a loose rein. “I allow the horse to choose his own way down the trail or go wherever he wants in the arena, as long as he maintains a walk,” she explains. “When he breaks gait, I lift one rein and hold it—if he does not go back to a walk in a few strides, I slide my hand down the rein and ask him to bend his neck to the side, until he drops back down to a walk. I immediately let the reins go loose and off we go at a walk. I repeat this sequence every time he breaks gait.”

Falcone reminds riders to be patient. “Be willing to do the exercise over and over and over until your horse makes the change you want.”

Once your horse understands the lesson, you can introduce another horse and rider, and repeat the exercise if your horse gets antsy when the other horse gets a short distance ahead. “I slowly build up to greater distances and faster gaits,” Falcone says.

“If my horse becomes too anxious about the separation and gets wound up beyond a jig, I allow him to go as fast as he wants sideways,” Falcone explains. “Going sideways eventually helps him realize that it is much more comfortable to just walk straight down the trail.”

Stay relaxed. “Being really tense and uptight can cause jigging, so learn to relax and breathe really deeply, and try to keep your body as ‘Jell-O-like’ as possible,” Reynolds recommends.

Use a hill. If your horse is jigging, and there happens to be a hill nearby, you can ride up the hill in an attempt to show him that walking is less work than jigging, Hall suggests.

Get off and lead your horse. Your goal is to teach your horse to walk calmly home. “Get him in the habit that on the way home you go calmly,” Reynolds explains. “With our horses we never go faster than a walk the last mile of the ride.”

If he insists on jigging home, you can try dismounting and leading him, provided he leads well and it’s safe to do. “If I’m alone and the horse is jigging, I’ll usually get off, pet the horse, and let him eat some grass. So we kind of graze our way home so that he gets in the mindset of ‘Oh, the way home is relaxing,’ ” Reynolds says.

[Return to Trail Problem Solver >>](#)