

# Emergency brakes!

## The "one rein stop" and "doubling"

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*(Caution: Never do a one rein stop or double a horse in a bit with leverage of any kind. Do not use these techniques in a curb bit, or a gag bit, or even with a mechanical hackamore. The leverage of these devices will cause pain in the horse's mouth or jaw and make the horse overreact to these stopping techniques, often causing him to run or whirl in reaction. Use a full cheek snaffle, a large D ring snaffle, a large eggbutt snaffle, or a sidepull to teach these maneuvers. If you are having trouble with a horse that does not stop easily, it is best ride him in one of these devices to teach him to have both brakes and "emergency brakes" for a long time before you ride him in a leverage bit.)*

Imagine driving your car in rush hour traffic on the surface streets of a busy city. You approach a cross street, at a relatively slow speed, and the light turns red. As cross traffic begins to zoom across in front of your hood, you put your foot on the brake pedal to come to a full stop, and nothing happens. What do you do? Well, if you had a good teacher when you learned to drive, you quickly engage the emergency or parking brake and stop your car before you become another Eye Spy Traffic Helicopter Report statistic. Then you get your brakes fixed as soon as possible!

Another scenario: Imagine you are riding down a favorite trail on your horse, moving along at a moderate speed. Your slicker begins to slip on the back of the saddle, irritates your horse, and he speeds up a little, so you decide to stop to adjust it. You squeeze your hands in a gently repeated pull/release with both reins to slow and stop your horse, sitting deep, (a basic half halt maneuver) *and nothing happens*. If anything, he actually starts to pick up more speed. What do you do? Unlike your car, your horse may not have come equipped with emergency brakes, but if you have installed them on him as an "after market option" you apply first a one rein stop and, if that fails, a double, to stop him in his tracks. If you haven't installed these advanced breaking systems, here is how to do it.

### Ordinary brakes:

**Typical method:** Most horses are trained to stop or slow down when they feel resistance from the rider's hands on the bit. The process runs as follows: The horse is walking along, with or without some slack in the reins, rider's fingers relaxed and allowing full, free head and neck motion. The rider tightens his fingers over the reins until he feels some pull in them from the horse's mouth or nose (this method can be used with a sidepull or bosal as well), resists the motion of the head and neck by keeping his hands still or slightly pulling back on the reins. The horse stops. There is not a lot of finesse in this particular method, but it is pretty commonly used and taught to horses and riders.

**Better method:** Some horses are taught to stop or slow down when they feel resistance from the rider's seat, leg, and weight aids, with only a slight back-up feel of resistance from the reins. This more complex method of stopping leaves the horse's mouth out of the process until the very end, and relies on balance and weight shift in his body to slow him down or stop him. There are several

methods for training the horse to respond to these aids, and some variations in the way they are used. Most often, however, the procedure is as follows. Horse is walking along, with some slack in the reins. Rider sits straight, gives a light squeeze/release with his upper legs, pushes some of his weight deeper into the saddle, tilting his pelvis so that his tailbone is lowered a little, breathes out to relax his lower abdominal muscles, and to finish the stop takes a light squeeze/release on the reins with both hands. Horse slows or stops, depending on what the lower legs are doing (if they are on the horse he keeps moving, if they are away from his side, he stops.)

Both of these methods work with most horses in most circumstances, but there are occasions when they fail. Rather than continuing to use them on a horse that is either ignoring them or too wound-up to notice them, it's a good idea to have a back-up method for stopping the horse and preventing other types of misbehavior like bucking or running.

### **The mild emergency brake – the one rein stop:**

**Why and when?** The one rein stop is best used for horses that are moving too fast, paying little or no attention to standard "stop" cues, and although somewhat disobedient, are not behaving particularly dangerously. The cue works as a way to remind them of previous conditioned response for stopping, and helps them focus on the rider as the "number one partner" in the relationship. For many horses, this is the only emergency brake that will ever be needed.

**What is it?** The one rein stop is a maneuver in which the horse bends his head and neck slightly to one side and simultaneously yields his hindquarters away from that side, coming to a stop as his body loses a straight alignment. This maneuver is also often called "disengaging the hindquarters", which is a rather misleading way of describing the yielding over from pressure or "untracking" of the haunches of the horse. To me, the term "disengage" implies throwing the clutch on a car and taking the gears temporarily out of action, which is not what happens in a horse's body when he yields his hindquarters. He still has plenty of push power from his haunches when they are yielded over, and his back and haunches do not somehow become disconnected from his shoulders as a result of this maneuver. What does happen is that his balance is momentarily affected by the shift of his haunches to one side. This can encourage him to slow or stop, if he is conditioned to do so by repetition of the maneuver.

**How to:** Before teaching this maneuver from the saddle, the horse must understand how to move his haunches away from pressure and how to bend his neck to "follow" a direct rein to the side. I prefer to teach these skills with physical/touch rather than visual signals.



