

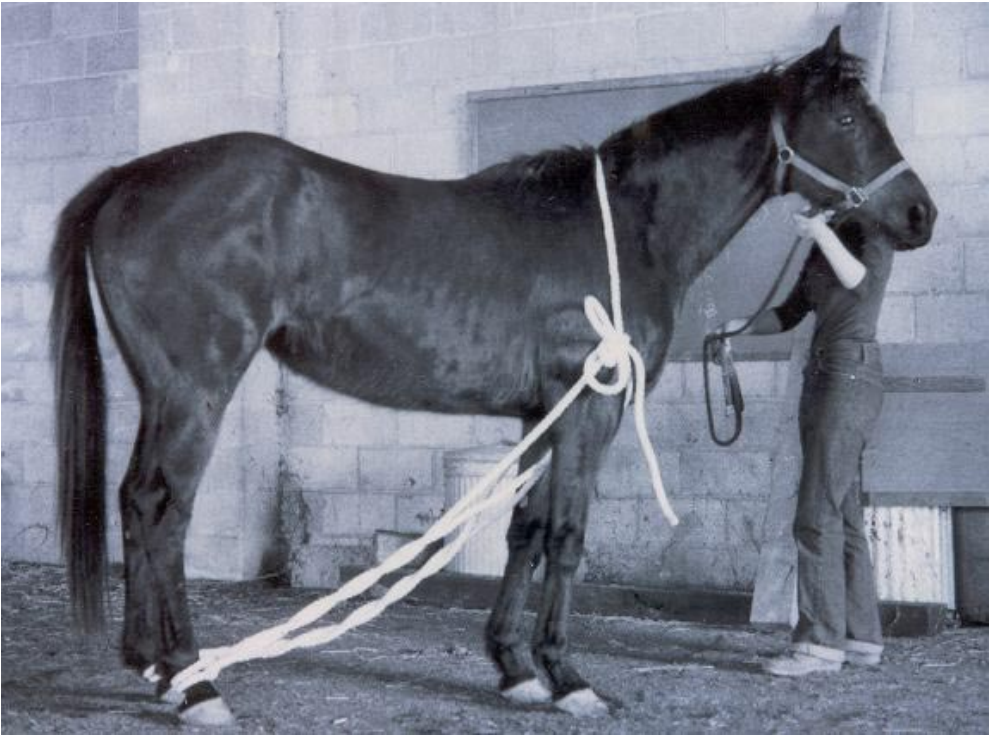
HAND BREEDING THE STALLION

Hand breeding stallions is one of the most potentially dangerous endeavors associated with the care and raising of horses. The unpredictable nature of these thousand pound athletes can create some hair-raising situations. I have seen nice horses turn into vicious stallions loathing the smell of humans during courting rituals; stallions driven to rage by the presentation of an unwanted mate; and stallions that lull their handlers to sleep by their exemplary behavior only to attack at an opportune moment.

Therefore, my first rule in the breeding shed is safety. All procedures should provide maximum safety for the stallion, for the mare, and most importantly, for the handlers. Therefore, 99.9 percent of the time, I insist on placing a double scotch hobble on the mare. Ideally, this will protect the stallion and the stallion handler from receiving debilitating blows. While the goal of the breeding shed personnel is to bring the stallion to a mare that is ready to receive him, you can't always be sure that she will agree with your opinion. And if the mare doesn't agree with you, it is hard to imagine (unless you have seen it) the uproar an uncooperative mare can make even with hobbles on.

My early days at Texas A&M exposed me to a few experiences with fresh-off-the-range maidens-mares that weren't halter broken and had little intention of taking the easy way out when it came to dealing with man. The worst mare I ever had in the breeding shed was a Thoroughbred who came in to be bred to Judgar Ruler, a son of Nasrullah, one the greatest Thoroughbreds of this century.

In spite of the stud's fancy credentials, this mare became terrified as the stallion came into view. She proceeded to throw a walleyed fit, busting out of the hobbles, and driving three people out of the breeding room before clearing a 5 foot gate to escape to the backside of a 50 acre field. Although such instances are rare, it is impossible to predict the behavior of a mare arriving for the first time at your breeding shed. This is why I demand an alert attitude from everyone present.



