

This issue deals with the basics of a question I get asked a lot. Different circumstances but the reason for the problem; hence the question, is the same. I am sure that you will find the answer and discussion useful.

FAQ: My daughter has a 5 year old appaloosa she wants to eventually use for jumping. She's had him about a month and he's usually a pleasure to ride. However on some occasions he just stands still and will not budge even when she tries to get him to circle. Is he just being stubborn? How can she get him to move? . . . Jen via Internet

Answer: It sounds like your daughter's horse has been accustomed to making many of the decisions in their relationship. Yes, it's possible he's being stubborn, which is an attitude problem, but in most cases I find that it's because the horse doesn't clearly understand what we want.

Here are some situations when the horse might be making the decisions.

- Does the horse stand totally still while your daughter mounts?
- After she is on, does the horse wait to be asked forward with leg, or does he often walk off?
- When asking for an up transition to the trot, does the horse wait for leg cues, or does he often pick up a trot on his own?

If the horse isn't waiting for the cue to go forward, then the problem is that the horse, not the rider, has been making the decision to go forward. The by-product of this is:

***** The horse will also make the decision NOT to go forward. *****

Another possibility could be that the rider is NOT ALLOWING the horse to go forward. This could be the result of the rider having too much pressure on both reins while asking the horse to go forward with the legs. This is very confusing to the horse because on the one hand you're asking the horse to go forward (with leg pressure) and on the other, you're telling the horse not to go forward (with your hands).

Trying to get the horse to move by asking him to turn on a circle is a correct way to address the problem. But if you don't "give" with the outside rein, the horse may not be able to bend enough to move in a circle therefore adding to the horse's confusion and frustration.

Here's how to fix it. First, you need to learn the basics of teaching the horse to give to pressure and recognize the correct response and reward for it. In other words, learn to communicate in the horse's language. It all starts with the ground work!

In our first DVD, "Establishing Control of Your Horse", these basic giving to pressure exercises are explained and demonstrated very clearly through several ground work exercises. Once you start to better understand the basics of the horse's language, you will then develop the necessary tools to successfully progress further with your horse.

So the bottom line here is:

If you give conflicting cues to the horse, the horse gets frustrated.

If the horse doesn't understand what you want, he will often do nothing.

Give the proper cues at the right time (pressure & release of pressure).

Make sure you allow the horse to do what you are asking him to do.