

*Alice Trindle Presents:*  
**Developing  
a Willing  
Partnership**

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Alice Trindle was born on a ranch in eastern Oregon, the only daughter in a family of five brothers. She learned to ride behind the back of the saddle holding on to her brother's belt loops. In the past 15 years Alice has continued her relationship with horses, and had the opportunity to study with several true horsemen such as Tom Dorrance, Ray Hunt, Dennis Reis, and Bettina Drummond. She conducts clinics in Oregon, Washington, California, and Idaho, and offers multi-day horsemanship retreats at her ranch in eastern Oregon.  
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# Driving On The Long Lines

*Clinic #8 in a series of ten*

## Driving Your Saddle Horse to Develop Feel & Self-Carriage

I was extremely fortunate to grow up with both saddle horses and big 'ol draft horse teams. Sitting up behind the collar and hanging on to the hames as my brothers walked the draft horses back from helping to feed off the morning hay to the cows was always a great pleasure. We have pictures of birthday parties with about eleven little kids sitting from ears to tail on a good workhorse, that just seemed to know how to take care of every pair of kicking, gripping little legs, and not be bothered one bit! Today I enjoy driving our team of draft horses, now feeding elk instead of cows, but still marveling at the ease of communication down those 25-foot long lines to 2,000 pound gentle giants. What a feeling!

The last several years I have found great benefit in driving my saddle horses on long lines. For the human, driving on the long lines helps develop feel and creates a good awareness of how the horse's feet move, along with how your body energy needs to position to achieve certain movements. For the horse, driving encourages self-carriage, leadership, and can often be the beginnings of collection and engagement. The picture of a horse carrying a "soft feel", picking his posture up by pulling the tummy muscles into his back, and engaging the hindquarters to the bit and back to the drivers hand is truly breath-taking. So let's get started... Put on your walking shoes and get ready to do some of the best riding you may ever accomplish, by learning to drive your horse on the long lines.

## The Equipment

You don't have to have anything fancy to set your horse up for driving on the long lines. (Please note: In the pursuit of classical dressage and developing a horse for the high school maneuvers, the type and use of the long lines are different from the equipment I will be describing in this clinic. You might say, this is a "Cowgirl" approach to achieving some of the same results as the classical pursuit!) Here is what works for me:

- Headstall set-up with snaffle bit, curb strap, slobber straps, and a 22 ft. mecate, preferably made of the same material, and same diameter as your ring rope
- 22-ft. ring rope (Note: It is not necessary to have a ring woven into one end and a leather popper on the other. However, sometimes they both come in handy.) I use a 5/8-inch yacht-braid rope that is made by JS Halter Company. (505-625-0255 or email: [jandjsturza@surfbest.net](mailto:jandjsturza@surfbest.net))
- 8 to 10 ft. length of cord or string, even baling twine works just fine! (Note: This item will not be needed if you choose to use a surcingle, rather than creating your own.)

## Prerequisite - Before You Begin

Before we get into how to set your horse up for "Cowgirl" long line driving, there are several questions you need to ask yourself and your horse:

- Can your horse accept a rope on any part of his body, under his tail, around his flank, between his legs?
- Does your horse accept the snaffle bit softly, and can he give a "soft feel" by relaxing at the poll and allowing his face to become vertical?

- Can your horse handle movements and positioning from you where you are located behind him, and may change the eye in which he is seeing you from right to the blind spot to left eye? (Note: Roll backs in the round pen as described in Clinic #7 will help.)
- How's your health? Driving on the long lines is great exercise. If you have a heart condition or breathing concerns you may want to find a human partner to assist you, so that you can take a break or two!

### Getting Set-Up

We are going to get set-up using the “Cowgirl” method and materials. If you have a surcingle, and English tack, that's great. We are simply going to create a “Cowgirl” surcingle. With your horse saddled, start by tying the stirrups together under the horse's belly. Try to position the string so that it attaches to the inside of the stirrup, creating a ring or tunnel through which the lines are going to flow.

Next, set-up your long lines on your snaffle bit headstall, before you put it on the horse. Our goal is to have two, 22 ft. lines, with one running from each of the slobber straps. First, take your mecate rein completely off the left slobber strap. Now take your 22 ft. ring rope and thread the popper end from the outside of the slobber strap hole, inward. Continue to feed it through until you have about five-inches left on the ring end of the rope. Lay this portion of the rope up next to the slobber strap, find the ring end, and make a half hitch around your slobber strap. (Note: Depending on the size of your ring, you can just let the ring come tight against the slobber strap.)



Feeding the ring rope through the slobber strap



Tying the half-hitch around the slobber strap

Coil your two line neatly together, so that you are prepared to bridle your horse without a tangled mess...it's a lot of rope!

As you bridle, and begin to set-up the “Cowgirl” surcingle, remember that the lines have a quite a bit of additional weight. Be conscientious of how you are treating the horse's delicate mouth.

