

Everything You Need To Know About Trailer Loading

Effortless and safe trailer loading for horse and human



*By Eddy Modde.
8 Years of experience, loading 1000 horses*



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Credit and Thanks

I have written this E-book in my own words and interpretation based on my experience during the time I was a licensed [Parelli Natural Horsemanship](#) Professional. All the credit to what I know and can do should go to Linda & Pat Parelli, their mentors and instructors .

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Introduction

Between 2001 and 2009 I worked as a Licensed Parelli Natural Horsemanship Instructor. In the beginning of 2010 I took a break from teaching and started focusing on other things. After a few months of not teaching courses or giving demonstrations I realized that Trailer Loading had always fascinated me. The progress and the results are very visible and you help both the horse and the owner at the same time. I decided to share my knowledge and experience by writing them down in an E-book and by offering a transport service in Europe for those people who fail to load their own horse (even after reading and testing this E-book). Or at least cannot get them to calm down enough to travel with confidence.

Trailer loading is the number one frustration worldwide, yet trailer loading is a fundamental part in the relationship and communication with your horse, comparable to the foundations of your house. If the foundations are not strong enough, chances are that cracks in the wall will appear after time. Unless these cracks are taken care of at the base of the problem (in the foundations), no matter what you try to do to conceal the cracks, they will keep on reappearing.

There are many methods and strategies to get a horse to go in the trailer. We have all witnessed or heard of the most extreme ones. Any form of pressure will only augment the problems for the next time. With enough knowledge of how a horse perceives the world, you can teach the horse to load itself into the trailer. This will make the trailer seem a safer and more comfortable place to the horse. The best source for more knowledge about horse psychology is Natural Horsemanship. Even within the NH world you will find many different strategies for loading your horse. I am familiar with and use several of these myself, depending on the situation. In this E-book I will discuss the principles and strategies I have used the most myself.

I can imagine not everybody will be able to load their horse in this manner by just reading this E-book. Sometimes a lot of experience and professional help is required. A few important factors are knowledge, skills, timing and your own mental and emotional fitness. All these aspects will be covered. Horses can learn a lot quicker than we can by living in the "now". Horses do not think of the past and future as humans do. What you allow them to do, is what they learn; that also implies they will learn the things you do not want them to learn just as quickly.

There are several experts out there in the field to teach you how to trailer load your horse. A quick search on the Internet will give you many results. The purpose of this E-book is twofold: I want to spread my knowledge about successful trailer loading and ... I want to promote the horse trailers that provide slant loading. These are not very common yet in Europe. This way of transporting horses will greatly facilitate the loading itself as well as offer much more safety and comfort during the transport.

To ease the writing of this E-book I have used only one finite. Wherever it says "his" horse, you can read "her" horse and the same implies for whether the horse is referred to as a "he" or a "she".

Not everything in this E-book has been scientifically proven. All findings are however based on my own personal experience. I am not trying to prove anything here... prove it to yourself.

1. About Eddy Modde

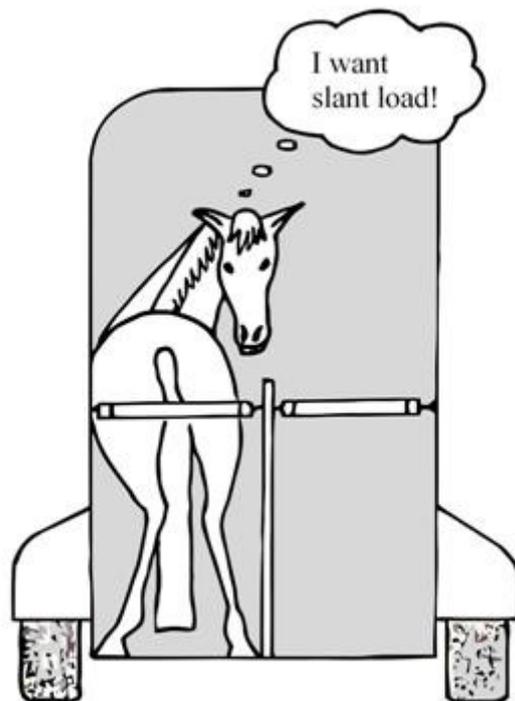
Between 1997 and 2000 I was a working student with a senior Parelli Instructor in Australia for 13 months. This is where I had my first experiences with trailer loading different horses using the Natural Horsemanship principles. From 2001 to 2006 I attended several 4 to 10 week courses with Pat & Linda Parelli in Colorado and Florida, USA.

In the last eight years I have loaded hundreds of horses and transported dozens. With my own horses I have travelled extensively through The Netherlands and Belgium teaching courses and performing demonstrations. I also travelled with horse and trailer to Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, France, England and Scotland. In short, I have many miles under my belt... without a scratch.

At a certain point I had the knowledge and skills to load any horse on to any trailer. Even though often this included trailers I would not want to be transported in if I were a horse.

Once, however, after a course at my place, we could not load this one horse in the trailer to go home (it had always been a problem). She only lived 3 miles away, but we decided to solve the problem once and for all. I applied all the strategies I had at the time to help the mare accept the trailer, but it only amounted to her "tolerating" the trailer enough to walk in to it by herself. As soon as we tried closing the bar behind her, she threw herself on the divider of this 2-horse trailer. It was time to admit to myself that I was fixated on certain convictions. "It has to work this way, it has worked with any horse so far". The mare was very persistent and communicated her message very clearly, but I was missing it, "***I cannot keep my balance facing forward!***". I got my ego out of the way, let go of certain convictions and put the divider in a slant angle. The mare showed her relief by standing calmly and after we placed a long bar behind her, allowed us to transport her without a fuss. Before, she used to throw herself on to the divider while travelling as well.

I continued trailer loading horses the way I used to for years after this event, although I would put the divider in a slant angle more often. I also continued transporting my horses in a two horse trailer where the horses face forward. A quote from William Blake explains this phenomena: "*The road to excess leads to wisdom...for we never know what is enough until we know what is more than enough.*" I heard this quote for the first time when Eric Clapton explained in an interview why he quit his excessive drinking. In other words, I have now reached that point where enough is enough. I have seen my fair share of horses and humans getting frustrated with trailers, loading and transports. I have seen too many rusting, rotting, seedy, and dark



trailers. The time was ripe for this E-book and to become an ambassador of slant loading.

At the present moment I offer a horse transport service in Europe and this E-book is only the beginning of a series of tools and aids I will have on offer for those people who are interested in safe and comfortable loading and traveling. It is my intention to make use of the wonderful possibilities the Internet has to offer for ongoing support and flow of information.

Read more about me on [my website](#).

2. The Goal

All right, the goal is to load your horse on the trailer, right? We can do even better than that. It is my goal that you can get your horse to go on the trailer by himself and still “like” you after and that it will get better every time! It is important to understand what I mean with “like”. It can mean different things to different people. What is great fun for one, can be a right disaster for another. It is a bit easier with horses, although the different “horsenalties” offer some variety. But for the prey animal “horse” in general, something can only be “fun” when they feel completely **safe**. The same implies for us humans, when we experience fear, the fun goes away (not to be confused with “excitement” or “thrill” which makes us humans do things like bungee jumping etc.). Apart from safety, a horse is also very motivated by **comfort**. A fly can already cause a horse to feel uncomfortable. Food and water may also be used for motivation. More about this later. Besides Safety and Comfort every horse needs **Mental Stimulation**. Nature and the herd provide plenty of this, but the way most horses are kept in our societies, the mental stimulation is way too low. This is even the case if your horse is lucky enough to live in a herd or out in the field. To get back to the issue of safety; the horse will feel most safe where he spends most of his time, so with the other horses, in his box, paddock or field. In the wild, the horses move around a lot, but the whole herd travels together. By keeping horses restricted to the same area, we have created an unnatural situation. In case of a fire for example, the horses feel safest in their boxes and will prefer to stay there even when the doors are opened. One of the greatest challenges therefore of trailer loading (and trail rides) is the fact that your horse feels bound to the herd and the location.

What do we need in order to break this pattern? First of all we have to recognise that this is a pattern that we have created ourselves. This leads us back to “mental stimulation”. One of the best methods of mental stimulation, is breaking patterns.