Restrained in double scotch hobbles, a mare cannot deliver a debilitating blow to the stallion.

Still, in spite of the odd mare, the creator of most of the problems in the breeding shed is the stallion himself. Because of this, I am a firm believer in discipline and control during the breeding routine. I expect my stallions to enter

the presence of a mare in an orderly manner. Calling, prancing, and dancing is acceptable only as long as the stallion keeps one eye on me and does not take the slack out of the shank.

I believe that hand-breeding routines should closely mimic nature. The stallion should first approach the mare's head. Sniffing, snorting, screaming, and striking the ground are to be expected, but upon command the stallion should back away. The handler should then direct the stallion to approach the mare at her shoulder. More sniffing, licking, and nipping will occur as the stallion works his way to the hindquarters of the mare.

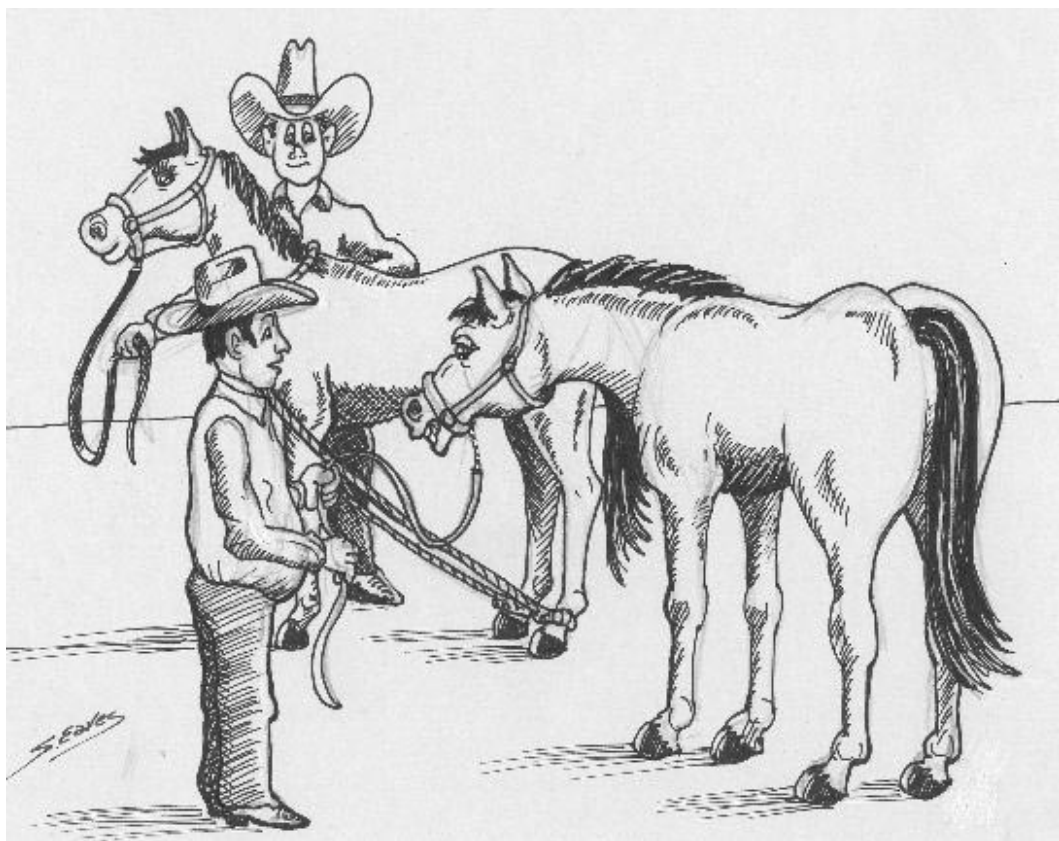
During this entire procedure, the stud is expected to back away from the mare upon the direction of the handler and should never be allowed to take advantage of the restrained mare. At the completion of the teasing routine, the stallion is allowed to approach the mare from the rear and a cue to mount is given.

