

Starting Your Miniature Horse In Harness



Stage Four

Introducing The Cart



What You Need

1. An open bridle with a non-pinching bit.
2. A full harness including breast collar, breeching and kicking strap.
3. A driving whip.
4. A safe, well balanced 2 wheeled cart with footman's loops.
5. A halter and long lead rope.
6. A capable helper.



This is the easy bit.

No, really.



This is the easy bit.

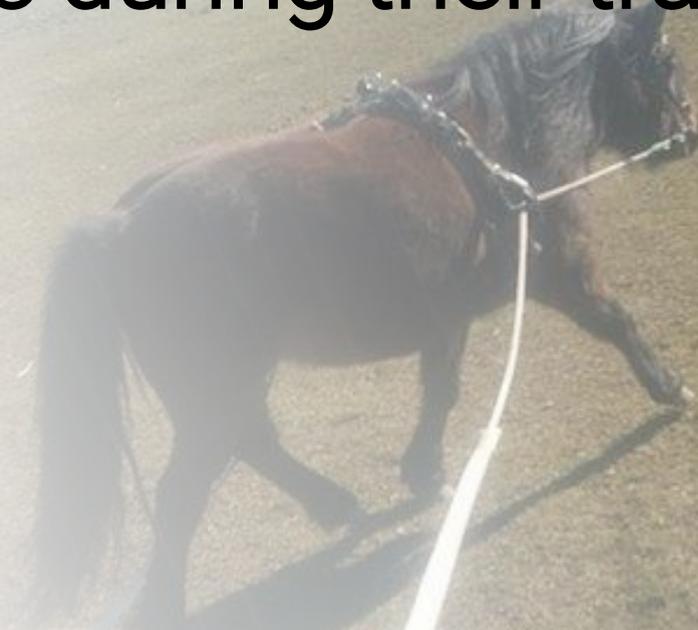
No, really.

We are attaching a wheeled projectile to a flight animal.

They're going to let us know if they're not comfortable – we just have to listen to them.



“Every horse has a wreck
once during their training.”



“Even now has a wreck
once during their training.”



NO NO NO!!!



Responsible Wreck Prevention

Make sure your horse is solid on their basics: Confident in cues and communication; and balanced and strong enough for the job. (ie – don't hook them to the cart the same day they have a bit in their mouth for the very first time.

Use the right equipment for the job – a properly fitted harness in good repair and a well balanced cart.

Make sure you've taken every precaution in the first few times they are hooked to the cart.

Listen to your horse.



Safety First

Cheap Insurance:

#1 – Helmet

#2 – Kicking Strap

#3 – Capable Helper



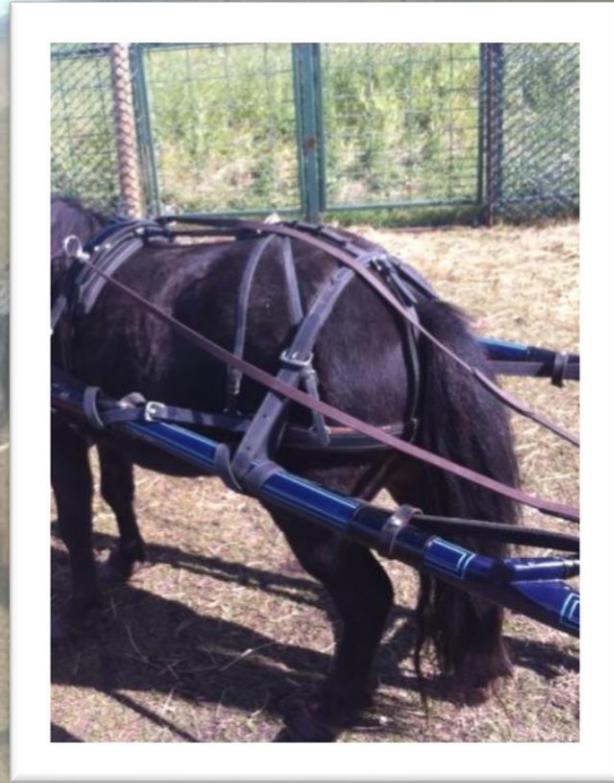
Kicking Strap

Goes from one shaft, over the bum just ahead of the crupper to the other shaft.