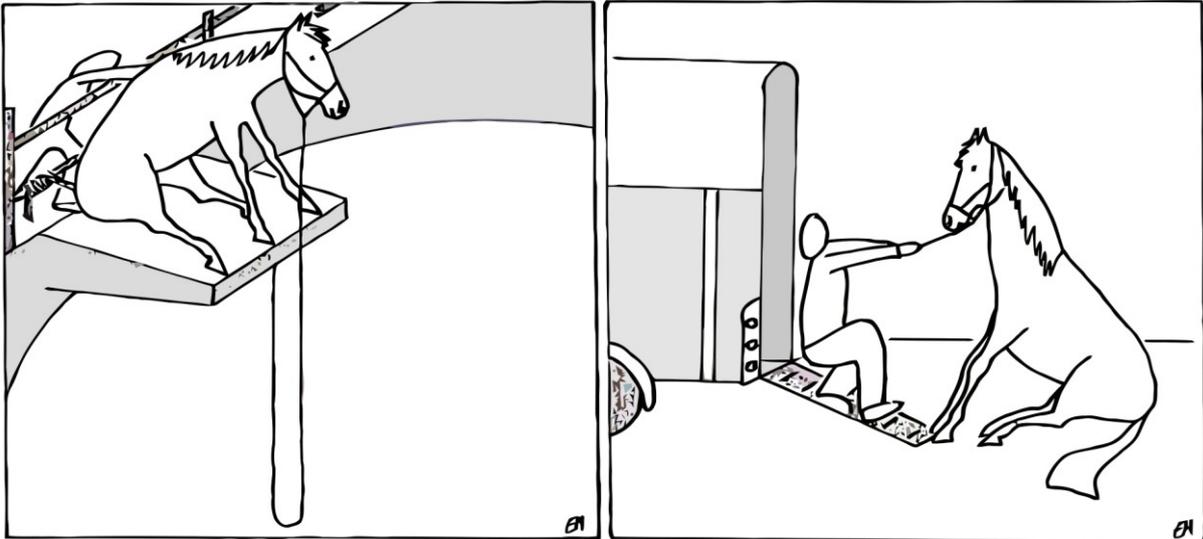
Next we need **trust**. Horses do not trust you just because you take care of them. By exposing them to “scary” situations, without over-exposure, they learn to trust you when they discover the situation was not “scary” at all. They overcome their fears through experience. The one thing you should not do, is throw them in the deep end. Bungee jumping illustrates this very well. You can talk a human through it, using words that make sense to them. One step at a time, the human will approach the edge and then jump when they **voluntarily** decide to jump. They are always free to take a step back at any time or even to retreat to a place where they feel completely safe again, allowing them to breathe. After then having plucked up the courage to try again (either by themselves or with help from someone else), they try again. Once they do jump, it is a real thrill and they experience it as exciting instead of dangerous. If they were still standing on the edge contemplating jumping and someone were to put their hands on their backs and try to push them off, they would probably resist and shout: “Noooo, I am not ready”. This is exactly what a horse does when you try to “force” him.

The worst thing to do while trailer loading, is to ask a horse to step forwards when he is already trying and gathering courage. Even just a small click of the tongue can set off a scared horse and have

him question your leadership qualities. And bingo... this leads us to the next ingredient: **leadership**. In the eyes of the horse, a good leader is he who can best look out for his safety.

In order to do it “perfectly”, we need to know what the horse is ‘thinking’. Your suggestions have to be in line with his mental and emotional state and must be executed with the correct intention. This comes down to your skills and experience being as good as someone with a black belt in karate. For me personally you have then reached the point where you can call yourself a “horsethisperer”. Their timing is so good, it all seems to go completely effortless.

Look for the 7 similarities (answers at the bottom of this page)



Let me add this. We are the ones who want to do things with our horses and in order to do so sometimes they have to be transported. But let us be honest, if it was up to them, they would prefer to stay in the field with their horse buddies. But it is possible to have horses experience a fun life with more mental stimuli. So going places using a trailer is fine. Do not just use the trailer to take them to the veterinary clinic or to competitions. Also use it for fun trips!

Summary:

It is my goal that you can get your horse to go on the trailer by himself and still “like” you after and that it will get better every time!

The 7 similarities: 1. Force 2. Both pulling and pushing does not work 3. The horse does not have a choice 4. Physical tension 5. Mental resistance 6. Emotional stress 7. Human and horse are getting frustrated

3. Terms and Definitions

In order for me to communicate my message clearly, it is important that all the terms I use will come across as intended. Especially since some terms can have negative connotations. Nothing about trailer loading should be perceived as negative. Hence in this chapter I will explain some of the definitions of the terms you will come across in this E-book.

The relationship

It is important how the horse perceives you. This will be a result of your non-verbal communication, intention and attitude. A good metaphor to illustrate this is when a man asks a woman to dance with him (of course it could be the other way round, but the female intuition is an important factor here). First of all the “first impression” is already made the moment the man looks at and approaches the woman. His intention is already showing. The woman has already made a decision about the dancing, but awaits what the communication and attitude will bring. If she then decides to accept the invitation, it is only a matter of seconds for the first impression to be confirmed or revised. In other words, the woman knows very quickly whether the man is a good dancer or not. Hopefully the woman will not have to wear a noseband to stop her from calling out every time he steps on her toes. This only deals with the symptoms and does not aid the relationship.

Comfort

Horses live in the now and comfort is very important to them. A fly can cause a horse enough discomfort to swish his tail, bite or kick at the fly. Several flies can even cause the horse to run through his field bucking. Horses will do whatever is needed to become comfortable again.

Reward

The purpose of a reward is to let the horse know that what he did was right. The reward motivates the horse to do it just as well next time or even better. The greatest reward for a horse is to stop doing what you were doing, take the pressure off and leave the horse alone. Petting the horse like a dog is not really a reward, but can be used to help relax tense muscles. You can do this using soft petting and not ... the harder, the bigger the reward. You can use your voice, but the actual words will have little effect. Intonation and intention, however, can be picked up by the horse. “Good boy, well done”, is not very effective when you say it with shaking knees or while thinking “I will make sausages out of you if you don’t do what I want!”. It is also difficult to reward a horse while projecting a lot of energy. In order to get people to be more aware of their intention and energy levels, I often advise them not to use their voice at all. Even amongst people, 55% of the communication consists of body language and 38% of intonation, etc. A mere 7% consists of the words used (source: NLP). Horses seldom use verbal communication amongst themselves, which shows how little impact it will have. This does not mean that you can’t do great things, using verbal communication, but do not use it initially. The same applies to food rewards. I have never used food to solve a trailer loading problem. Horses can go without food for quite some time if they have to. They can go for days without water. They can go without oxygen for a little over one minute. Safety

and comfort, however, is what they always seek NOW. This is what makes it their main motivation. So what can you use as a reward? ... do nothing, take all the pressure and energy off them, stroke and scratch them. Allow them time to dwell and give them soak time. This almost always results in the horses licking their lips, which indicates that they got the message. They “understood” and processed the message. The coin has dropped.

Pressure

In my experience, many people have negative connotations with the word ‘pressure’. Most people who start out with Natural Horsemanship believe it is all just a matter of being very friendly. Pressure is not a negative word. Without pressure your clothes would not stay on your body. Once I had a long discussion about this with a visitor of our booth at a large horse fair in Holland. After a while I figured I better change my strategy. I placed my hand on her shoulder, made a suggestive gesture with my other hand and said: “let us step out of the booth for a minute”. Then I told her “these three ways of communication already constitute ‘pressure’ in my opinion, but you did not perceive them as something negative”. “Yes, you are right”, she replied. She bought the carrotstick and another happy customer left our booth. There are times where more ‘pressure’ is required and this is where people get confused. The definition of ‘assertive’ can shed more light on this (see further down). If you study the way horses apply pressure to each other, you will find that this is sometimes very subtle. Or, it can be so assertive that if this amount of pressure were applied to people, they would end up in hospital. Horses are very sensitive, but can withstand enormous amounts of physical pressure. Just watch their thankful reaction when you smash a horsefly on their necks. They are very grateful to you for hitting them then. It is the combination of mental and/or emotional pressure with physical pressure that makes horses suffer the most.

Driving

This has nothing to do with cars or steering wheels ☺. Have you ever wondered why a horse puts its ears back? Sometimes it is meant as a defensive gesture and sometimes offensive. In both cases the purpose is to drive (off) another horse (or dog, cow or human). Thus having the other yield to the suggestion. Putting the ears back is the first warning. This is usually followed by moving a part of the body (tail, front or back leg, neck). Next the horse will approach and the final phase will result in physical contact. And usually not a modest contact, but a serious kick or bite. The most dominant horse in the herd will hardly need any pressure (if any) to move the other horses. They ‘drive’ them with their clear intent and strong presence. They do not have to proceed to physical contact, but they are certainly prepared to do so ... without doubt, fear or anger.