How do you get a stallion to behave like this? Start him young. First-time breeders are easier to train. To make the job easier, it would be nice to let a group of old pasture-bred mares teach the impetuous youngster some breeding manners. Pasture breeding will teach even the most overzealous macho stud not to take mares for granted. There is a natural code of behavior for mating and most mares can get quite angry if they are not treated accordingly. They expect the stallion to declare his intentions and tease her until she hits a breeding stance. Without the proper social amenities, a stallion is likely to be fired upon and rejection will continue until he learns to court the mare according to her

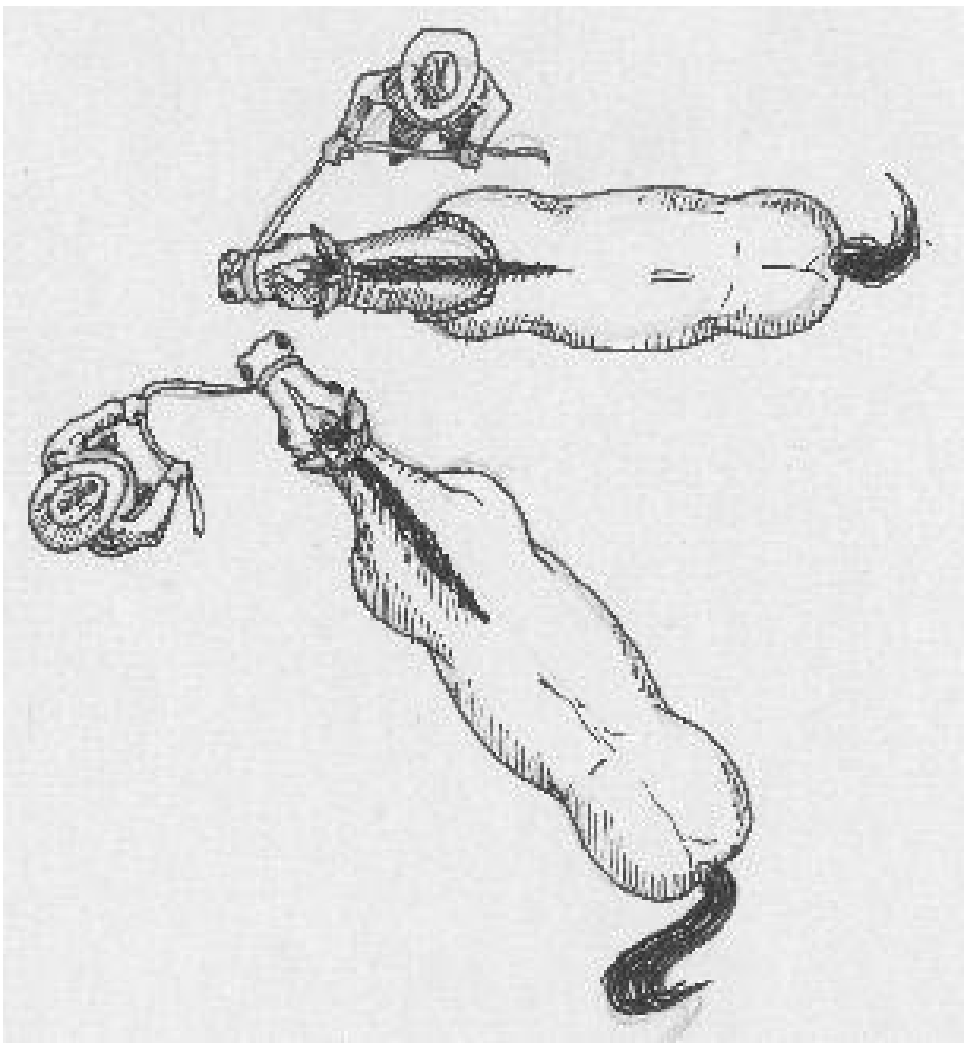
wishes.

Unfortunately, most stallion owners cannot afford to take advantage of this method for starting the young breeding horse. With the high cost of quality breeding stock, the inherent risk of permanent damage to the inexperienced stallion is too great. So the lessons designed by nature to be taught by the females of the herd fall solely into the hands of the stallion manager. He is the individual who must provide the rejection or punishment that the mare normally does when a rowdy youngster steps out of line.

