

Chapter Seventeen - "What If?" (Solutions to Common Problems)

All trainers run into problems. Even if you believe you thoroughly understand both the principles and the techniques involved in a training program, you will still encounter difficulties.

Before you can work out a solution to a problem, you must be able to recognize that it is a problem. Having a knowledgeable helper or experienced trainer can be very, very valuable--not only to provide guidance in your training, but to act as a second pair of eyes to help you identify your horse's progress and roadblocks.

Following is a list of common driving problems and our suggestions for correcting them. This is a summary of our own experience, and may not apply to your particular situation--but we hope that if you do run into any of these situations, these will help you begin to think in the right direction as you search for a solution.

1. Jigging instead of walking.

A. Your reins may be too short. A horse may begin to jig when the rein length doesn't allow him to stretch his body sufficiently. In the walk, a horse must be allowed a long frame.

On the other hand, if the horse is over-eager and does not want to walk because he would much rather trot (on the way home from a drive on the trails, for instance), and you have to hold him on a short rein to prevent him from running away, the situation is more difficult. The more you shorten the rein, the tenser he becomes, the less he can walk, and the less he is going to settle down. This can sometimes escalate to a very dangerous situation, with the horse trying to rear or bolt. Using the brake may help slow down an over-eager horse by increasing his load.

The only real solution, however, is to teach the horse the walk command very thoroughly in groundwork so he knows he has to walk when you tell him to walk. Then you can give him a longer rein, make him more comfortable, and stand a chance of settling him down--or at least not getting into a fight with him.

If you feel you have an over-eager barn lover on your hands, be sure you don't ever let him rush back to the barn. (See No. 22.)

B. The carriage may be too heavy. If the vehicle is too heavy for your horse, he will find it very difficult to advance his shoulders sufficiently to pull well at the walk; it may be easier for him to take short, jigging steps instead.

C. Your horse may have sore muscles, or he might be uncomfortable with the harness or biting. Any sort of discomfort can prevent him from relaxing and walking properly. Short checkreins also prevent the proper stretch and relaxation

for a good walk, and many horses who wear checkreins will begin jiggling out of frustration. The solution to this is simple: take the checkrein off.

D. He is just plain lazy. Your horse may just not be motivated enough to pull the cart in a forward walk, so he breaks into a trot instead. Work on his forward walk in your ring work.

E. You are asking for more walk than he can give you. Some horses just do not have the physical ability to produce a big walk stride, and the weight of the carriage will inhibit this even more. If you ask for more walk than his conformation will allow for, he may have to jig instead.

2. Head tossing and shaking.

A. Check the bit, because it may:

- be too narrow, pinching his lips against his molars;
- have loose joints that pinch his lips;
- have a too-short curb chain;
- be too severe, too thin or too thick;
- be adjusted too low or too high, and may interfere with teeth (especially wolf teeth).

B. The noseband may be too tight. Too-tight raised nosebands may press the horse's cheeks against his molars. A too-tight and too-low flash or dropped noseband may inhibit his breathing, or he may become very itchy under the noseband.

C. Check for physical problems, such as new teeth growing in, or teeth that may need floating. He may also have sore muscles, or be unsound. A very sensitive horse may resort to head tossing whenever he's bothered by any part of the harness or even tickled in the ears or face by his mane. Or, your hands may be too rough.

D. The horse may just be young. Many young horses tend to shake and toss their heads quite a bit without any apparent reason; they just seem annoyed by all the harness. Sometimes this can also be attributed to impatience, lack of balance, or playfulness. Your careful, patient and firm handling--plus time to grow up--will generally clear up this sort of head-shaking.

E. Flies, of course, can also cause head tossing and shaking. Use fly repellent liberally, and purchase a face shield or tassel to protect your horse and make him as comfortable as possible.

F. Nervousness--either by nature or as the result of a scary experience--can cause a horse to toss or shake his head. Lots of calm, correct ringwork (possibly with sliding sidereins to provide a steady, reassuring contact) will help the naturally nervous horse. Be sure you don't push him too quickly or ask for more than he's ready to handle.

For the horse who has been made nervous through fright, you will have to re-train him to trust you and accept your commands as you carefully re-introduce the situations that make him

afraid. Try to do this under controlled circumstances (in an enclosed area, with a helper) and give him plenty of time to regain his confidence. The horse who is nervous in traffic can be a real safety hazard, and this part of his training cannot be over-emphasized.