Assertive

According to the dictionary: Assertive = *describes someone who behaves confidently and is not frightened to say what they want or believe*. In other words: *to have the intention to do what is needed, without emotion*. Horses can exchange severe blows, without anger or frustration. Emotions such as anger and frustration (and all other emotions) are based on events in the past that are locked in the subconscious. I.e., in that moment you are living in the past (in your mind) and not in the present moment. That way it is impossible to be truly effective. If you like movies then you can find

examples of this in e.g. 'The last Samuraj' and 'The Legend of Bagger Vance' (You can watch those parts of the movies on Youtube).

To have your emotions under control is also a prerequisite for the effective use of voice commands. Raising your voice, combined with emotion, undermines your authority and confirms your 'predator behavior'. More later on getting emotions under control.

'Predator Behavior'

In order to strengthen the relationship, the horse has to learn to let go of his prey animal instincts and the human of his 'predator' instincts. Many people take it personally when I say we have predator instincts. The reactions I am talking about, however, are these: we tighten when we get scared, which happens a lot while riding (comparable to a cat sitting on your lap and all of a sudden puts her claws in your legs, because she sees a dog). It is our instinct to then quickly close our hands and only to open them when it is too late (this is the main cause of rope burns). Learn to close your hands slowly and to open them quickly. To transfer instinctual behavior into conscious action and then into an automatic response, requires a lot of practice. To look at your horse with two eyes is not a problem for the horse.... As long as you do not look at him hungry and ready to kill. No, this is not a joke and not exaggerated either. The primary essence of predator behavior is probably the tendency to use force and intimidation instead of mutual communication and psychology.

Dominance

This word is mostly used when describing the hierarchy of the herd. It is also used, appropriately and inappropriately when a horse refuses to load. When a horse does not load he does not do this, because he feels he is the boss or to get you angry. A horse high up in rank, feels very responsible for his herd. Their safety is his responsibility. They do not load, because they cannot abandon their herd. To say in this case that it is about dominance, is not entirely fair. YOU are the one taking him away from his herd. So, unless the horse feels just as safe and comfortable with you as he does with his herd buddies, why would he do what you want him to do? Here we arrive at the very important **relationship**; how does the horse feel about you and what associations have you (or previous owners) allowed him to have with trailers and loading.

Yielding – the basic moves

In fact these are the 'moves of dominance'. These are the moves horses use on each other to establish or confirm the hierarchy. With the use of non-verbal communication, you can have a horse yield in two ways – using touch and drive. For trailer loading (and everything else you want to do with your horse) it is important that he can do all the basic questions you ask your horse, without hesitation or fear. These qualities are very important. A sensitive, skeptical horse might seem to be yielding very well, but it is often escaping out of fear and that is not what I mean here. We want them to yield without any form of fear, but with understanding and respect. If you are incapable of directing your horses feet, the horse will definitely do so with yours. This is how you end up walking back and forth to the trailer endlessly or with a horse that walks all over you. Natural Horsemanship holds all the answer to 'teach' your horse to yield really well. Even though yielding is not something they have to learn. To yield or not to yield is exactly what they learn growing up in a herd. The

hierarchy is established by who-moves-who. Alas, alas, alas, many horses are raised with little free social play with other horses. They then end up playing the who-moves-who games with the usually unsuspecting humans. Punishing a foal that bites, has absolutely no effect if the human is not aware of the who moves who hierarchy rule. A foal that yields respectfully for humans, will never try to bite them. They will at most nibble a little and you can allow this, since it is mere curiosity.

Respect

Respect is measured by the time it takes from the moment you ask the question till the moment your horse gives you the appropriate response. The faster your horse gives a response, the higher his respect is for you. Note that a response is with full confidence and understanding. There can be no respect in a reaction, as a reaction comes from the instinct to survive.

Snappy departure

Pat Parelli always talks about snappy departures and smooth transitions. I will talk about the snappy departures here. If you are able to go into a canter from a standstill with your horse, then you will know what I am talking about. There is a feeling of understanding, attentiveness and power from relaxation. Imagine these same ingredients with a departure from standstill into trot and even the walk, also during ground work such as: sending your horse on a circle, over a jump or on to the trailer. There's a lot of respect in a 'snappy departure'.

Communication

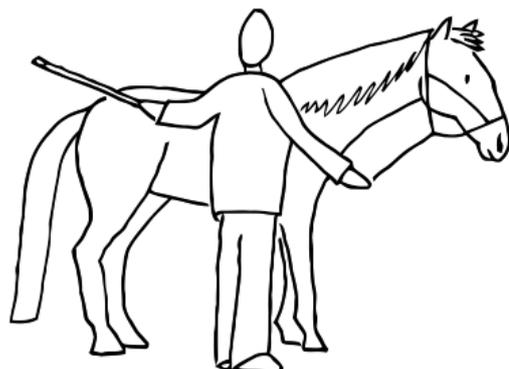
This has got to be mutual. When there are only signals going from the human to the horse and the signals coming from the horse are ignored, then we cannot speak of communication. The horse is always communicating back to you, but not verbally. In order to interpret this non-verbal communication, you have to observe his entire body. Only if these signals are interpreted correctly and the human adapts his signals for the horse to understand, can we speak of communication.

Psychology

Using horse psychology enables you to communicate with the horse and get into their world of thinking. How or what animals think, is not of importance here. They certainly do not think as humans and are incapable of placing their consciousness at will. They are always 'in the now' and the attention goes there, where it is needed to survive. To get their attention is one thing, but to hold their attention including their trust and respect, is the real challenge.

Positions

With the knowledge on yielding, you now know that the position in which you stand or walk is of no importance for the hierarchy – often we walk in front of the horse, we ride sitting on top of the horse, and we drive from behind. What makes you the leader, is when you control the horse's movement (gait and direction). This also means that you can decide where and when to stand still.



In the position next to your horse, you can both lead and drive him. This way you have control over his movement, making sure your horse yields well for you, in other words, responds positively to your suggestions. It is very important here that your horse yields his forehead away from you, otherwise he will walk all over you.

Principles versus rules

Rules get invented and usually with the purpose of fighting unwanted symptoms. If you break the rules, you take a risk. The people who invented the rules namely also invented consequences in the form of 'punishment'. You drive over the speed limit and you get a fine. You steal and go to prison. It is also very tempting to brake rules anyway and just making sure that you do not get caught.

Principles are laws of nature. If you do not honor them, there will be natural laws that will oppose you, without exception. A horse is a living organism. Be principled and use psychology and communication, instead of force and intimidation, just because someone once thought up those rules. This is exactly why I like the Parelli program so much; they teach people principles, not rules.

**In this chapter you can
find my definition of:**

Relationship
Comfort
Reward
Pressure
Driving
Assertive
Predator Behavior
Dominance
Yielding
Respect
Snappy Departure
Communication
Psychology
Positions
Principles vs Rules

4. The Prey Animal Horse – How they learn

‘Learning’ occurs through experience. It is of no importance to the horse how much intellectual knowledge we think we have. It is up to us to convince the horse that the trailer can be a safe and comfortable place. ‘Learning’ can happen two ways: consciously and unconsciously.

In the ‘unconscious’ state of mind the horse follows his instinct in order to survive. In the ‘conscious’ state of mind, the horse is self assured and capable of assessing situations.

A few examples of both.

Unconscious learning:

- You are witnessing the birth of a foal. Every touch gets programmed (especially during the first few hours). Whether this results in something positive or negative depends on your timing of the release. The ‘state of mind’ the foal is in the moment you touch it and release, can result in the foal enjoying the touch or not liking it, feeling the need to go against the pressure or to yield away from it. I once handled a pony that was handled and touched a lot right after it was born (in the imprinting phase), but they released when the foal was still wrestling. Now as an adult pony, it still ‘wrestled’ in all directions upon touch. This resulted in a very dangerous situation, created by bad timing.
- You are asking your horse to load on to the trailer by putting pressure on the halter with the lead rope. The horse reacts by going against the pressure (this is their natural reaction anyway, or has been programmed earlier) and hits his head against the roof of the trailer. It all went really fast and the horse had a very negative unconscious experience. This is easily prevented by the way: never attempt to pull a horse on to the trailer.

Conscious learning

- The foal is growing up, gets more self assured around people and starts to play his dominance games with people. By biting, pushing or kicking, he learns that people also yield for him. This is not a negative experience for the foal. He also learns with other horses – “that horse yields for me, that one does not. This human yields for me and that one does not; just keep trying 😊” (mental stimulation).
- When using the correct way of approach and retreat while trailer loading, curiosity will win over fear and the horse will take another step consciously. Because the horse overcame his own fear and the next step towards the trailer was a conscious choice, the experience is positive.