Bending the neck from the ground

### ***On the ground:***

***Hindquarters:*** Before asking a horse to yield his hindquarters from the saddle, teach him how to do it from the ground. To move the haunches over, stand about even with the girth, place your hand on the horse's side, just about where your calf would be if you were in the saddle, and with the flat of your hand or the flat of your fist, push straight into his side, while simultaneously tipping his nose toward you with a light pull/slack on either the halter lead rope or one rein on a snaffle bit or sidepull. Ask the horse to move over one step only with his hind legs, keeping his front legs still, then release all pressure and praise him. Switch sides and repeat the exercise. Practice the maneuver over a period of a couple of days, until the horse will easily and willingly move his hindquarters over one step in response to pressure from your hand on his side. Don't rush the process, or try to poke him in the side with your finger (which is a sharp object, after all) to get him to move over. Try to imitate with your hand the feel he will have from your leg when you are in the saddle.

***Neck:*** While most horses will usually bend their necks from side to side with simple direct pressure on a lead rope or snaffle rein, some of them do have very stiff muscles in the neck that make this difficult. Since the ability to bend the neck from side to side is very important in both the one rein stop and doubling, take time to help your horse gradually bend his neck as you are teaching him to yield his haunches. With the horse standing still, place one hand at about the center point on his neck, then gently turn his head toward the side, bending the neck at the point where your hand is placed. Don't force the neck around, but instead ask the horse to bend it in very small increments, until he ends up with his forehead aimed first directly to the side, then, eventually, back toward his flank. Do this to both sides, until with a slight tug on the rein or lead rope, he can bend his neck without resistance.

***Mounted practice:*** Once the horse can bend his neck and willingly yields his hindquarters from the ground, practice these exercises from the saddle. With the horse standing still, one rein in each hand, lower one hand to below the swells on a western saddle, and using a light take/release on that rein while the other hand slacks off any contact with the horse's mouth or nose, bring the horse's neck around to first one side, then the other. At first he may try to slew his entire body around, yielding his hindquarters over without being asked. Prevent this by keeping gentle pressure against his side with your leg on the opposite side from the expected bend in the neck. Ride him forward between each repetition of this exercise to keep his attitude positive and prevent him from becoming sour with it.

When the horse has mastered the neck bends, begin to ask him to yield his hindquarters over from your leg pressure. Again, start with the horse standing still, then push strongly, straight into his side, with your lower leg/calf on one side, slightly tipping his nose to that side with a light squeeze/release of the rein on that side, and *supporting the action* of this direct rein with enough contact on the other rein to prevent the horse from bending his neck too far. Ask for one step to the side with the hind legs, then relax all rein and leg cues and praise the horse. Ride forward a step or two, then repeat to the other side. Continue to practice this exercise alone until the horse easily steps over with his hind legs one step, every time you ask by pressure with your lower leg.



"the one rein stop, horse moving haunches over from leg pressure, bending neck slightly to same side as pressing leg."



"release of rein, leg still on horse, final phase of one rein stop"

**Putting it together:** With the horse walking slowly forward, begin to put the whole of the one rein stop together.

1. Tell the horse with your seat that he can anticipate a change of some sort by
  - a. squeezing and releasing gently with your upper thigh.
  - b. tipping your pelvis as you would for a standard half halt, and
  - c. sitting slightly deeper in the saddle
2. Breathe out, settling "heavy" into the saddle,
3. Ask him to move his hindquarters over one half step, and at the same time...
4. Take a light pull/slack with the rein on the *same side* as the leg that is asking for the yield of the haunches.
5. Take the leg off the horse as soon as you feel him move over one step with the hind legs, and maintain light pressure on the *onerein* until the horse comes to a stop .. At which time you release all rein pressure and reward him with a stroke on the neck or verbal praise or both.

Practice, practice, practice, until every time you start to "take" with the hand and "push" with the leg on one side, the horse comes to a stop. Practice first at a walk, than at slightly faster speeds, as the horse becomes more and more responsive to this set of cues.

### **The Major Emergency Brake -- teaching a horse to double:**

**Why and when?** Doubling is a strong tool. It is useful for green horses that have strong minds and are resistant to learning to get along with a rider. It is indicated for spoiled horses that have developed dangerous habits such as rearing, bucking or running away. And it is useful for any horse that suddenly "takes a notion" to run or buck and must be stopped for his own or his rider's safety. It is not for horses that have hock or stifle unsoundness problems, or those with back or neck injuries.

Horses like that will be physically harmed by doubling if it is done very often. Even well conformed, sound horses can be injured by this technique if it is overdone.

*Don't do it if you have any doubts about the physical soundness of your horse!* Doubling is also not an everyday, gentle cue for quiet, normally well-behaved horses that may speed up a little on the trail. Use the one rein stop for them, don't double them unless it is absolutely the last resort for preventing a disaster.

**What is it?** When a horse is "doubled" he literally swaps ends, in a sharp, abrupt 180 degree turn. This takes his forward momentum away from him, changes his balance, and interrupts whatever he has been doing by completely disrupting the way he has been using his legs and body.