G. Pathological head shaking - This is actually a disease, which can be very painful to the horse, and can have numerous causes. Please go on line and inform yourself about various causes and treatments.

3. Constant fussing with the bit.

All of the above-mentioned causes (under #2) may apply. A horse may also be fussy because he has never learned to deal properly with the bit, and is worried about it. In this case, he will need careful re-education to the bit, and sliding sidereins may help him learn to accept its support and direction.

4. Nervousness with bit contact.

Again, many of the reasons mentioned above may be the cause of the problem.

A. In addition, some horses simply have a very sensitive mouth and do not like any amount of bit pressure. These horses are best worked for a while on a rubber or plastic bit until they learn to trust and understand it; then they can usually return to a metal snaffle (preferably a double-jointed one).

B. A horse may also be nervous about bit contact when he is afraid of the task ahead--being asked for collection, for instance, when he is not able or ready for it.

C. Horses that have experienced cruel rein handling, but are not particularly soft in the mouth, may become nervous about bit contact because they expect to be hurt. These horses are best worked in sliding sidereins to give them a chance to work themselves into trusting the bit.

5. The horse's mouth feels like a "log."

A. He may be trying to block out pain. A horse with severe back problems or a bad spavin may feel to the driver as if the reins are attached to a log or rock. Trying to protect himself from the pain, he will resist the bit, attempting to prevent any rein action from going through to his hind quarters.

B. The bit may be too severe; or, the curb chain may be too loose, allowing the combined action of the bit and curb chain to cut off feeling in his tongue.

C. A horse with a very heavily muscled lower neck, with a thick throatlatch and unyielding jaws, will find it fairly easy and natural to set himself against the driver's hands. This horse's neck muscles will need "rebuilding," through correct training. Sliding sidereins can really help, but when a horse

has a severely "upside-down" neck (and if he's been accustomed to traveling this way for years), it can be a long, frustrating process to develop the correct muscling. And the amount of rebuilding that can be done will always be limited by the horse's poor conformation.

D. Total confusion and mental resistance may make the horse's mouth suddenly feel log-like. This may be only an occasional problem, as with a horse who is otherwise responsive but completely refuses to rein back in harness. Go back to simpler demands to lessen his confusion and increase his trust. Be patient, be clear and consistent in your demands, and ask for help from a knowledgeable friend if you need it.

6. Head flying up in transitions.

A. This often happens because the horse is green or improperly schooled, or because the driver hasn't properly prepared the horse for the transition. The horse must be both ready and able to shift weight to the hindquarters to execute a transition correctly. (See Chapter 12, "Transitions.")

B. Hind leg unsoundness may also cause the horse to avoid taking any weight onto his hindquarters. Check for any physical problems that may cause the horse to have difficulty flexing the hind leg joints or coiling the back.

C. The bit may be too severe, or the rein contact too rough.

7. Breaking into the canter when he's asked to lengthen the trot

There could be several reasons for this:

A. The horse is not ready yet, or not capable of lengthening work. You may be asking for too much, too soon. (See Chapter 12, "Transitions.")

B. You may not be putting him on the aids properly to prepare him sufficiently for lengthening.

C. If he's young or particularly exuberant, he may simply be thinking that this is all a great game, and he can explode into a canter whenever you ask for a more energetic trot. If this is the case, be sure he's getting plenty of exercise on his own, and then put him back on the longe or in long lines to work on his commands. Scold him sharply when he gives you a canter instead of a lengthened trot, and try again. Be sure to give him great praise when he does offer even a few steps of lengthening.

8. Going behind the bit; traveling with his head behind the vertical.

A. The bit may be too severe or the driver's hands too heavy. Improper training can also cause this problem, especially if the horse has been asked for too much collection too soon.

B. The horse's build and temperament can also be contributing factors.

A horse with a very flexible neck and/or a hammer head--especially if this is combined with an energetic temperament--is very prone to coming behind the vertical. You need to hold him to keep him under control, but his energy keeps pushing so much against the bit that he cannot possibly balance himself back over his hindquarters. As a result, he curls up his neck.