'Learning' and trailer loading

During my instructor training with Parelli in Colorado in 2001, I was lucky enough to be taught by Ronnie Willis. He was one of Pat Parelli's mentors and a true horsewhisperer in my eyes, even though he would never have called himself this. This is what he said about trailer loading:

"you're not teaching your horse to load, you're teaching him to unload".

Every step the horse takes forward, he is allowed to go backwards. Sometimes people can get the horse to load, but then he is too scared to unload, because this was not practiced.

I always use the following metaphor. There are people who will not enter a building, unless they know exactly where the emergency exits are. If there are none, they will not even go in. This represents a form of claustrophobia and this is exactly what a horse experiences entering a trailer. They are prepared to go in, but they want to make sure they will survive and be able to get out again... and know how they can get out. The main advantage of having the horse walk in front, allowing them to take any next step themselves and allowing them some dwell time, is that your horse will discover / learn / experience that he can survive it. This sounds very dramatic, but this is how the horse experiences it. I refer here of course to horses with a fear of the trailer.

To jump ahead here – when the horse is not afraid of the trailer, but for whatever reason consciously decides not to go in, the cause is that the horse **has control over his AND your movement**. As soon as you have control over when, how and where you move your feet and your horse's feet, trailer loading those confident horses will be a piece of cake. But take into consideration their motivation for not going in.

The most 'challenging' situation is where the horse is afraid of the trailer AND wants to control your movements. However, as soon as you see this and become aware of it, it is no longer a problem. Do not allow a scared horse to walk all over you. This only confirms to the horse that you are not the leader and are incapable of looking out for his safety.

Why it is best to have to horse walk in front

I know many cases and have heard many stories about the following: "my horse follows me onto the trailer (a helper closes the but bar), but then he becomes restless". This is easily explained. Your horse follows you alright. A sign of a good relationship, but the horse does not have enough confidence in himself or the trailer to be left alone in there. The horse did not load himself on your suggestion. A metaphor: A shy child will have no trouble ordering a lemonade at the bar in the company of an adult, but ask the child to order the lemonade while you do not go the bar with her, it is a completely different story. You can encourage the child with words like "you can do it, just give it a try, etc". A horse on the other hand....

Another example from my own experience. I was giving a demonstration at a big horse fair with my horse. Nearby in a paddock he noticed a camel. I was just as much wondering as my horse what a camel was doing on a horsefair. As he is a very skeptical kind of horse, the adrenaline started rushing through his veins the moment he spotted the camel, in the middle of our demonstration. There was nothing left for me to do, except make the demonstration out of this incident. When I had my horse follow me, we could approach the camel quite close. When I had my horse walk in front of me, he

found it a lot more difficult and he stopped approaching pretty soon. They feel more safe when they are following, but this does not make them more brave. If you can teach your horse to walk into the trailer by himself, he will have overcome all his fear by himself and then you will need no helpers for trailer loading. The same applies for riding. The horse leads in this case. Of course it is always ok to dismount and help your horse become more brave. In this case also have your horse walk in front of you, using approach and retreat. By leading him past the alleged danger, you will be home faster, but you will have to do this every time. It is often said 'do not get off', but thanks to the rise of Natural Horsemanship you can now learn to be more effective on the ground and therefore you can get out of the saddle. Only a very experienced horseman might be able to solve it just as well from the saddle.

Summary:

Horses learn through experience. Consciously or unconsciously. You have to give them time to dwell and soak until they lick their lips. If you don't, all your time might be lost and the horse didn't learn ... at least not what you wanted him to learn.

5. What To Look For – in yourself and in your horse

Playing the piano is easy; when you know when to hit which key, and how to hit it, then you can play anything you want. Because it is this simple, it does not mean it is easy. I have been playing the guitar since I was eight and I can vouch for this. Especially because you have to pay attention to so many things at the same time. First you need the skill to do it all with the right timing. Once that has become second nature, it is simple and easy. In this chapter a few more pointers.

Human body language Not many people are aware of their body language, but your horse certainly is. As mentioned earlier under the sub-topic 'reward', 55% of our communication consists of body language. The 38% intonation is for the most part non-verbal and unconscious. A good way to become more conscious about this is to exaggerate the difference in body language when you ask your horse to do something and when he can relax. I use the terms: energy up and energy down.

Energy up: If you expect a snappy departure from your horse, you should do the same in your body. Breathe in, make yourself bigger, be clear in your signals what it is you want the horse to do. This way you will also be better prepared to respond when your horse does not respond appropriately.

Energy down: The biggest reward you can give your horse. Breathe out, relax, make yourself smaller, (maybe even rub your horse). If you want, you could say "goooooood", but with a soft, relaxed intonation. So do not shout "GOOD BOY, WELL DONE" at him, while almost spanking his neck in half. Soft pets on the neck relax the muscles. Somewhere in the past, the idea arose, that the harder you pet, the bigger the reward. Not according to the horse!

Horse body language A horse will give certain signals that will show his understanding and acceptance of what you are asking. Sometimes it will take a little while. They can give the signals immediately, or it takes a little while for the penny to drop. In that case it is more a "bill" as I used to say in my courses. In that case it takes a while to hit the floor, like a leaf falling from a tree. The most important signal is the licking of the lips. Sometimes this is very overt, but with the more introvert horses it can be one little lick inside their mouth. It is always accompanied by more relaxation in the horse. Again, not many people are aware of their energy and body language. I have had to adjust this myself as well over the years. Once I was on an instructor course with my horse in Switzerland with senior instructor Berni Zambail. We were working on something new, so paying attention to the licking and chewing was important. I was sure the penny was about to drop for my horse, so I waited... and waited, but nothing happened. Then Berni told me to take a step away from my horse. Immediately his head dropped and he started licking and chewing. This was a revelation for me. I was completely unaware of the fact that I was still asserting 'pressure' on him, but this was definitely the case for my horse. Several important signals can show more relaxation: lowering of the head and neck, blinking of the eyes, moving of the ears, a relaxed tail.

Summary:

Pay attention to your non-verbal communication. Even your intention will reflect in your energy which your horse picks up on.

6. Reasons Why Horses Don't Go On A Trailer

Here's a summary of reasons why horses won't voluntarily go on a trailer:

- Fear (the trailer, the ramp, the human, the environment, he is herd bound)
- Lack of respectable leadership (too forceful, too soft, no preparation, no plan, lack of motivation, herd bound)
- Unsuitable trailer (too claustrophobic, too dark, too fragile)
- Bad experiences (well, this list is endless, but it includes bad driving with the trailer)

Notice I didn't mention dominance here. I believe it is our job to understand the horses point of view. Horses dominate each other, only to know the hierarchy in the herd, so they know they can be safe, because they have a leader they trust and respect. The leader of the herd has to be the one that is capable of looking after their safety, taking them to new food sources, which they need at that moment and yet always knows there is water around. Oh ... and keeps them away from predators.

We humans are the ones who put these perfectly-able-to- survive-without-humans creatures in an environment where we MAKE them depend on us. We want the horse to be a part of our 'herd'. That's like a man forcing a woman to marry him (or the other way around 😊). That's why I don't like to say that the horse is dominant, when they don't do what we want.

However, being with us they will do what they would do in the herd. Who is the leader, who moves who, who will look after our safety. Horses know to eat and drink and that predators in the wild are dangerous. We humans (think) we know what is safe and dangerous in our environment. So we HAVE to be the leader for our horse. But leadership is something you have to earn. Your horse has to agree that you can look after his safety. And in what language are you going to tell him this?

I will go a little bit deeper into the subject of 'Herd bound' further on it this E-book. When you really understand how to get your horse to bond with you, then all issues of fear and lack of leadership will dissolve. Then trailer loading and many other things will become easy.

Summary:

Reasons horses don't want to load:

- Fear
- Lack of leadership
- Unsuitable trailer
- Bad experiences

Calling it dominance, is too easy

7. Have a Plan While Loading Your Horse

It is important to know that everything in this e-book is the preparation. You are teaching your horse to load. Of course the idea is not to make it into a big ritual every time. In the end your horse will walk onto the trailer confidently straight away. I will give you this warning, though: the more your horse knows, the smarter he will get. In other words, they know what you know, but they also know very well what it is you don't know. So you have to stay alert that they will not outsmart you.

