

Target Training for Horses

Teaching Your Horse to Target

Getting started with target training is a fantastic way to introduce some fun and engaging tricks into your horse's daily routine. Not only does it enrich their day, but it also helps guide them through unfamiliar situations with confidence.

Target training works wonders when combined with clicker training. The clicker serves as a tool that helps your horse connect the dots between the behaviour you want and the reward they'll receive. And don't worry if you don't have a clicker on hand! You can simply click your tongue or use an enthusiastic "yes!" as a cue. Just make sure that the sound you use for targeting is distinct and not something you typically use when riding.

When teaching your horse a new trick, it's essential to use their favourite reward to keep them motivated. Some horses go wild for treats, while others might prefer a good scratch on their withers or shoulders. This interaction not only aids training but also strengthens the bond between you and your horse, which is so important!

Important Note: If food is your horse's motivation, make sure the treats you offer are appropriately sized to prevent choking. Avoid using carrots or other veggies cut into discs, as they can easily get stuck in their throat.



What You'll Need:

- An easily movable object like a plastic plate or a cone
- Small treats (optional)
- A clicker (optional)

How to Target Train Your Horse

Step One: Start by standing next to your horse with your chosen object. Hold it out at arm's length, but avoid touching their nose with it. Now, say the cue "touch."

Step Two: As soon as your horse nudges the target with their nose, hide the object and reward them right away. If you're using a clicker, click just when they make contact with the target. If your horse seems a bit shy or indifferent towards the object, feel free to reward them for any small movement toward it, like reaching out. This encourages them to keep trying.

Step Three: Keep your training sessions brief—about ten minutes is perfect. Afterward, give your horse a nice break. If they need it, don't hesitate to pick up again the next day. It may take a few sessions for them to feel confident about touching the target when you ask.

Step Four: Once your horse has mastered touching the object at nose level, you can elevate the challenge! Hold the object at different heights and repeat the cue "touch." If they're consistently reaching for the target, try moving it a little farther away from them.

Tip: Pay close attention to your horse's body language during your training. If you notice them becoming bored or frustrated, it's a good idea to wrap up the session and give them some space. Keeping your sessions short is key since horses have a shorter



attention span.

Why Is Target Training Useful?

At Blue Cross, we find target training to be incredibly beneficial when working with our horses. These quick training sessions help the horse welfare team build a strong bond,

which is especially important for new arrivals or horses that might be feeling a bit anxious.

Once your horse is confidently targeting the object, you can use this technique to introduce them to new challenges. If your horse is nervous about something, like loading into a trailer, practicing targeting an object nearby can help break down that intimidating experience into smaller, manageable steps. As they gain confidence through a few training sessions, you can gradually encourage them to target the object inside the trailer, making the whole process a lot less daunting.