Only patient and correct work will lead you out of this problem. First, the horse must be taught to slow down and relax so that his forward movement no longer has to be controlled by your holding back on the reins. Next, he must learn to reach for the bit. He may have to be allowed for some time to poke his nose up and out to make him forget about curling up. And finally, he must learn to reach forward-downward with a yielding jaw, reaching with his nose almost to the ground. If all this is accomplished, training progress should occur in the normal fashion. (See Chapter 11, "Longitudinal Bending.")

9. Very stiff on the right rein.

This can be caused by bit discomfort or unsoundness, but by far the most common cause is the horse's own natural crookedness.

This has to be overcome by good training.

As discussed in Chapter Nine, it is difficult for the horse to bend properly to the right, since his right hind leg is not naturally as strong as his left hind leg. By stiffening the jaw, he can support his weight on the rein, and at the same time can block any weight shift and rein action to the rear.

Even when the horse has been brought along properly, this problem may persist. Often, it seems that a horse uses the stiffness in his right jaw as a last barrier to total submission to the aids. Usually, once you are able to truly soften his right jaw and get him to accept the rein correctly, the whole horse will be at your will.

10. Very stiff on the left rein.

Again, discomfort or unsoundness may be the problem, but the more likely cause is his natural crookedness. In this case, the horse is so dependant on carrying his weight over his left shoulder that he tries to support himself also on the left rein.

If he yields to the left rein, he won't be able to travel over the left shoulder any longer, he'll have to carry himself in good balance--and his muscles are not accustomed to that. If this is not remedied in the early stages of training, it can develop into a serious problem. The horse becomes so confirmed in this unbalanced way of going that he adamantly refuses any other position.

It is also possible that the horse feels very stiff on the left rein because he is not accepting the right rein. When one

rein is not accepted properly, the other one can't be accepted either.

Try to soften the right jaw first and, once the horse gives in, work on the left rein again. Horses that have had some proper training will usually respond quickly to this. In most cases, it is really the right rein that is causing the trouble.

The cause may also be a misalignment in his spine. This is often the case, and if a stiffness persists or seems to get worse, please consult a chiropractor, massage therapist or other body worker.

11. The horse appears "off" when going around turns.

A. Improper hitching may cause this. Too-little movement of the singletree, or discomfort caused by pressure or rubbing from the collar may cause this problem. Check your harness and cart carefully, and make adjustments as needed.

B. An uncomfortable bit can cause a horse to appear slightly lame when he turns. A straight bar bit, too severe a bit, or unskilled rein aids can be at fault. Try a different bit, and have a knowledgeable friend drive while you watch carefully for improvement.

C. There may be a physical cause: soreness or weakness in one shoulder, unsoundness in any leg, or a misplaced horseshoe nail that only bothers the horse when he feels the stress of a turn. Displacement of a neck and/or wither vertebra may also be the cause.

12. Unwilling to pull on quietly; rushing and lurching forward

A. These horses have usually had a bad experience at the beginning of their training. Insufficient groundwork or too-heavy a carriage may have started this problem.

The horse must learn to trust his own ability to pull, and he must trust you not to overload him. To effect a cure, go back to ground driving. Have a helper hold onto the traces (see "Learning to Pull," in Chapter Eight) and apply just as much pressure as the horse will accept without becoming nervous. This may be very little in the beginning.

Gradually increase this pressure on the traces until the horse accepts the full, leaning-back weight of at least one person--two would be even better. Lots of praise and lots of patience will bring results.

B. Don't rule out unsoundness as a factor, either, especially if correct training doesn't seem to help the problem.

Back and hindquarter soreness will often make it impossible for a horse to pull on smoothly. Lyme disease is very often the culprit in a case like that.

13. Unwilling to pull up a hill.

A. Usually, this happens as a result of some sort of strain. An unfit horse may be asked to pull a too-heavy carriage, or he may be asked to work with ill-fitting harness or improper hitching (lack of a singletree, for instance). If a collar doesn't fit properly (or, in a pair, if a horse isn't correctly hitched and is not actually pulling with the collar) the horse will quickly become discouraged.

B. Short checkreins are very likely to cause problems with pulling up hills. And almost any physical unsoundness can make a horse reluctant to put any extra effort into his pulling.

C. All kinds of soundness problems can contribute to this.

14. Rushing.

A. Some horses simply have an over-eager temperament. These horses must be handled with great patience, firmness and tact. Using your brake each time he tries to rush can help to steady this type of horse, because he learns that each time he rushes he suddenly must work a lot harder.