The time factor

Any form of force (where the horse does not have a choice), will cause trailer loading to cost the same amount of time and effort next time, or even more. By following the plan as described underneath and by applying all the directions in this e-book, trailer loading will only get better every time. With enough timing and experience sometimes already after just one session. Take the time it takes, however, for it will be rewarded and your horse will be very grateful to you. Especially after a demonstration, people would say to me: "I do not have the time to load my horse in this manner", even if the horse was loading by himself at the end of the demonstration. They only saw the time involved in the training, but they did not take into consideration the amount of time they will save every next time.

A realistic calculation: once a week a person takes her horse somewhere on the trailer (to a lesson or competition, for example). Every week it takes about half an hour (sometimes longer) to load the horse. Also going home it takes half an hour again. Say this happens 40 times in a year, then it takes 40 hours per year. It seems extreme, but this happens. If, after reading this e-book, you apply the concept for half an hour every day for one week, it will only take about 5 minutes to load your horse. This will have only cost you about 4 to 5 hours. Therefore you will save an enormous amount of time. Not only will you save time; you will find that many things will improve, including the riding.

Intuition

Should you decide to switch to slant loading, it will probably take even less time. Horses can sense intuitively what is about to happen. To give you a good example of this, the following story. I know of a horse that had absolutely no problem loading onto any trailer. Once this horse refused to load. With a little force the horse went in, only to step through the bottom of the trailer. Intuitively this horse knew that she was about to enter a dangerous situation. Horses that are sensitive to losing their balance in a straight load trailer, walk more confidently onto a slant loaded trailer. It is also commonly known that horses prefer a horse truck to a trailer. Horses trust their intuition.

The plan in a nutshell:

- Basic moves: control the movement, snappy departure
- Simulations with obstacles
- Approach and retreat
- Balance comfort and discomfort
- Reward the smallest try or improvement
- Straight line

The concept

Suppose someone suggests to take you bungee jumping. You hesitate, but they manage to persuade you. They tie the elastic cord around your feet (like you tie the halter to your horse) and there you are. You are still not really convinced, but as long as nobody forces you, you are **willing to give it a go**. You move up to the edge, the fear is overwhelming, so you take a **step back**. You get yourself together again and re-approach the edge, a little closer this time. You approach and retreat until **YOU** decide to jump. The whole time the choice to jump or not to jump was yours. This is the main theme of trailer loading. Always ask your horse questions that you know he can answer with a 'yes'. So do not suggest 'now jump off the bridge with an elastic attached to your feet'. The most likely answer here is 'NO!!!'. You are more likely to get a yes when you suggest 'take a step closer to the edge, as far as you want or dare, you can retreat again anytime'.

Basic moves

In chapter 3, Terms and definitions, I talked about the 'basic moves'. The first step of the trailer loading plan, is to ensure you are in control of the horse's movement. Make sure you can ask your horse to move forwards and backwards, but that you are also able to move the front end and hind quarters away from you and that you can move the horse sideways. Reward plentiful when they yield well. Then make sure he can still give you a good 'snappy departure'.

Simulations with obstacles

When a horse goes on the trailer, he has to step on to something (the ramp and floor of the trailer), in between something (the walls), under (the roof), and in (the entire trailer when the doors are closed). It would be good to simulate all these situations before the actual trailer loading. You can ask your horse to walk over a pole or a plank, in between obstacles, underneath something. Make sure it is safe and that your horse experiences it as safe.

Approach and retreat

With the approach, the departure is key. This should be executed snappy, assertive, self assured and with the correct intention and precision. A horse that is willing to depart in any direction on your command, has his attention fully on you. The more you can accomplish this, the more they will be mentally, emotionally and physically 'engaged'.

How far should you retreat? It is the same with the person trying to bungee jump as with a horse trying to walk on the trailer, you retreat as far as is needed for them to where they feel safe again, to where they can breathe again and where they can let go of the fear (that is only possible when they

are relaxed). One time, while teaching in the UK, I was trailer loading a horse on a 45 ft line. This line was only just long enough (I even had to run a little with the horse), for the horse wanted to retreat in a canter until he was 60 ft away from the trailer. A short while later, however, the horse was walking onto the trailer by himself. This horse really needed the opportunity to retreat very far away from the trailer in order to overcome his fears. Staying close to the trailer was too much 'pressure' for him. Usually retreating by taking just a few steps backwards away from the trailer is enough. These steps backwards provide good exercise in themselves (teaching to unload) and they leave you in control of the movement. By paying close attention, the horse will show you if he needs to retreat any further.

If you apply approach and retreat well, the horse will overcome his fears. The horse does not feel forced, but feels it has a choice. You control the movement to and from the trailer and you have control over your personal space especially.

The success of trailer loading comes down to a delicate balance between:

When to approach – when to retreat

How much comfort near the trailer – how much discomfort away from the trailer

Comfort / discomfort

The most important thing is this: the trailer has to become a comfortable place. To get this message across to an animal that does not use words to communicate, you can play the 'hot-cold' game, which most of us will know from when we were children. A horse has the intelligence of a four year old. Give them a simple puzzle to solve and they will feel successful when they find the answer. If the 'puzzle' is too hard for the horse to solve, he will become insecure. For a prey animal to be 'insecure', means in fear of his life. The puzzle to present to your horse is: where can you find comfort? Eventually in the trailer, of course, but you have to make this clear to him in small steps. Every step closer to the trailer, is where he will find comfort. Away from the trailer he finds more discomfort. This does not take much. Just to keep them moving, will be discomfort enough. Although, the horse will have to move his feet more than you do. Just leading the horse around will not help.

You must learn to use your imagination. To keep him only moving in circles will become extremely boring and will not do your relationship a lot of good. Add some jumps for example and some sideways and backing-up. Some people believe that you can punish your horse by backing him up. This is definitely not the case and should never be used in this way. Once I saw a horse playing over the divider with his neighbor behind him in a treadmill. One was trotting forwards, while the other one was trotting backwards, biting each other's nose in the meanwhile!

In practice

The following is just an example of how it could look in practice. A special approach for all the different types of horses and situations could be the topic of more educational products, which may follow this e-book. Say you just started trailer loading and you take your horse to a trailer with a ramp. At this moment in time there is no puzzle to be solved yet, but the point where your horse stops and does not want to approach any further, you give him a little comfort. Now remember the exact spot where the horse stopped. If you do not do this, you could miss out on good opportunities to reward your horse, or end up pushing him over his threshold. By pushing him over, you can lose a lot of trust (remember the bungee jumping example and someone gives you a little push when you are not ready). You retreat (maybe only a few steps backwards) and ask him forwards again (snappy, with energy). If your horse gets less close this time, you do not give him comfort. If he goes almost as close, you can reward him so he knows he is getting close to the right answer to the 'puzzle' (and he will feel successful). You can only do this a few times, however, otherwise the horse will not feel motivated to go beyond that spot. Most likely the spot will be somewhere in front of the ramp (if your trailer has one) in the beginning, but sometimes it will be yards away. After repeating this a few times, they will start to develop some curiosity for the ramp. *Fear will disappear, when curiosity appears*. Reward this!! Allow him to investigate the ramp by sniffing it or even pawing on it. See it as testing the grounds, like testing the ice in winter. You know the ramp and trailer are safe. The importance here is that your horse finds this out for himself.

Again, horses do not like dodgy, rotting, dark, small trailers. In my opinion these belong on the junk yard and I would never use them to transport these precious, sensitive animals.

So, we are still doing approach and retreat with the trailer. Every time your horse makes significant progress, you can take him away from the trailer and have a cup of tea or coffee. In other words, relax. Any moment of progress is a good time to quit for the day. Whether the horse was or was not yet on the trailer, is not important. You reward the attitude / opinion of the horse, towards you and the trailer.

Any time you ask your horse to move again, when you are away from the trailer, do so in a snappy fashion, assertive, self assured, but with a friendly intention. You could also repeat some of the 'basic moves'. A few circles in both directions, a little sideways and a small jump. There are no rules; the important thing here is that you move the horse and have complete control over his movement (gait and direction). Have fun with it; it is 'play', not 'work'.

The time will come where you have the horse standing on the ramp with his front feet. Most people can get to this point, but now we have a good foundation. The horse will start to understand the puzzle: "the more I try to get closer to the trailer, the more comfort I get" (the puzzle is 'find the comfort'). You keep moving the comfort spot forward. How can you motivate him to find the comfort? By creating discomfort. What is uncomfortable? Anything that exerts the same amount or more pressure than a fly. Get him moving and control the movement. The less you have to move your feet to accomplish this, the better.