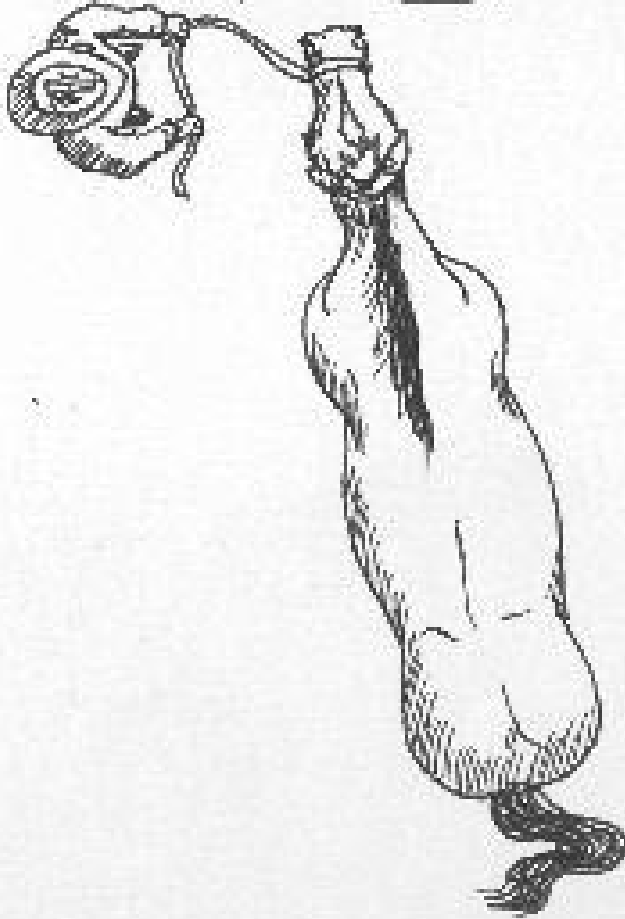
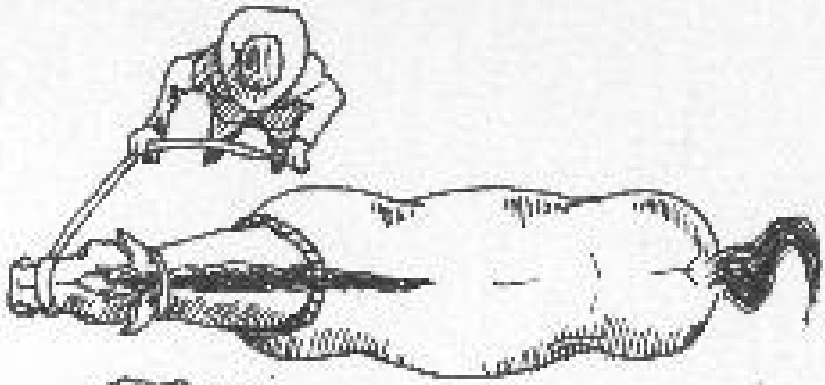
Fortunately, the young breeding stallion's genetic program sets him up for reprogramming, but it takes force-the kind and amount of force a mare would use. The task is not easy or for the faint-hearted, but done right, it won't take too many sessions to convince the young horse that man is not his enemy trying to steal his mare. Instead, he will quickly figure out that responding to the direction of his handler will enable him to satisfy his biological urge to breed. A camaraderie soon develops as man and horse begin to work as a team.