B. In horses that are not merely over-eager, rushing is almost always a result of discomfort and anxiety. It is seen especially in small horses who are made to pull fairly heavy vehicles; the faster a heavy load moves, the easier it is to keep it moving. Also, the horse may think that the quicker he moves, the faster he'll get to wherever you want to go--and the sooner he'll be able to stop.

C. Rushing is also a proof of front-end heaviness. In this case, the horse constantly tries to catch up with his own balance, and thus becomes quicker and quicker. Again, this is often caused by a too-heavy vehicle. Many people who drive small horses or ponies believe they have a very eager, athletic animal who loves to work because of the way the horse rushes and hangs on the reins. In fact, exactly the opposite may be the case: the horse may be scared by the difficulty of pulling and anxious to get it over with.

The horse who rushes because of fear or a too-heavy vehicle will not be helped by the use of the brake; this will just make his job harder and cause him more frustration. The only way to help this horse is to change to a lighter vehicle and give him careful, quiet work to calm him and re-establish his trust in you. Relaxed drives on the trails in a light cart will be beneficial.

15. Refusal to bend.

A. The equipment may be at fault. If your shafts and harness (or pair hitch) don't let the horse bend, you will need to make adjustments. Refer to Chapter Ten, "The Lateral Bend," and Chapter 16, "Pair Driving," for more information about equipment.

B. The horse's earlier training may be at fault, or he may not be physically able yet to bend. You may also be asking him for too tight a turn for his level of training.

C. If he is stiffening his jaws just enough to prevent proper longitudinal stretch, he won't be able to accept the bending aids. Try him in sliding sidereins to encourage the correct longitudinal stretch; this will encourage lateral flexion.

D. The footing may be too deep. If he's struggling to work his way through heavy mud, he won't be listening very well to your aids.

E. The horse is unsound behind. Correct bending requires him to use his inside hind leg to provide increased support for his weight; if one or both hind legs are unsound, he will be reluctant to do this.

F. Any spinal dislocation and/or muscle tension may be the cause.

16. Refusal to stand still while being hitched.

There are two reasons for this problem: a lack of discipline, or a fear of what will happen.

A. If discipline is the problem, you must reinforce his obedience to the command for the halt. Insist that he stand whenever you ask him to; a verbal reprimand, a slap on the neck, or a yank on the reins may be necessary. Lots of patient ground work brings the best results.

B. If the horse is nervous about being hitched and seems anxious, you will need to do some patient ground work with a helper. Simulate the motions of hitching without actually connecting him to the cart by bringing the cart up and fiddling with the traces and breeching. Have your helper pat and scratch his neck, reminding him to stand (you may even want to feed him a carrot or a handful of grain to encourage him to relax). Then lead him off (unhitched) for a walk or some ground driving. Repeat this several times before you actually do hitch him, and then keep the first few minutes of your driving session as quiet and calm as possible.

In any case, it is absolutely crucial that a driving horse stand quietly while being hitched. Some of the worst accidents happen because a horse gets out of control at this time.

17. Rearing in carriage.

Next to running backwards and bolting, rearing is the most severe disobedience a driving horse can exhibit. It is extremely dangerous. You must either teach him to never rear again, or you must give up on him as a driving horse.

When a horse rears in carriage, you must avoid any rein action to prevent him from losing his balance and possible falling over backward. You may yell at him and try to get him to

move forward, but if he is rearing because he's afraid of something in front of him, don't interfere with him at all. Pray that he will come back down without getting a leg over a shaft or pole. If he is very upset and seems likely to go up again, try to unhitch him as quickly as possible.

Once you realize you have a problem with this, ground drive him for your next training session. Challenge him with everything you can think of to cause him to rear, and then reprimand him severely for this. The best action to take is to turn his head sharply to one side and punish him with severe rein aids, your voice, and possibly the whip.

If he is very violent about it, he may fall over and hurt himself. (This isn't very likely, but it can happen.) This is better, however, than having him hurt you and other people.

Challenge him again with whatever caused him to rear previously, and if he repeats his bad behavior, you may seriously consider not to drive a horse like that, at least for a while. Go back, do lots of ground work, implementing Natural Horsemanship, clicker training or whatever else you prefer, and try to create a better relationship with the horse. Often a behavior like this will desist, when there is more mutual trust and understanding.