Adjusted so that most of the time it does absolutely nothing.

If the horse tried to lift their hindquarters to kick or buck, they would not have to lift the whole weight of the cart and driver.

Prevents horse from getting a leg over a shaft.





Desensitizing to the Cart

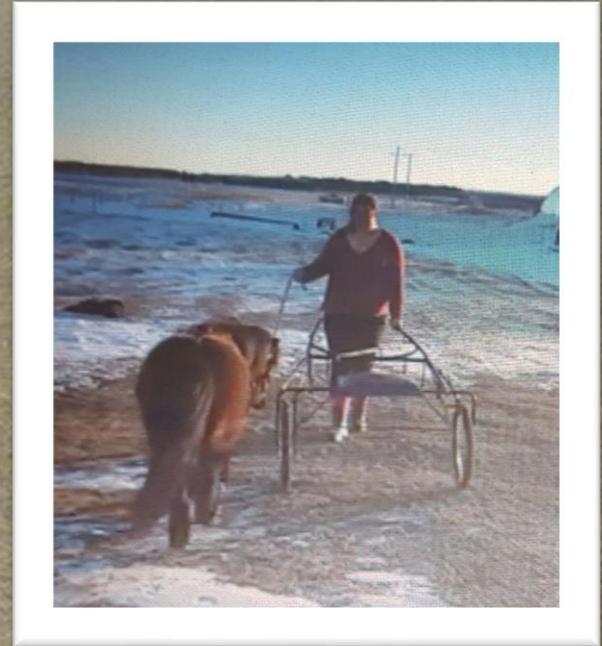
Horses, being flight animals, are less fearful of something that is moving away from them – engage their “seeking” emotion instead of “fear.”

Ideally, get your helper to pull the cart and ground drive your horse following the cart.

Gradually work up to the cart on either side of them, touching them, eventually following them.

Make noises, go over bumps, shake and rattle cart, lift wheel and drop – every sound they might experience when they are hooked to it.

Exposure to other horses driving can be beneficial as well.



First Hook To The Cart

Hook them to the cart with full harness including breeching and kicking strap, but NOT including a check or blinders.

Keep halter and long lead rope on under bridle. Helper on end of lead as insurance only – not to lead, just be there in case. Driver controls the horse.

Take it slow – let the horse tell you how confident they are. A few steps or ready to walk-trot-turn-whoa with confidence.

Again, downward transitions are the most important – only a few steps of trot at first with a focus on relaxation.



First Hook To The Cart

When horse is calmly walking, trotting and standing as they are asked by the driver without assistance from the header, have them unclip the lead.

Get your helper to follow along as though they are still leading and gradually fade into the background until you are ground driving on your own.

Even if this goes well the very first time, wait until the next day to get in, to allow them to process and confirm this first good experience with the cart.



First “Real Drive” – Yay!!

Refresh the previous stage – ground drive with the cart one more time first to make sure you’ve got a horse in the right mindset today.

Get your helper back on the lead.

Be sure to go forward first and make wide turns – we have increased the level of difficulty, keep it as easy for them as possible.

Confirm downward transitions and whoa.

Give lots of encouragement and keep it short.



First “Real Drive” – Yay!!

When you and your horse are confident – not before! – then ask your helper to take off the lead and fade into the background.

Keep your initial drives very short and sweet – not only does it not allow muscles to become sore and make them sour, but gives you more chances to build solid positive experiences.

Build duration slowly – lots of walking initially with short intervals of trot.

Work as much as possible on straight lines and large figures.

Always error on the side of quitting too soon – avoid trying “just one more thing.”



Moving Forward

Pulling weight for the first time is a lot of stress on muscles, bones and ligaments – they need to have time to gain strength and acclimatize.

Once you are driving them, don't work more than 2 days in a row and no more than 3-4 days a week.

Time off – even extended time off – is your friend at this stage.

Starting youngsters in the fall, hooking a few times and then turning out for the winter is ideal.