Once you have politely bridled your horse, take the left long line, and feed it through the left stirrup, neatly coil it back up, and place it on the saddle horn. Now move around the front of your horse to the right side, and accomplish the same task of feeding the line through the stirrup. You are about ready to start... find your left line from off the saddle horn, and position yourself slightly behind the right hip, with the left line in your

left hand and the right line in your right hand.



Completed “Cowgirl” surcingle set-up!

### Positioning and How to DRIVE Your Intentions

Remember the old cowboy movies where the stagecoach driver took both lines and slapped them up and down with a huge “HAYAAAAA” to get the horses to go forward. Well, this is NOT like that! Remember our work-in-hand session, (Clinic #5), where we had a *supporting* rein on the outside of the horse, and an *active* rein to the inside of the bend? Driving lines need to have the same feel. The outside line, or line closets to the wall is most often supportive. You should have a feel, a caress, and a slight squeeze in this line. It does not direct the horse, but rather makes a suggestion...it supports the movement. The inside line is active and it can give direction by sending energy to where you want the horse to go. You can use the inside rein to drive the energy up and forward in kind of a “skip-a-rope” motion, like you were skipping a stone sideways across the water. The inside rein does have a feel on it, but gives and releases the pressure when the horse responds to the request, while the outside, support line most often maintains a caress.

I hold the lines most of the time in same way that I would hold my reins: Thumb up, little finger down, with the line running out the bottom, between my ring finger and little finger, towards the horse's mouth. Old time drivers of draft horses, such as my 91 year-old father, hold the lines over the top of their pointer finger. This may work well for you at certain times, but I like to be conditioning my muscle memories for riding postures whenever possible. Play around with hand positioning, and I think you will understand how each position uses a different set of muscles, and may cause a variety of braces in your body.

As you prepare to drive your horse forward, remember your “Horseman's Protocol” (refer to previous Clinics). It is even more important on the ground than in the saddle! Take a deep breath, and see your horse moving forward to the right, since you are at his right hip. Now wake-up your right line, with a little sideways skip of your rope, send energy forward and towards your horse's right hip and flank. Or have a human partner assist you with the whip to first motivate for forward momentum. In a more classical pursuit you never spank with the line, but rather use the whip to assist. It may take a bit for

him to understand this new positioning and feel, but soon he will be traveling out in front of you, as you walk along slightly to the inside of his right hip. Don't get too close, but equally so, don't get out at the very ends of your 22-ft. lines!

As you progress forward, see yourself as the cart, or sitting on the cart, and the horse pulling you. Lean back slightly, bend your elbows a bit, and think about bringing your belly to your hands. Drive the horse forward with your intentions and active line. Try not to push the lines, causing huge scoops in the lines between your hands and the horse's mouth. Equally, try not to find yourself water skiing, with straight arms. Believe me, if your horse takes off while you are in this posture, you are in for a ride. The idea is to invite the horse to PUSH from his hindquarters, lifting his belly, rounding his back, and you capturing the energy, this "FEEL", back in your hands.



The horse is moving forward, carrying a nice posture, and the driver has a "feel" on the lines, slightly tipping the inside eye to the inside of the arena.

### Specific Maneuvers and Exercises

Pretty much all of the riding maneuvers and patterns you may want to accomplish in the saddle are achievable on the long lines. In fact, in many cases I prefer to teach the maneuver on the ground, with long lines first, and then transfer the feeling for both horse and rider easily to the saddle.

Start with the basics:

- Forward on a circle
- Change of direction towards the center of the arena
- Change of direction towards the wall, or roll back
- Back up straight, to backing up on a circle
- Leg yield – forward and sideways on the diagonal
- Side pass – nose to the wall, sideways at a 45 degree angle to the wall, moving away from the bend
- Shoulder-in
- Haunches-in and Half-pass

With each of these maneuvers you will most likely explore some frustration until you discover the positioning you need to have in order to send your energy and convey to the horse your intentions. It's OK to be frustrated! Hang in there, or seek some helpful advice from someone who has driven on long lines a bunch.

The rewards to long line driving your horse are truly immense. You will develop a much better feel for the horse through your reins, and begin to understand the importance of the outside – support rein. You will see how the feet move,

how rhythm, timing, & balance effect movement. You will gain a greater understanding of positioning of your energy and posture to affect the movement outcome. Your horse will begin to develop self-carriage and self-impulsion, while carrying a beautiful posture. He will also take on self-confidence, and be looking for your leadership in a 51 to 49% partnership.

**WARNING:** Driving on long lines is addictive! The results, the fun, and the exercise are well worth the effort.



Advancing maneuvers include leg yield and half-pass postures

*Alice Trindle offers a number of clinics that include driving on long lines as an activity. Give T&T Horsemanship a call today to find out more about a clinic or retreat in your area. TNT*