18. Running backward.

This can be almost as dangerous as rearing, because he can back you into a ditch, down a bank, or into traffic.

One of our own horses accidentally taught us an effective cure for this. In spite of being an exceptionally sweet, obedient, and willing animal most of the time, this gelding had a stubborn streak.

Since this horse did not like to step on things like plywood and tarps, we occasionally ground drove him over these things to reinforce his submission. One day, he decided that he was not going to go over the tarp (even though he had obeyed on several previous occasions). He had tried throwing himself sideways and rearing to avoid this, and quickly learned that those behaviors resulted in swift punishment. So he began to run backwards.

Because he was wearing blinders, he didn't see where he was going and backed with such violence into a pasture fence that he cracked both boards. The noise and the impact made such an impression on him that he never tried it again. In this instance, the horse punished himself--which always makes the best punishment.

If you don't have a fence handy, try to let him back into something that can't hurt him, such as a wooden wall, a two-by-four held by two helpers, or a few bales of hay. (Even better, put a few tin cans on top of the bales of hay to cause a racket when he backs into them.) Using the whip generally doesn't help much; it may only make the horse more upset. What he really needs to learn is that he can't get anywhere by running backwards. But again, better preparation with ground work most

likely will prevent those situations in the first place.

19. Bucking.

This is another very dangerous habit, as the horse can hook a leg over a shaft. In a pair, he may put a leg over a trace or the pole.

If he does put a leg over a shaft or pole, this may frighten him so much that he bolts--and then you and he are in real danger of getting badly hurt, especially if the pole or shafts break.

Many young horses will buck, and a kicking strap will help prevent disaster. The kicking strap, combined with punishment from the driver, will also discourage them from trying. Of course, a kicking strap can only be attached to shafts, so don't try to drive your horse in a pair if you are afraid he might buck.

20. Becoming upset when asked to turn sharply.

A. Your horse just may not be ready for a tight, 180-degree turn. This type of turn requires him to step sideways as well as forward, pushing against a shaft. Have a helper assist you from the ground, pushing the horse to the side as you ask him to turn.

Ask only for a few steps at first, and reward him generously for any correct effort.

B. If he turns his head too sharply when he tries to perform a tight turn, the shaft may be poking him in the neck. Try to keep his neck straighter as you ask for the turn, or employ a helper to show him how to step sideways without turning his head around too far.

You should also teach him on the ground to accept the whip on his shoulder or along his body as a side ways aid.

C. You may also be pulling too severely on his mouth to get him to turn; or, the bit may hurt him.

21. Refusal to back at all.

A. The horse may not be ready for backing in harness. Review the sections on reinbacks in Chapter 7 ("Basic Ground Driving") and Chapter 14 ("Pleasure Driving") and begin by asking him to back in ground driving.

B. The carriage may be too heavy. Ask him to back first with a lighter carriage, and then ask for the reinback on a slope where he can push it slightly downhill.

C. The breeching may be too low on his hindquarters. Each time he tries to back, his hind legs are shoved far forward by a too-low breeching. Horses quickly learn to resist backing if this is happening.

D. The footing could be too deep. Again, this makes the carriage far more difficult to push backward.

E. Your horse may not be supple enough in his jaws. If any

rein action causes him to stiffen his jaw, then your request for a reinback isn't going to get through to him. Solve the stiff-jaw problem first by putting in the sliding sidereins and working him through exercises designed to increase both longitudinal and lateral flexion. (See Chapter 10, "The Lateral Bend," and Chapter 12, "Longitudinal Bending.")

F. He may be sore or unsound. If anything hurts when he tries to back up, he won't want to do it.

G. If you've ruled out everything else, he may be just plain stubborn. A horse cannot perform a willing reinback unless he submits to you, and some horses just will not give in. If this is the case (especially if he has proven to you previously that he can execute a proper reinback), take him out of the cart and work on reinbacks in ground driving. Spend several minutes going from a walk to a halt to a reinback, then walk on again. Repeat this until he submits and performs correctly. You may have to be quite firm with him, but don't give up until you obtain an obedient rein back. Then hitch him again to the cart, and look for smooth footing or perhaps a slight slope and ask him to back downhill in the cart.

