Parelli Natural Horsemanship: The Driving Game

Pat Parelli

3. Driving Game
The Driving Game is the third of the Seven Games. It teaches your horse to yield from a “suggestion” with no physical touching involved.

This game is learning how to use rhythmic pressure. The horse is naturally inclined to move quickly away from moving objects or rhythmic pressure, so this game is relatively easy to teach to your horse.

When teaching your horse the Driving Game, you will need to use rhythm in your hands, beating the air like Indian drums in “B” grade western movies! It goes in little groups of four, with the first beat being emphasized: “BOOM boom boom boom … BOOM boom boom boom.”

For the Driving Game, here is what your Four Phases might look like for backing your horse up:

Phase 1
Softly beat the air with your hands (not touching the horse, stay about 12 to 24 inches away from him). Pretend there are a couple of little bongo drums in the air between you and your horse’s nose. Softly beat them in unison.

Phase 2
Increase the intensity of the rhythm but do not move closer to your horse.

Phase 3
Start moving closer to your horse, slowly and meaningfully. Give him a hard look.

Phase 4
Tap your horse’s nose (on either side of the bridge of the nose) using the same rhythm until he backs up just a step. Your feet should get planted in place once you start making contact with your horse.

If anything, this contact can get progressively more intense, but keep your feet still the whole time. This way, the moment the horse takes a step back, he gains instant comfort and release from the physical pressure. He’ll learn that if he moves, the discomfort stops.

Key Tips to Using Phases
Any time your horse moves backward a step, release (quit, relax and smile). Allow your horse to think for a moment when he does the right thing. You could even wait for him to lick his lips. Then, start again. Always begin at Phase 1. In the teaching stages, give each phase about three seconds, but stay with the fourth phase until you get the horse to move.

If you do it right, you’ll find that after using Phase 4 only a few times, you will rarely have to use it again. Your horse will want to move well before you ever get there.

Start with the back up. Play with this until you are able to easily drive your horse backward at least five or six steps consistently.

<< Back to The Seven Games

Next: The Yo-Yo Game >>