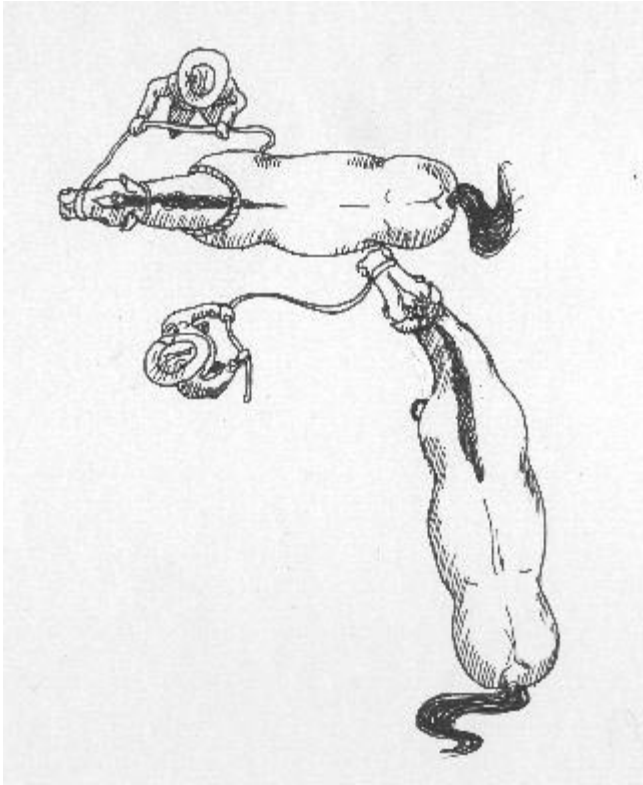
The positions of the mare and her handler and the stallion and his handler are very important for reasons of both safety and control.



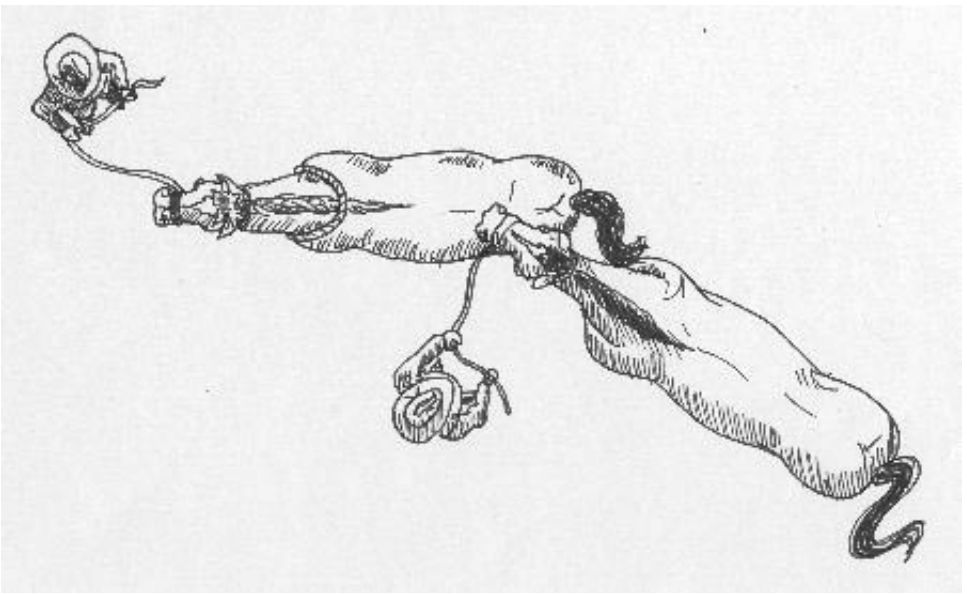
The stallion should be led at an angle toward the mares head. Upon the exchanging of breath, many stallions strike out, so it is important that both handlers be positioned out of his strike zone.



To move the stallion from the head to the shoulder, back him away from the mare and then walk him back up to the mare at her shoulder.



If all goes smoothly, the stallion is backed off again and led to the flank position. It is at this point that most stallions become even more excited and, if the mare is in good standing heat, she will start to lean toward the horse. The stallion must be kept under control and must not mount the mare prematurely.



For the third and last time, the stallion is backed away from the mare and returned at a slight angle to her hindquarters. After receiving a cue to mount (such as laying the lead shank over the mare's hip), the stallion rears and mounts over her hip.

Before attempting this challenge, be sure to invest in some good equipment, which includes a stout halter and a lead shank with a two-foot piece of chain attached to a snap. While the halter may be either nylon or leather, great consideration should be paid to construction of the lead shank. I have a strong preference for leather because it doesn't burn your hand the way nylon and cotton will when a stallion tries to tear away.

However, the chain and the snap are the most important part of this basic equipment. Placement of the chain through the halter and the snap connection of the lead shank to the halter are the primary means of control; the chain and snap need to be stout – bull stout.