If he complies even once, let that be enough for the session. If he doesn't, unhitch him again and repeat the ground driving exercise, getting firm with him whenever he shows resistance.

22. Refusing to back straight.

Any of the reasons mentioned in #20 may apply. If he is able to back straight in his ground driving, work on having him back on a downhill slope.

Be sure your reins are absolutely even, and be careful that your rein aids are applied carefully. Be ready with your whip, if necessary, to touch his side if he goes crooked.

Also, a horse who is not really soft and accepting in his jaws lacks balance. So young or green horses most likely will have a hard time backing straight.

23. Getting strong when heading for home.

It is very easy to get a horse started in this bad habit. Every horse knows where his home is, and every horse will move eagerly toward home. All you have to do is let him rush toward home one time and he will believe that he can do it always.

A. Make a point of always walking for the last mile (or at least the last five minutes) of every drive. If he refuses to walk, find a place to turn him around and send him away from home again. (This is easier to do when you are riding than when you are driving, and it may help to ride him out several times to make this effective. Each time he gets strong, turn around and head the other way--even if it takes hours to get home.)

When you do get to your driveway or the last turn to home,

send him on past it if he begins to get strong. You may have to do this several times, but you must be firm with him.

B. You can also ground drive him and insist on frequent halts facing toward home. (If he is too unmanageable and refuses to stand at all, do this first facing away from home.)

C. Plan your drives to avoid having to head for home close to feeding time.

D. Have a quiet horse accompany you, and have the second horse stay behind you on the way home.

24. Traveling crookedly on a straight line.

This may be caused by the horse's natural crookedness or inexperience. Green horses often "wander" when they don't have a clear idea of where to go or what to do.

A. The horse could also be sore on one shoulder or on one hind leg, and travels crookedly to compensate for this.

B. The horse may have one naturally weaker shoulder, and tries to throw more of his weight against the collar to compensate for it.

C. The harness may be adjusted unevenly, or it may be uncomfortable.

D. In pair driving, crookedness can be caused by the method of hitching. (See the discussion of hitching in Chapter 16, "Pair Driving.")

25. Forging or losing front shoes frequently.

A. The horse may be very much on his forehead, because of a lack of fitness, unsoundness, or too heavy a carriage.

B. He may be unbalanced because he is rushing.

C. The toes on his front feet may be too long, causing a late breakover, and the horse can't get his front feet out of the way of his hind feet quickly enough.

26. Weakening in strength or stamina; not progressing in Training

A. The horse may be using the wrong muscles because of incorrect training. If he isn't using his back properly in pulling, his hindquarter muscles will not improve and may even deteriorate.

B. Some type of debilitating disease may be troubling him. Lyme disease, for instance, has become a major threat in some parts of the country, and many horse owners are not aware that their horses can be affected by this. Diagnosis can be difficult, as the tests are not very reliable, and many horses that test negative to the disease will still show improvement when they are treated for it.

27. Becoming upset in harness.

When the sight or sound of an object makes the horse so upset that you are afraid he may do something very dangerous (like rearing or bolting), have your helper jump out, go to the horse's head, and try to settle him down. If this does not seem to help, quickly unhitch the horse. If there isn't time to take him out of the traces and breeching properly, cut the straps with the sharp knife you carry along for this sort of situation.

Repairing cut traces and breeching is far preferable to having your horse take off, injure himself and others, and destroy your vehicle in a panic.

Once you have handled the immediate crisis, ground drive the horse (right then and there) past the scary object. Go around or past it until he is completely at ease with it--even if it takes hours.

Then hitch your horse up again and continue your drive. Use the extra traces and repair straps (from your spares kit) to put your harness back together if you need to. If you don't have a spares kit, you'll have to walk the horse and carriage home.

We once had this happen with a young mare who was driving in a pair. She became terrified of a herd of cows and began to rear and plunge, threatening to become totally out of control--even though her older partner showed no concern about the cows whatsoever. We unhitched her right there and ground drove her past cows, while the gelding watched and waited. It took an hour to fully calm her down and accustom her to the cows. But it was certainly worth it: she now knows cows. When we rehitched her, she drove willingly past the cows.

If it is not possible to take the horse out of the cart when he becomes upset--if, for instance, you are on a very busy road--have your helper alert traffic and try to turn around and get away from the hazard. This can be dangerous, however, since your horse may think of bolting to get away as fast as possible from the scary object.