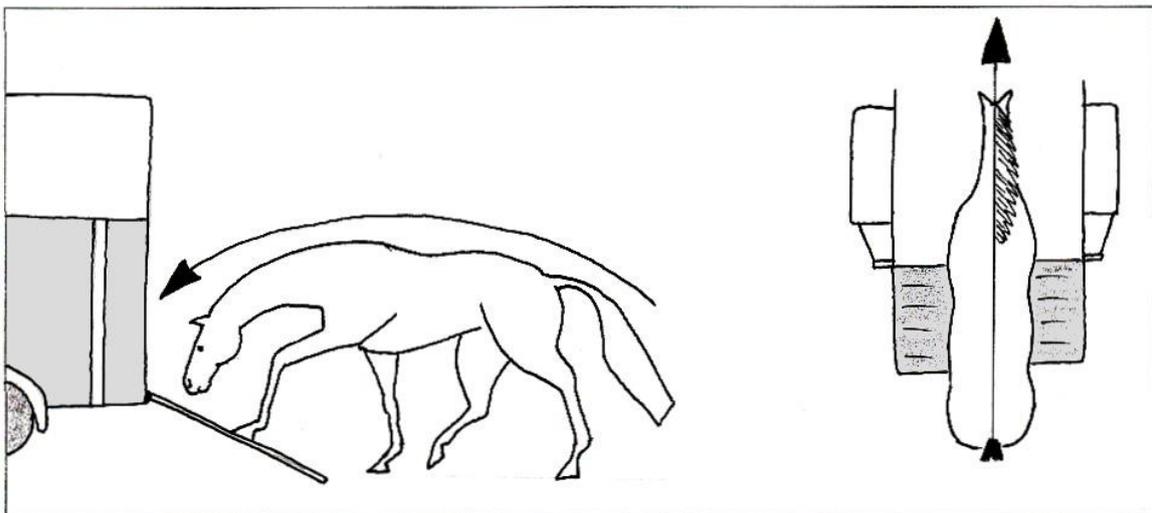
As I mentioned before, the ramp has more disadvantages than advantages. Most trailers in Europe have a ramp, most in the US don't. For most horses, putting their front feet in the trailer can be hard enough as it is. With a ramp this is the exact same moment where they also have to step on the ramp

with their hind feet. Keep repeating all of the above and you will get to this point. To have the horse step in with his front feet, is the next hurdle. Do not forget that at this point, the head and neck are already inside.

The straight line

Another important ingredient for success: the straight line. Straightness is not only important for dressage, but also for trailer loading. In the classical academic way of riding a lot of emphasis is put on the straightness and is very detailed. In this case it is quite simple. Especially because trailer loading is a number one challenge for most people and/or horses, the **principles** of Natural Horsemanship are of great importance. These principles can be applied to any exercise in any discipline. Straightness does not only imply physical straightness. All horses (and people) are naturally 'bent', to the right or to the left. As soon as you try to correct this, mental, emotional and physical aspects will start to show up. In both (Natural) Horsemanship and this e-book, the main theme is the mental and emotional aspect. *"A brace in the body, is a brace in the mind"*, i.e. any form of resistance or tension in the body, has a mental (or emotional) cause.

When a horse knows what is expected of him and is emotionally 100% ok with it, he will walk on to the trailer fully relaxed, balanced and straight. He will also move well through his entire body.



A confident horse walks on to the trailer in a straight line

Trailer loading is the ideal opportunity to discover the 'bent' in your horse (and maybe also in yourself) . A horse cannot hide his thoughts and feelings and can't pretend. The direction his nose or eyes are pointing in is where he wants to go. This causes flexions in the neck (and to a lesser extent in the body) and can be 'corrected'. It is important that you do not employ direct line thinking and try to fight the symptoms. I will present a few examples here. There are of course a lot more, but those will be mentioned in a sequel to this e-book.

1. Your horse is standing in front of the trailer with his nose or eyes pointing at you. You can solve this by asking your horse to re-approach the trailer and this time direct a little more energy* at his nose. The pitfall here is that you move your feet more than the horse. Beware!

2. Your horse is standing in front of the trailer and facing away from you. You can solve this by asking the horse to re-approach and this time aim a little more energy* at the shoulder or flank. The pitfall here is that you start to pull on the halter, which will not work.

*: you may need to touch the horse. Don't worry. If you do it correctly, your horse will only blame himself for walking into that pressure and decide not to do it again.

Therefore you must reward any time your horse is standing straight in front of the trailer (looking into the trailer). No matter how far he is on the ramp or in the trailer. For the horse it is part of the puzzle; where can I find comfort. First in a straight line in front of the trailer and finally in the trailer itself.

When you give the horse comfort and he looks away, that's fine. He may not be confident enough to keep his body straight for much longer.

Trailer loading confident horses

As I mentioned earlier ... the problem with a horse that is not afraid of the trailer, but for whatever reason refuses to load, is that **the horse is in control of his AND your movement**. As soon as you take control over when, how and where you move your feet and your horse's feet, trailer loading will become easy. The true reason is usually that they do not want to leave the herd. Here is where the relationship and your leadership come in. If you can convince the horse that you are capable of looking after his safety, the loading will become easier again. Make sure there is a good balance between the comfort and discomfort you provide. With too much comfort, carrots and asking nicely if he will load, they will walk all over you or just walk away. In that case they control your moves. With too much discomfort, it will come down to force and this is exactly what we do not want (and why you are reading this e-book).

How to solve herd bound

Many times a horse won't load, it's because they don't want to leave the herd. This may be the hardest thing to solve, as they spend most of their time with the other horses. They feel safe and comfortable with their buddies. They look the same, speak the same language. Did you ever spend time with a group of people who speak a language you don't? Once I was in a course with Birger Gieseke from Germany when he was still a Parelli instructor. I speak very little German, I understand it a little bit. At the dinner table, of course everybody was speaking German instead of English and after a while I started looking at the ceiling and out the window. I really wanted to get out of there. Birger noticed and said to me: "now you know how horses feel".

To improve the bonding, spend time with them where you demand nothing. Just hang out. You probably are not able to hang out with your horse as much as you would like or need to. So the balance of hanging out and doing things is very delicate. Also the quality of both is of high influence of the outcome. Taking good care of them and talking to them is of very little importance to the horse. Safety is. Observe your horse playing and hanging out with other horses and find out what your horse likes. Then you'll be able to give good leadership. Leadership is having a plan and knowing when to leave them alone.

To solve the herd bound issue you can use approach and retreat. It is the same concept we use for trailer loading. You play the hot-cold game. If you always take them away from the herd to do things with them (work or play) then where is the comfort? Exactly, with the herd. You will need to give them comfort and hang out with them, away from the herd. But not too far at first. If you go too far, their survival instinct will be stronger than their ability to think their way through. This will need to be trained; stimulate them to use the thinking side of the brain. When they are in a survival mode, they'll act instinctively (without thinking) which is when they won't be able to stand still, maybe try to bolt, rear, buck, kick, all the things we don't want them to do. They can't help it, that's how they have survived for millions of years.

Imagine you have a savings account with your horse. It would be somewhere in his mind. This account contains the amount of trust and respect your horse has for you. You may have a lot of credit at home, close to the herd. But when you take your horse away, you might quickly lose credit as a trusted and respected leader. The more credit you had when you started, the further you will get. And maybe it may be enough to be able to trailer load that day. But without enough credit, the herd bound instinct will win.

Patience (and other emotions)

No, we are not quite there yet. For often people ask me: "how can you stay so patient?" My answer always is: "because I know this stuff works". Now that you have acquired quite a lot of theoretical knowledge about the psychology of trailer loading, this will certainly attribute to your patience. For now you have the confidence that it will work. You feel you do not yet have that confidence, then let me know, so I can use it for the next information tool for trailer loading. It will not be so easy in some cases.

So now I am talking about the human emotions. No matter how much knowledge and experience you may have about trailer loading and you could even have perfect timing, this does not guarantee you will succeed. If you can't do it with the correct intention, attitude and without negative emotions, this will show up in the results you will have. Maybe you will succeed and it will take some time, but then your horse will go in the trailer with a bad taste in his mouth. And next time the horse might try a different strategy to not go in the trailer. Their survival strategy is to out-smart and out-persist predators. It has been for millions of years.

