



Hands-On Horseman

Training, Gear, Health & Management Tips for Today's Horseman

● HOW-TO

Sensible Saddling

Use these 10 steps to ensure safer and more efficient saddling.

Story by PETER CAMPBELL

Photography by A.J. MANGUM



1 Be sure your horse is brushed so there will be no dirt or debris between your tack and your horse, then position your saddle pad. As you work, you might want to keep the lead rope draped over your left elbow, allowing you more direct control of the horse. (I prefer to tuck the lead rope in my belt so the slack doesn't drag on the ground. If you do this, be sure the rope can easily pull free of your belt in the event your horse pulls back suddenly.)



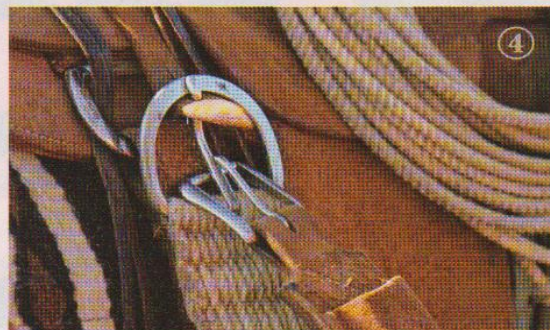
2 As you approach the horse with your saddle, hold the saddle under your right arm, gripping it by the outside edge of the cantle. Just before you're ready to swing the saddle atop your horse, grip the fork with your left hand, giving you a two-handed hold on the saddle. Swing the saddle into place in one fluid motion. Try to handle the saddle so that the off-side stirrup doesn't bump the horse's belly as the saddle goes into place.

3 From your spot on the near side, tip the horse's nose toward you and step around his front end to his off side. Tipping his nose toward you helps ensure the horse sees and comprehends your movements. Once you're on the off side, be sure your horse's head is no longer tipped to the near side. (You want him aware of what you're doing on his off side.)

4 From the off side, check that the cinch and strings are not trapped beneath the saddle, then lower your front and back cinches. (I prefer to keep my cinches buckled in a keeper, as shown here, so they need to be "let down" when I saddle a horse.) When you let down the cinches, do so gently, so that they don't bump the horse's legs.

5 From the off side, tip the horse's nose toward you, then step around the horse's front end to return to the near side. Again, once you're in position, make sure his head is no longer tipped away.

6 Lift the near-side stirrup, laying it across the saddle seat, and undo your latigo. (I keep the latigo tied in a knot, as pictured, for easy takedown.)

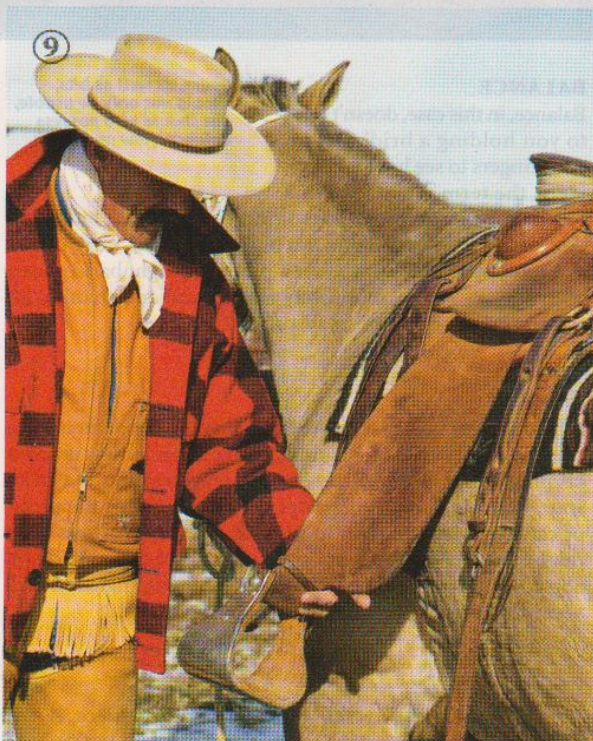


7 With your left hand, reach for the cinch and bring it under the horse, keeping the cinch flush with the horse's belly. With your right hand, feed the end of the latigo into the cinch buckle.

8 Cinch up, running the latigo back to the D ring, then back to the cinch buckle. Secure the cinch with the buckle.

9 When you let the left stirrup back down, don't let it bump the horse's belly. You can bring the stirrup down as fast as you want, as long as you make sure you catch it with your left hand before it hits the horse, potentially spooking him.

10 With your left hand, reach for the back cinch and buckle it. Keep the back cinch flush, but not tight, against the horse's belly.



PETER CAMPBELL is a veteran horsemanship clinician. Learn more about him and his 2011 clinic schedule at petercampbellhorsemanship.com.