Avoid turning around and leaving, if at all possible. You don't want your horse to think that this is the way to deal with scary things; he will quickly learn to throw himself around and try to run away every time he doesn't like something.

If you do have to leave the scene before you have settled the problem, try to create a similar situation at home or ground drive him back to the scary place at a better time and work him through it.

28. Bolting.

When a horse bolts, your first thought must be to steer him clear of any obstacles that might turn the carriage over.

Have your helper grab onto the reins as well, and the two of you must begin to apply as much pressure on the reins as possible. Do not give any slack until the horse slows some; the "give-and-take" method of stopping a runaway does not seem to

work in driving. Try to build an iron wall with your rein pressure, and put it right in front of the horse. Then, as soon as the horse slows you can release some and see what he does. If he gets faster again, repeat the aid.

You must not, however, panic. Try to give the horse the attitude that it was your idea to go fast, and now you'd like to slow down. Activate the break as much as you can without locking the wheels (if the wheels lock, the carriage will skid or become--quite literally--airborne) and talk to your horse firmly and calmly. Give him the command to trot. If you are in a field, you can guide him around the perimeter and into a gradually diminishing circle.

As long as you have some space to go and the footing is fairly smooth, bolting is not too dangerous, since the horse can't run forever and he will tire at some point. However, it is a different matter if you are on or about to cross a busy road. If this is the case and you feel you cannot stop your horse in time, look for the least dangerous place you can steer him: into a cluster of small trees, through some bushes, or into someone's yard.

We had to do this once with a pair. They became frightened by some people who were lying in the tall grass next to the trail; the people rose up as we came close, and the horses bolted. We were approaching a busy road, and at the rate they were going, it seemed very unlikely that we would be able to stop them in time. We drove them into a cluster of small trees, which stopped them very effectively. We were thrown off the carriage by the impact; however, no one was hurt and nothing broke on the harness.

If you know what made your horses bolt, ground drive them at home through similar situations. If you don't know why they bolted, try everything you can think of to induce bolting while you are ground driving--and then make very sure that they do not get away from you. Once a horse learns he can run away if he doesn't like something, he is totally unsafe as a driving horse.

The Safety Checklist

Always . . .

Chapter 17 - 15

1. When you are hitching a green horse outside in the yard, point him toward a wall or fence. Let him face any activity or commotion so he can clearly see it, and have a knowledgeable person head him, standing right in front of him. Holding a horse from the side can result in the horse spinning around and hitting the handler with the shaft.

2. Get your green horse accustomed to having a rein caught under his tail before you hitch him for the first time.

3. Be sure he is used to all the sights and noises you may encounter on your drive (lawnmowers, dirt bikes, air brakes, gunfire, horns, etc.).

4. If you have to drive on busy roads, have a slow-moving-vehicle triangle on the back of your cart. Think also of carrying a red flag with you, and a flashlight in case you are caught after dark. Having reflectors on your vehicle and a roll of reflective tape for your horse's browband and collar are also a good idea.

5. Be sure your horse is shod properly for the task at hand, using studs when necessary, or have him appropriately booted if he can't go barefoot.

6. Your harness and cart must be in good repair. Be sure the brakes work correctly and evenly.

7. Carry your spares kit, and make sure it is complete.

8. Know and observe traffic rules!

9. Have yourself and your turnout insured with a homeowner's or renter's liability policy.

10. If you go alone on a drive, tell somebody where you are going and when you expect to be back.

11. Wear protective headgear, and recommend that your passengers do also.

Never . . .

1. Remove the horse's bridle when he is still hitched.

2. Have anyone in the carriage when the driver is not in it.

3. Ask a horse to do anything while hitched that you have not already asked him to do in his ground work (backing, cantering, turning).

4. Approach a blindered horse from behind without talking to him first.

5. Have a child or non-horsey person attend to your horse when you have to leave the turnout.

6. Leave a horse hitched to a cart without supervision.

7. Go on a drive without a spares kit.

8. Go on a drive without a last check of your equipment.

9. Set off for a drive on the road or trails alone if you are not absolutely confident of your horse's obedience.

10. Participate in a group drive if your horse isn't used to driving in company with other turnouts or riders.