Primary Goals

A safe, sane and happy driving horse.

1. Confident in cues and communication.
2. Balanced and strong enough for the job.
3. Comfortable with the cart.



Secondary Goals

Winning in the show ring.

Competitive in combined driving.

Fit enough for trail driving.

Or



Not The End – Just The Beginning

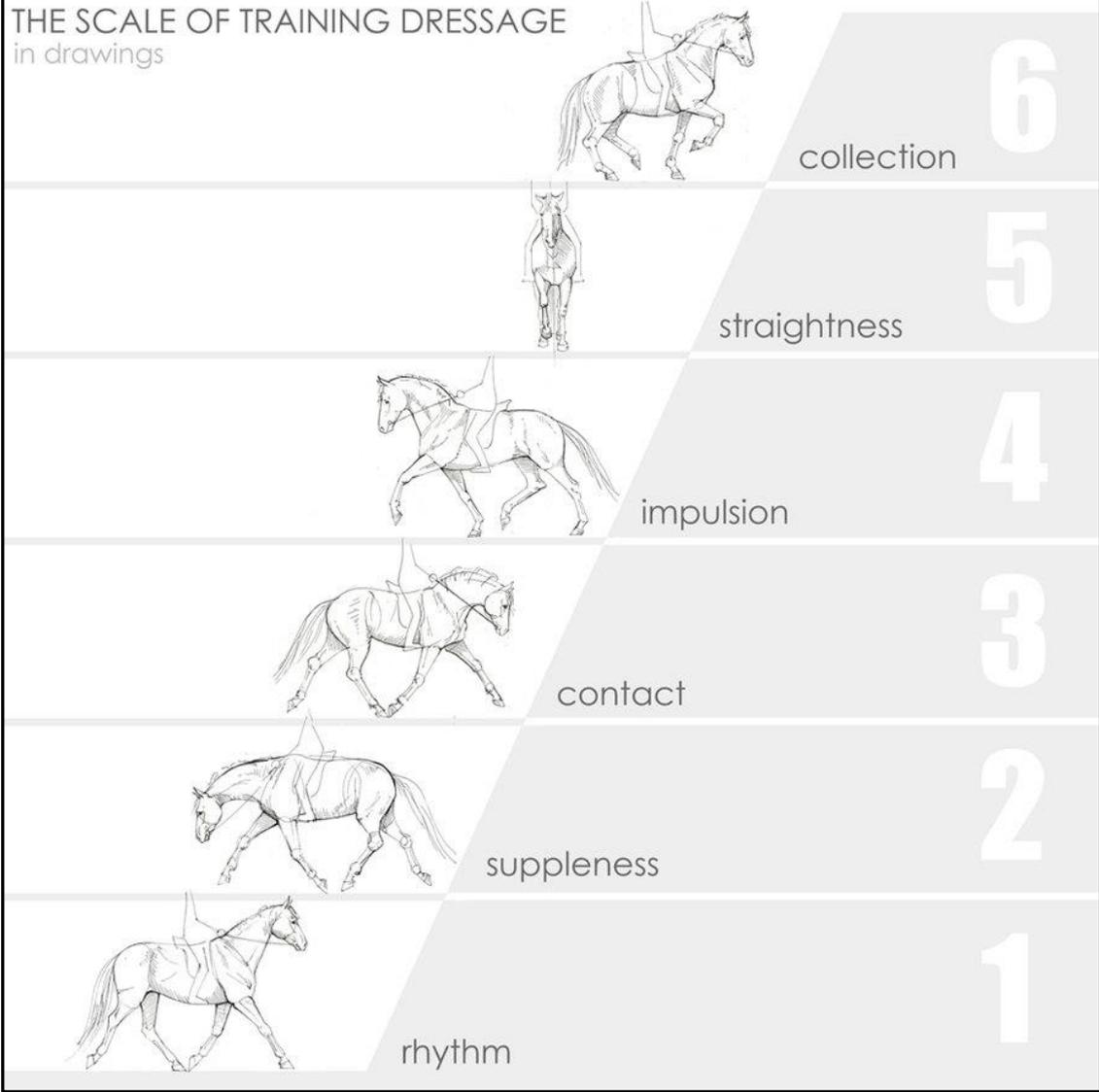
We can't expect our horses to perform at a high level immediately after they learn to pull a cart safely.

