

Trail Tune-up

My 9-year-old Quarter Horse is perfect for trail rides, but sometimes he'll lie down and roll when we're crossing water. Can you help me fix this problem?

By Dale Rudin

Q. I own a 9-year-old Quarter Horse and all we do is trail ride. He's perfect, but sometimes he'll lie down and roll when we're crossing water. I kick him, but he ignores me. I have to get off and pull him up. Can you help me fix this problem?

A. To get your horse to be more responsive and respectful of your cues, you need to get him focused on you. To do this, add at least three days of arena work to his weekly routine. If you don't have an arena, use an open field. Warm up at the walk and then guide him through patterns, such as a circle followed by a straight line, and then a circle in the opposite direction. Riding on straight lines from corner to corner on a diagonal path and from end-to-end down the center of your arena or field will improve your horse's focus and reliance on your cues.

Repeat the same exercises at the trot and then add serpentine to his repertoire. When that's going well, ride circles and straight lines at the lope. Pay attention to leads, steadiness, and making transitions soft and smooth.

No matter which gait you're working your horse, emphasize his responsiveness to your leg cues. When you press evenly with both legs, he needs to lengthen his stride immediately. If he doesn't, firmly bounce your legs against his sides until he gets the message. If you press with one leg, he needs to readily move away from it. Depending on the position of your leg, behind the cinch, in the middle of his rib cage, or slightly behind the middle, you should be able to move his shoulder, entire body or isolate his hip.

Those exercises will teach your horse to follow your lead instead of making his own decisions. Don't put any time constraints on your horse's progress. This is a new process for him to become accustomed to both mentally and physically. As his willingness to do these basic exercises improves, you should have more success keeping him moving through water. If you do feel him try to go down, keep his head up by elevating your hands or turning his head to the side while energetically sending him forward with your legs. Don't let him stop to paw or drink. It will be difficult to get him going again. Until you can trust him, keep his feet moving. If he does go down, get your legs out of the way so you don't get pinned underneath. Although your horse enjoys a refreshing dip, teach him that his relationship with you is his top priority.

Expert: Dale Rudin teaches her "Performance Through Partnership" techniques near her home in Tennessee and offers clinics nationwide. She also authors "Western Lessons" in *Young Rider* magazine. www.dalerudin.com