

Draw Reins How to use them

Holly Grayton

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This is a fairly controversial topic. Often I hear people speak with loathing about the use of draw reins, and that they are adamantly against ever using them. Now, I completely agree that draw reins are a tool that should be handled with care and should not be over-used, however there is certainly a time and a place where they are very useful and can help you get through some tough parts of training with your horse.

Equine Canada's rules state that only a professional can compete while using draw reins, and only up to 1.15m in height. This rule seems like a good guideline for home use as well. If you are an amateur considering using draw reins, please consult your trainer before you give them a try. Draw reins can, when used incorrectly, confine a horse to the point of claustrophobia which can lead to a big wreck, so do ask your trainer first!

To safely use draw reins, first ensure they are on properly:

First lay the reins evenly across the neck and feed the ends from the outside to the inside of the bit ring (beware that you can only use draw reins with a bit that has large enough space for the draw rein to move freely through the ring). Once through the rings of the bit you can connect the snaps to a multitude of locations.



The most common place to attach the snaps is to the middle of the girth, on the horse's belly. If you are jumping you may still attach them to the middle of the girth, but first run them under a breastplate to allow for horses to raise their knees without the risk of catching a leg in them.

In some cases, people may choose to connect the ends to the side of the girth, right under the saddle flap. This changes the way the draw reins will act on the bit, offering more control side-to-

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side, and not so much in a downward direction. This setting is inherently safer to jump, as the draw reins should not be in the way of the horse's knees over a jump.

In any case, when you use draw reins you should be sure not to have them too tight or too loose. Too tight can cause horses to feel too confined, and if they do, you may not be able to release them fast enough should they choose to rear or back up unexpectedly. A horse can also lean on them for balance and then trip too easily. If in the opposite case, they are too loose, the horse could trip on the slack in the reins, especially when jumping.

The proper use of a draw rein could be considered similar to an adjustable standing martingale that acts on the bit, in the sense that they will create a limitation for how high a horse can raise its head. They can also help with hotter horses or younger horses that don't yet know enough about a consistent contact.





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Draw reins can be a source of comfort for some horses through the stability and limitations. Draw reins can also help to teach a horse to reach over his back and trust in a consistent hand. Because of the downward pull from even a loose draw rein, this can help a horse to stretch. Of course if the reins become too taut the horse could be forced into a downhill, on-the-forehand balance, so be cautious of this possible side effect. If you have mirrors in your indoor arena, and as we are still riding inside a little bit this time of year, take advantage of the visual aid to develop your feel while being able to check out the real thing.

I can't stress enough that you should have a professional present while you are learning to use draw reins and be very aware of your horse's comfort level with them. Draw reins can be a powerful tool to have in your training bag – as with all power tools take care and use wisely!