

BORROW A TRAINER

Learning the power position stop.

By AQHA Professional Horseman Andy Moorman

with Christine Hamilton

Illustration by Jean Abernethy

I TEACH MY RIDERS A FAIL-SAFE WAY TO STOP A HORSE OF ANY KIND. I call it the “power position stop.” I teach it because everybody needs to know how to stop a horse correctly.

The goal behind it is to get the horse to come together in a balanced stop so you are in control and he yields to you. It’s not a specialized stop, like a reining stop; it’s for anyone who is riding.

I don’t teach the power position stop to an absolute beginner. It’s really for someone with at least a minimum of basic riding skills at the point of beginning to understand feel.

I do teach it to anyone having trouble learning how to confidently take control of a horse, not out of fear or frustration, including advanced riders. It teaches you how to balance the horse, pick his back up and have him in your hand for a correct stop.

It also gives a rider confidence. A lot of people fear not being able to stop a horse, and when they get stiff and clutchy with the reins, it makes the horse worse. This gives riders a better alternative.

And it always works if you do it right.

Common Problem

WHEN SOMEONE CAN’T GET A HORSE TO STOP, FOR WHATEVER reason, the first thing most people do is pull. Most riders want to pull back, lean back and shove their feet out in front of them and try to manhandle the horse.

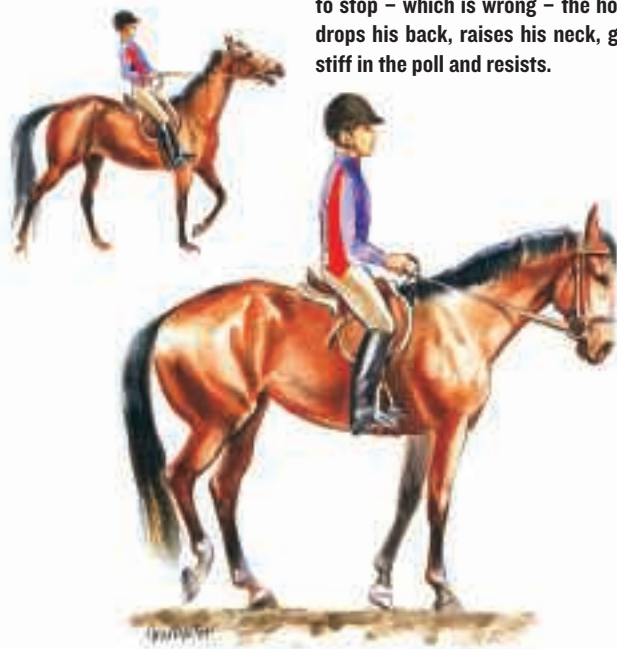
It won’t work.

When you pull, the horse drops his back, raises his neck, gets stiff in the poll and resists. Because the horse is so much more powerful, you can’t make him stop that way. It teaches the horse to evade your hands and the bit, and it can make him fearful.

What To Do

WE USED TO PLAY A GAME WHEN WE WERE KIDS: DRAW A LINE IN the dirt, lock one hand with a person on the other side of the

The power position stop uses your own body weight to balance you and the horse into the stop. But if you pull to stop – which is wrong – the horse drops his back, raises his neck, gets stiff in the poll and resists.



dirt line, and try to push or pull the other person over the line. Whoever gets the other person across the line first wins.

You find out pretty quickly that if you get your weight down low and your arm in by your body, you’ve got good strength and can pull the other person across, especially if you can get her to let her arm go out straight.

That’s the same idea with the power position stop. It allows you to stop the horse just by taking a feel and letting your body weight control the horse.

Here's what you do (you need someone on the ground to make sure your position and rein length are correct):

1. Use a mild bit, like a ring snaffle, and two hands. Don't use draw reins or martingales with this exercise – they interfere with the contact you want for this to work.
2. You must have correct horsemanship: Sit straight up and down – don't lean back or forward. There should be a straight line from your ear to the middle of your shoulder through the middle of your hip (where your jeans seam is) down to the back of your heel.
3. Sit down in the middle of your horse and feel your seat bones on the horse's back.
4. Put your arms down by your sides. Pick up your hands so there is a straight line from the elbows, down your forearms and the reins to the horse's mouth.
5. Have your rein length so you have a decent feel on the horse's mouth with your arms and hands in that position. It's not tight or slack, just a feel. Close your fingers on the rein so you have a grip on the rein.
6. Now, when you're ready to stop, just close your upper arms by your side and steady your hands, **DO NOT** give or take on the reins. At the same time, sit deep and close your legs, not hard, just a little. Closing your leg through the stop keeps the horse's hind legs coming under him.
7. As you sit deep and steady your hands, when he feels he can't pull you, he'll usually give to you in the poll and stop. Often he will even take a step back with a soft poll. Immediately release him and pet him; reward him.

The power position stop uses your own body weight to balance you and the horse into the stop. If your horse pulls on you, when you sit deep and centered and stay steady with your feel on the reins, it is as if he's pulling you down

through his back, and he can't do that.

If your arms are straight and you're not sitting down and long through the leg, he'll pull you right over forward.

When you get it right, you'll feel the horse respond, especially after you do it a few times. He'll step under with his hind legs, raise his back and give at the poll, soft into the stop. He won't hang on you on his forehead. It doesn't hurt him; it's not hard on him; it's just a simple way to put you in control.

Once you learn the technique and your horse understands it, just apply it very lightly, and he'll respond.

You absolutely cannot pull on the reins. Just hold the rein, steady your arm and don't let him take it away from you. On the other hand, you cannot throw the reins away, either – you have to have a feel.

That's why it's really important for the rein length to be correct. You have to go through this process several times to adjust your rein length for the right feel. Usually people tend to have their reins too long, but you can also get them too tight.

Practice first from a walk, then at the jog, then a bigger trot and, finally, at the lope and canter. You need to be secure with it at each gait before you move up. And be patient – some horses pick it up quickly; some don't.

Always use two hands for this exercise. When you ride one-handed, you ride with your hand in front to keep an even feel on the bit, and your arm is not where it needs to be for the power position stop to work. Once you have learned to stop properly – your horse responds lightly when you deepen your seat and steady your hands – then go to one hand.

It teaches you to ride with feel on the reins to control the horse, not pulling and not throwing the reins away. And it teaches you to get the horse to step up to your seat and leg. It's one method for learning a good, proper stop. ■

Christine Hamilton is editor of The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to chamilton@aqha.org.

GET THE PICTURE

When I teach this technique, I hold the rein in place of the horse's mouth and show the difference your arm position makes.

If the rider doesn't have her upper arm down by her side and a straight line from her elbow to the horse's mouth, and if she's not sitting down in the saddle with her leg down, I can pull her over (See left photo). If I can, you know the horse can.

But if the rider sits down and keeps her upper arm by her side, her shoulder down, sitting down with her leg down into the stirrup, then I can't pull her over (See right photo).



PHOTOS BY CHRISTINE HAMILTON