**How to:** Before using this maneuver from the saddle, it is a good idea to teach a horse to turn sharply on the ground. It is also useful for him to have learned to bend his neck and move from leg pressure on the side as he would for the one rein stop.



"Doubling from the ground, horse beginning the turn."

**On the ground:** Unless you are physically strong and have a good round pen to work in, don't try to double a horse at speed from the ground. You can teach one to turn sharply at a walk, however, even if you are as creaky as I am and only have an arena to work in. I prefer to teach this in a fairly thick rawhide bosal, but it can be done in a stout halter if you don't have access to a bosal. Attach a good, stout mecate or longe line to the bosal or halter, and ask the horse to walk forward along the rail, with you following slightly to the side and behind him. Go forward for several steps, then bring the longe line behind your hip, lock it there, and *sharply* turn the horse back on himself, so that he "swaps ends" then *instantly release* all pressure on the line. You may make this less abrupt by using a verbal cue such as "turn-sharp" as you bring the line over your hip. However, sometimes the very unexpected nature of the use of the double is what makes it most valuable as a control tool. Practice for only two repetitions to each side, then go on to something else. Don't overuse this tool, or you can make your horse resentful and set up resistance in his neck. Just like a car's emergency brake, it can be burned out by overuse.



*"The double, showing the position of the rider's leg on the off side, pushing the horse through the turn."*



*"The double, showing the inside leg off the horse, inside hand pulling the head around. This will be followed by a release as soon as the turn is complete."*

**Mounted work:** The double differs from the one rein stop in two ways: one, its purpose is to sharply turn the horse in a tight 180 degree turn, ONCE and stop; and two: you use *your leg on the opposite side* from the turning rein to drive the horse through the turn. If you ride with normal leg cues, asking the horse to turn right by pressing with your left leg against his side, he will already be somewhat familiar with that use of the leg. Despite ground practice, he may not understand the abrupt use of the single rein to turn him sharply. To teach him that cue, at a walk, practice lowering your hand (say you want to double to the right) and pulling sharply down and back on that rein, while allowing the left rein to slack completely. Bend his neck this way, sharply, first to one side, then the other. This is very similar to the way you bent his neck in preparation for the one rein stop.

**Putting it together:** At a walk, practice the entire double. It works like this, for a double to the right:

1. Prepare the horse for a new maneuver by sitting deep in the saddle, following the same two first steps in the one rein stop.
2. With a tight hold on the right rein, lower your right hand, so that it is well below the swells of the saddle, and out a little bit away from your body.
3. Simultaneously, allow the rein in the left hand to go slack, with *no* tension on the rein. Hold it firmly enough so that it does not pull out of your hand, however.
4. Pull back and down quickly on the right rein, bringing the horse's head and neck back toward your knee, while...
5. *Simultaneously*, kicking strongly with the *left* heel to drive the horse's body quickly through the sharp turn, keeping the right leg quiet on the horse's side.
6. *Instantly* slack all pressure on the right rein as the horse finishes a very tight 180 turn.
7. Pause for a count of at least 6 and allow the horse to settle. Then walk forward.

Do not practice this more than twice in each direction, allowing the horse plenty of other work between each repetition. It is *vital* that the exercise be followed by a short pause period, and that it not be done more than a couple of times to teach the cues for it. Again, over- use of an emergency

brake will burn it out! For success in doubling, the timing of the use of the left leg and the right rein is very important. The kick from the left heel follows the pull on the right rein by a very tiny fraction of a second, to send the horse through the sharp turn initiated by the rein. Both aids must be discontinued the instant the horse has turned, and the horse must be allowed to stand on totally a *slack rein* at the completion of the turn. If for any reason he does not stand still, after he has been doubled, repeat the exercise, this time to the opposite direction, and again give him a chance to settle once the turn is made. This exercise is of virtually no use if you don't let the horse have a chance to settle down and relax *on a slack rein* after he has been turned. Do not make the mistake of continuously doubling a horse into a tighter and tighter circle without slacking the rein. That does not give him a chance to stop and can make him so dizzy he loses his footing and falls with you.

When to use it? The timing of the use of the double is very important. It is not a good tool to employ after a horse has taken off at a dead run. If you try to double one then, he will most likely fall and roll with you on him, *not* a good plan. Instead, use the double when you anticipate that the horse is going to be getting out of control. At the moment that he starts to use more speed than you want, but before he is bolting away, double him. If he is thinking of bucking, double him. Don't wait until he is bucking and running with you to apply the tool. If he is thinking of rearing, double him then, don't wait until he is in the air and likely to be pulled off balance by the technique. If he is ignoring your signals to stop, even from a trot or walk, and does not respond to the one rein stop, double him *once*. If he does not settle down after one double, do it again, this time in the opposite direction. Again, do not turn the horse for more than one 180 turn, or one 360 at most.

Use this tool sparingly, and you will always have it available as an emergency brake to rely on. Over-use it, and you will have a sour, resentful horse who will be less and less cooperative as time goes on.

**[Back to Articles Index](#)**