I could write a whole new e-book on this topic. Maybe I will do so one day. However many good books have already been written on this. For those of you who are interested in developing yourselves on an emotional level, there are ample possibilities. The last 3 years I have focused on releasing and spirituality. These are two books I sincerely recommend:

'Power vs Force' by David R. Hawkins

In this book he explains that the outcome does not depend on the action you take, but on the intention you have at the time. The intention relates to the emotion you experience in that moment. An emotion (e-motion = energy in motion) is energy that vibrates at a certain frequency. The low frequencies such as grief, fear and anger have a negative influence on your actions. Emotions with a much higher frequency, like acceptance and love have a more positive influence. This also explains

why ‘horsewhisperers’ can make it look so easy. Not only do they possess skill and timing, but their emotional energy is of a very high frequency. Horses are used more and more for therapy and management training. And with good reason, for these sensitive beings reflect everything, especially inner feelings and emotions. You can’t hide those from a horse. Neither from a human by the way, but that takes place on a subconscious level.

‘The power of now’ by Eckhart Tolle

A writer that takes this even further is Eckhart Tolle. As simple as the title of this book is, as powerful is the effect of truly living in the now. Both movie clips, mentioned earlier, are about being in the ‘now’. This is always the only important moment and it is the moment where you create your future. Both the past and the future are only possible in your mind. Really, all we have is now and now will last forever. As soon as you say ‘now’, that moment is already in the past and can only be retrieved in the mind, but if you do this, you will miss all the beauty of the next ‘now’.

I personally am a big fan of ‘dog whisperer’ Cesar Milan. Cesar does not advocate a method or program, but applies dog psychology and explains why the human should always remain calm and assertive. He works with the dog’s mind, just like Pat Parelli works with the horse’s mind.

Catch the mind (yours, your horse’s, your dog’s) when it is thinking of something ‘negative’. Put its attention (consciousness) on something else. The mind is a tool we have, it’s a vessel for thoughts.

More on getting emotions under control.

Years ago I read a book called Psycho Cybernetics by Maxwell Maltz. There is a very simple way to master your emotions and that is **by delaying your reaction** to them. When there is no resistance to the emotion/the feeling, they will leave. Allow them to be there, without wanting to change them, because this keeps them in place. Also wondering how they got there, or wanting to change things in the past, makes thought, memories and feelings real. They are not real. You have to become aware that an emotion is only energy. We think we react to the world out there, but actually we react to the way we feel inside. All it takes is a strong intention and focus to accept what is in this moment. This is how you create the next moment to be more of how you would like it to be. The momentum of doing this consistent, is what makes your life a paradise.

There are many benefits of getting your emotions under control (besides feeling great all the time 😊). One of them is that your intuition will get stronger. This is really helpful when you’re doing something with horses.

The ideal horseperson would be a cross between a man and a woman. Usually, men need to use more love and patience. Women need to be more assertive. The more we are balanced/centered the better we are able to communicate with the horse.

Summary:

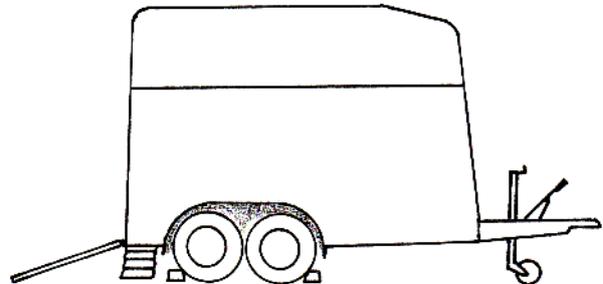
- Basic moves: control the movement, snappy departure
- Simulations with obstacles
- Approach and retreat
- Balance comfort and discomfort
- Reward the smallest try or improvement
- Straight line

Get your own and your horse’s emotions under control. It is easier than you may think, it just needs a strong intention.

8. Extra Tips

Practice

Park your trailer in a place where you will be able to practice regularly. Preferably in an open space, on good surface. I advise against parking the trailer next to a wall or creating a small space around it. Both will create 'pressure', because they do not offer the horse a choice. If you own a bumper trailer, in the way I have drawn here,



you can practice with the trailer without a car. Support the back of the trailer with sturdy blocks. Also place blocks in front of and behind the wheels. If you use the hand break, make sure it does not get stuck when you want to move the trailer again. I have seen this happen a few times and it also happened to me once.

The safe sequence

It may seem superfluous to mention this, but it still happens. When loading your horse: first close the but bar, then tie your horse. When unloading your horse: first untie your horse, then remove the but bar. Even a well trained horse, who learned to tie well, can still panic when he discovers that he is still tied when the but bar is removed. The consequences can be severe. By the way, I have many tips to share about tying horses safely. Many horses still pull back when tied with bad results. Maybe a good topic for another e-book?

Acceptance vs Tolerance

How can we get the horses to accept the trailer, instead of just tolerating it, and to even look upon it as a safe and comfortable place? The answer is by taking long trips!! Often people take the horses for a short trip in the trailer to get them used to it. The idea is good and it can work, but now you know you also reward their state-of-mind. What is your horse thinking when you take him for short trips and unload him straight away again? In the year 2005 I travelled with my horse in the trailer to Sweden for a few demonstrations and courses. 1600 miles one way. The trip took 3 days. My horse was loading well and I was worried it would get ruined by the long trip. On the contrary; the acceptance of the trailer only got bigger.

Do not (always) unload straight away on arrival

Your horse is always learning something. Often after arriving home late at night from a demonstration or course, the first thing I did, was unload my horse. For you believe he really deserves it. Even though this certainly is true, it started to work against me. He got more and more restless every time as soon as he noticed we were home. It had nothing to do with the trailer, but with his attachment to his herd. As soon as I noticed this pattern, I changed it by first unloading my saddle and equipment and waiting for his acceptance: "ok, I will wait for you to unload me". This also prevents them from getting restless when you stop at a traffic light or at a gas station.

Which halter is best for tying up your horse in the trailer

Often people react shocked to tying up a horse with a rope halter. The normal web halters break in case of an emergency and the rope halters don't. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that your horse learns to be ok with the trailer. You know how to do that with help from this e-book. To be quite honest, I believe in the following principle: *If my horse does not load voluntarily, I stay at home.* This may sound extreme, but no halter will keep your horse safe, if you do not help your horse overcome his fears. So the type of halter is irrelevant, but the prior and proper preparations are extremely relevant. I only own rope halters and will never use anything else (unless something better comes along). Teach your horse to tie well, first in all different kinds of places then in the trailer. As I mentioned before, maybe this could be a good topic for a next e-book.

The other thing is, when you have prepared your horse well to trailer loading, the best thing would be to leave the horse loose in the trailer. Just hang the leadrope out of the horses way, but don't make a knot. When in an accident (and I hope this will never happen to you) it is best that the horses are loose.

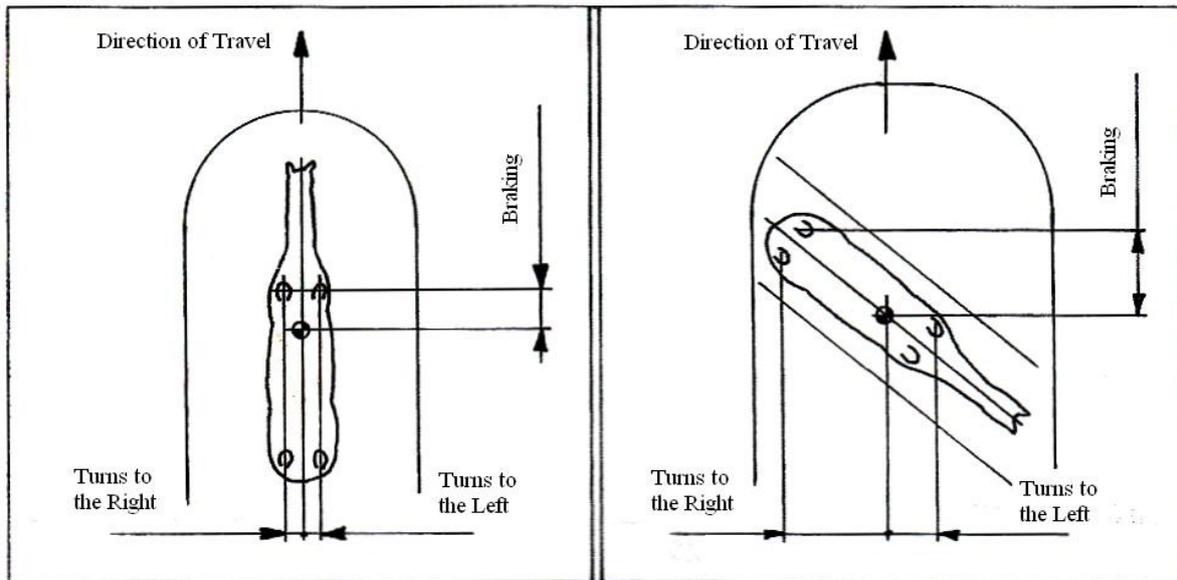
9. Driving The Trailer – The advantages of Slant load trailers

I invite you to take in all the theory and tips in this e-book. Do not just believe what I say... prove it to yourself. This will take some time and effort. You can make it easier on yourself and your horse by investing in a trailer with slant loading. **The difference is not small, but huge.** When transporting a horse in a stock trailer, without tying him, he will stand diagonally with his tail facing in the direction of travel. Even though some people mention disadvantages, this is what the horse prefers.