Now we start training and conditioning for our secondary goals using the training scale.

We want to build an athlete that can continue to improve throughout their career, not break them down by asking too much too soon, or handicap them by building the wrong muscles.



THE SCALE OF TRAINING DRESSAGE
in drawings



Miniature
Horsemanship
Kendra Gale

Having Trouble?

When in doubt, go back. Most of the time an issue is due to a lack of understanding. Go back and reinforce earlier training.

Always look for a physical reason for an issue.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Often another set of knowledgeable eyes is just what you need.

Remember that horses only do one of two things: What they think they're supposed to do or what they think they need to do to survive. They aren't being "naughty" – always give them the benefit of the doubt. They only have so many ways to tell us something is wrong or they don't understand, and it's so important that we listen.



Adding Blinders

If you plan to drive in the show ring, blinkers are required.

To introduce a blinkered bridle, do a refresher – start by ground driving, then long lining, then hook up to the cart being aware that they might have a reaction to their lack of vision.

Usually you can do it in one day, but some horses feel more strongly about the lack of vision and need you to take it slower. As always, listen to your horse.



Adding A Check

Again, if you plan to show in the breed ring, you need a check. If you don't, skip this step. A check is not necessary for any reason other than to follow a rule.

A sidecheck is much less likely to interfere with your horse's movement than an overcheck.

Don't put it on until they are comfortable in their own balance, and use it only enough that they are comfortable with it (adjusted so it interferes as little as possible) prior to the show.



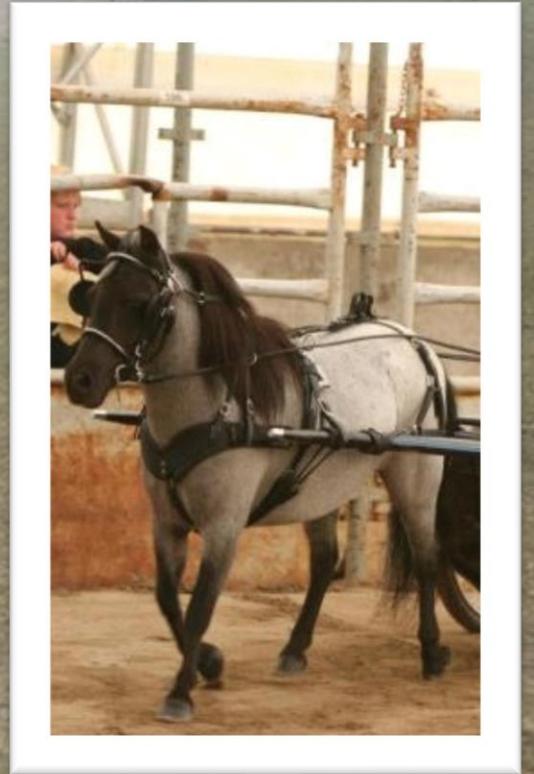
Other Harness Bits

Yes, you CAN use breeching in the show ring.

Yes, you CAN use breeching in the show ring and still win.

Yes, you CAN use a shaped, padded (“deep vee”) breastcollar in the show ring.

No, you do NOT need to use a martingale in the show ring. (Or ever.)



False Collection

Because a driving class at a show is so short, having a horse with a “headset” can end up overemphasized in early training.

It is important not to pull your horse together from the front end with or without “gimmicks” such as a martingale or draw reins.

Build your driving horse from back to front and help them develop the muscles for self carriage and they will have a “headset.”

True collection is so much prettier – so more importantly, better for your horse - than false collection. Take the time to do it right.



“Anything forced or misunderstood can never be beautiful.

What a horse does under compulsion he does blindly, and his performance is no more beautiful than would be that of a ballet dancer taught by whip and goad.”

Xenophon “On Horsemanship”



Have Fun With Your Driving Horse!

