

Clicker Training for Horses

Getting Started with Clicker Training for Your Horse

Have you ever heard about clicker training? While it's often associated with dogs, it's actually a fantastic way to train horses too! If your horse is just starting with clicker training, remember to be patient and give them plenty of breaks. Let's dive into how to introduce this fun training method!



What is Clicker Training?

Clicker training uses a simple click sound to help your horse connect specific behaviours with rewards. It's a great tool to enhance communication between you and your horse, making it easier to teach them in various situations.

And guess what? If you don't have a clicker handy, no worries! You can simply click your tongue or cheerfully say "yes!" to signal your horse.

Gather Your Supplies

Before you start, here's what you'll need:

- A clicker (or something to make a clicking sound)
- Treats (make sure they're something your horse loves)
- A bum bag for treats (optional, but it helps keep your hands free)

Using your horse's favourite treat is key to creating a positive training experience. Some horses might enjoy a nice scratch on their withers, while others will be more motivated by a tasty snack. If you're using treats, remember to feed them away from your bum bag—this way, your horse won't try to sneak a bite!

Safety First!

When offering treats, make sure they're small enough to avoid any choking hazards. For example, cut-up carrot discs are a safe and delicious option.



Steps to Start Clicker Training

To kick things off, it's important to teach your horse the desired behavior during training sessions. You want them to stand calmly, not nudging or sniffing at the treat bag. Instead, they should look straight ahead and patiently wait for their reward.

1. **Stand by Your Horse:** Position yourself beside your horse's shoulder so you can easily move out of the way if needed.
2. **Prepare the Treat:** Grab a treat from your bum bag and hold it in one hand. In your other hand, have your clicker ready.
3. **Ignore the Nudges:** If your horse tries to get at the treat, just ignore them. No treats yet!
4. **Click and Reward:** As soon as your horse looks away or gives up trying to nudge you, click the clicker and immediately give them the treat. This helps them learn that the clicker is part of the training, not just a signal for food.
5. **Switch Sides:** Repeat these steps, but change sides so your horse understands that they should wait for the treat no matter where you are standing.

Tip: Keep your training sessions short—around 10 minutes is ideal—to avoid boredom or frustration. If your horse seems confused or stressed, pause the session and give them some space. You can always go back to an earlier step to help them feel more confident.

Continuing with Clicker Training

Once your horse grasps the basics, it's time to integrate clicker training into your regular training routine. Think about what you'd like to teach them next! A fun exercise is teaching your horse to target an object.

Here's a simple breakdown:

1. **Introduce an Object:** Show your horse an object, but don't touch their nose with it just yet.
2. **Click for Touching:** When your horse nudges or touches the object with their nose, click and reward them!
3. **Repeat Until Confident:** Keep repeating this until your horse is confidently touching the object.
4. **Change It Up:** Once they've mastered that, hold the object at different heights. You can even add a verbal cue like "touch" to reinforce the behaviour.



And there you go! With patience and practice, you'll find that clicker training can be a delightful way to bond with your horse while teaching them new things. Happy training!