To get this across well, I will first go into the disadvantages of a straight loading trailer. We start by looking at the way the horse's body is built. At a standstill 60% of the horse's weight is on the forehead, because of the long, muscled neck. This makes the horse fall on the forehead even more during turns and when you brake. They can literally feel like they are falling on their noses. This explains why many horses lean on the but bar or on the dividers. I always tell people to drive as if there is a full cup of coffee on the dashboard. If you can drive without spilling a drop or moving the cup, the centrifugal force*, which the horse experiences will be minimal and he will be able to keep his balance a lot better. Growing up on a farm, I helped load the small bales of hay and straw on to a wagon since I was a small boy. When you are standing on top, with nothing to hold on to, you know exactly how the horse feels. Just like an untied horse will stand diagonally on the trailer, you do the same on the wagon when you have nothing to hold on to. You can try this on a bus, subway or train. Of course, they have four legs, but the effect is the same.

In traffic we sometimes have to brake suddenly or swerve or we are in more of a hurry than we should be, which does not help the horse's balance. I am not suggesting that with a slant loaded trailer you speed up through turns or slam on the brakes. You should still apply the principle of the coffee cup on your dashboard. If the horses can stand diagonally, they can turn through the corners and distribute their weight over their four feet more easily. Instinctively horses (and all prey animals) find balance very important. They need their balance to survive. Often when horses get scared while ridden, the fear is due to a feeling of imbalance.

In this next drawing I finally get to use my mechanical engineer background to explain why it is so much better for a horse to be able to stand diagonally. This symbol  marks the horse's point of gravity. The arrows show the distance between the point of gravity and the leg which is used for counterbalance. The larger the distance, the less power is needed. (comparison: if you push the door shut near the doorknob, you will need less power than when you push close to the hinges.)



* Centrifugal force – This is the force that arises when you take a turn. The best example is when you swing a bucket of water around your head, without the water falling out. It is because of the centrifugal force that the water stays in the bucket.

A few remarks that go with the drawing. In the drawing on the right, the horse is standing diagonally with his tail in the direction of travel. **This is the best position**, since this provides the best balance when braking. Another option is to have the horse diagonally, but facing forward.

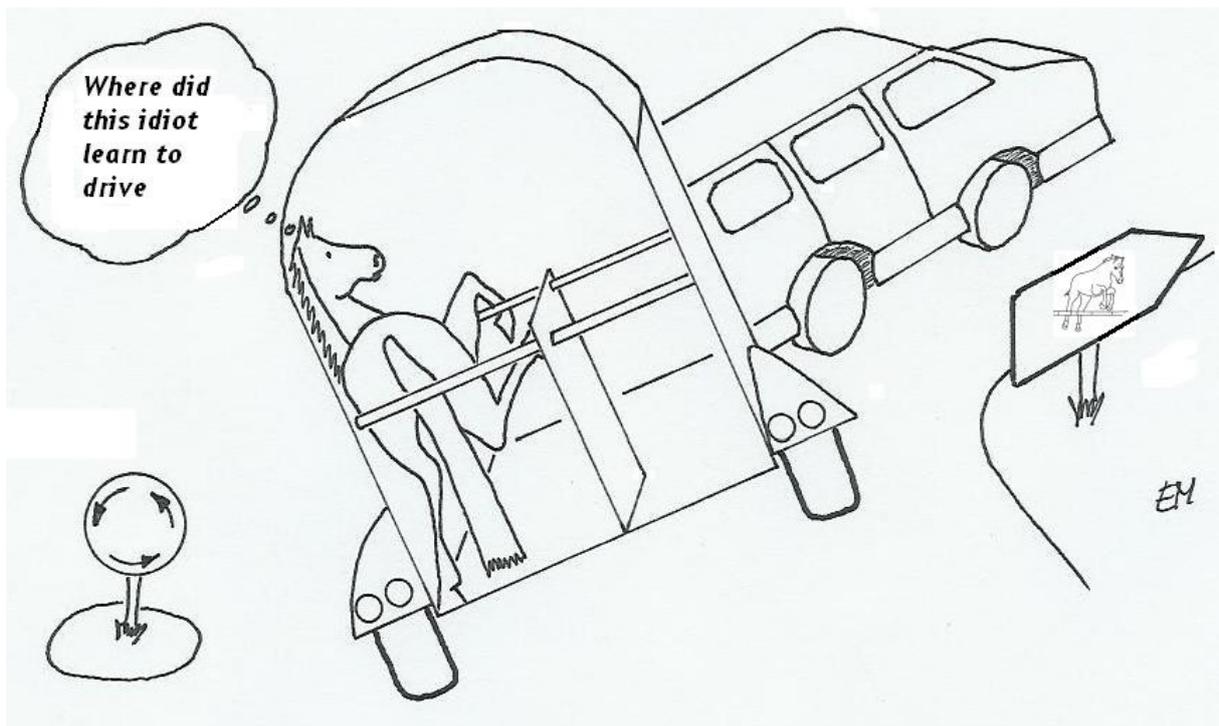
To improve his balance even further, a horse will spread his legs. I did not draw this, but put them 'square'. By spreading his legs, his balance will only improve. In a straight loading trailer, this spreading is restricted by the available space. You can see this in the drawing on page 5 or the funny picture below.

Are there any disadvantages to slant loading?

Some say that there are. I don't really agree, because I think this has other reasons. Their argument is that when horses are on a diagonal angle, they need to compensate the weight of braking and taking turns on one leg instead of two. They say this can lead to the horse becoming sore over a long haul.

I believe that the soreness will not be caused by being on a diagonal angle, but by one of these:

1. The driver did not use the principle of having a full cup of coffee on the dashboard. Braking and turns should be done with grace and should be smooth. I don't think accelerating fast is a problem as long as it is done smoothly, only it will increase your fuel consumption. If you want to accelerate so fast it brings your horse off balance, you should take up racing and forget about hauling horses.
2. The haul was too long. In Europe there is a law that limits hauls to 8 hours. I also think this is long enough.
3. Many sores, if not most, come from heavy training with too much tension. If the horse comes off the trailer sore, it is easier to blame the trailer trip than the training.



I read many different opinions on the choice between straight load and slant. Maybe if your horse is very tall and long, slant load may not offer him enough room to drop his head and neck and relax. Comfort is very important. Drive smoothly. There's no place for ego when hauling horses. Actually, you get the upmost respect when you drive smooth, considering the horse. Maybe a good idea for a bumper sticker: "I consider my horse while I drive".

An advantage some mention about slant loads is that you can turn the horse around so you don't have to back out. I would say teach you horse to back out anyway. Very easy to teach and very good for his balance, body and brain. Actually, if you follow the concept in my E-book, you will teach your horse to unload, just as well, as loading him.

Summary:

Basically, consider your horse while driving. There is no place for ego when transporting horses. Your horse will respect you and get to like the rides in the trailer. This way loading will get better.

There's no place for emotions either. Don't be afraid something will happen or worry about your horse being OK. They pick up on this energy and it won't do you nor your horse any good.

10. Case Study – Just for fun

Funniest trailer loading session

After a course on location in the Netherlands, I was going to transport a horse to my place for the owner was also going to be on this course. I started in my usual fashion and figured it would take about 20 minutes for the horse to load confidently. After about 10 minutes, however, it suddenly started to rain. Not just a little bit, but it started to pour down. The horse looked up, did not think twice and walked all the way in to the trailer. This shows how much horses value their comfort.

11. To Be Continued

As I promised this E-book will be continued with video material. Only you will receive an e-mail as soon as the next video is ready. Also I will continue writing articles on my blog about trailerloading and related topics.

Thank you so much!

I appreciate that you have taken the effort and time out of your day to read this E-book. I would love to hear what you think about it.

Please leave a comment on horsetrailerloading.info or [send me an e-mail](#). It would really help me a lot to improve the E-book, articles on my blog and future video material.

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Thanks again, and I wish you nothing less than success with loading your horse on the trailer.

Eddy Modde



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