Another decision that needs to be made before the stallion is caught is how the chain should be run through the halter. Some handlers, especially on Thoroughbred farms, use the chain over the nose. I am not particularly fond of this because sometimes it's necessary to jerk the lead line pretty hard to control the horse in a bad situation. A chain over the nose can cut him, leaving scars and dents for everyone to see.

Other handlers like to put the chain through the mouth. When you need to use an arm, you are going to cut the corners of the horse's mouth, again leaving visible scars and damage. Chains are also placed across the gums, right above



Obtaining control by running the chain through the stallion's mouth can also cause damage to the corners of his cheeks.

the top teeth, to achieve a war bridle effect. This is a very sensitive area and if you set a hand to that chain, I'll guarantee the horse will feel it.

I prefer to place the chain under the chin. Pressure generated there will get the job done and cause less permanent scarring. I have used the chain in the other positions, too, and probably will again, but I don't use them on any horse as a matter of practice. I try to use the least amount of restraint necessary to get the job done. Once the horse learns what's expected in the way of manners, there is

very little to do except to let nature take its course.



Placing the chain across the gums right above the teeth can produce a great deal of pain and should only be used when absolutely necessary.

The final preparation step before the training session begins is to arm yourself with the correct attitude. A stallion's behavior will be affected by the way that you feel about his inherent nature. A stallion treated as if he is a man-eating tiger will display more of the characteristics you fear, because your attitude will be expressed in the way that you handle him. Someone afraid of a stallion tends to snatch, bang, and yell at him for every little thing. This behavior is likely to make the stallion mad and therefore more aggressive and harder to handle.

A more productive attitude for handling stallions is to replace apprehension with a healthy respect for their power along with the confidence that you can deal with any situation that may come up. Combine this with the rules for coexistence and a clear-cut image of the breeding regimen and you have the foundation for developing a well-mannered breeding stallion.

Finally, don't underestimate the importance of the time spent with breeding stallions. Too often, because of the high cost of these horses, they get isolated in solitary padded-cell situations. Their privileged treatment invites a glass menagerie mentality: Look but don't touch. As a result, these stallions tend to develop more psychological problems, which lead to undesirable behaviors. The more time a stallion spends on the lead shank, being led to and from his paddock, being groomed, etc., during the entire year, the easier he is going to be during the breeding season.

I remember talking to a stallion manager late one summer night in Oklahoma, who told me, "Right now these stallions are not handling well, but you come back here in April or May, when we are in the middle of breeding season,

and they will be handling just like geldings. When we're teasing and breeding, that stallion is on a shank in my hand from the time I finish my second cup of coffee in the morning until well after dark. After a few days with that type of association, we develop quite a rapport!"

Truer words were never spoken, but the idea of having a stallion on the end of your lead shank for eight to ten hours a day would be both a mentally and a physically draining prospect for many. Imagine having to maintain control over a poorly trained stallion who rears, bites, or strikes out. The stress would soon take its toll.

So my last suggestion before attempting to train a breeding stallion is to have a plan of action to deal with potentially dangerous situations like biting, rearing, and striking.

Biting is probably the most common affliction of stallions. Prone to the use of their mouths by virtue of their sex, stallions use their teeth to fight and their mouths to tease. From the time they are little colts, they nip and nibble at each other and you if you will let them. By stopping this early, you will save yourself and others from this cute little trick that will turn into a painful, savage habit by the time these colts are ready for the breeding shed.

Acquiring an older stallion that already has this dangerous habit demands an even more cautious approach. At one time, I had a stallion that had a really bad habit of biting, not just me but anything that happened to be around. Coupled with this, he had a rotten attitude about the mares he was to breed. He thought that all mares were supposed to stand perfectly still. If one moved, it irritated him

terribly and he would reach over and bite her on the neck until she froze in place.

A stallion like this can really hurt a mare, and a leather neck pad should be available to prevent excessive damage. On this particular horse though, I used a noseband made from a piece of wire. Every time he tried to open his mouth, the wire would apply pressure on his muzzle and limit his ability to bite. There are also muzzles that can be attached to the halter, but both of these methods are gimmicks and serve to control the habit-not necessarily to correct it.



Biting can be difficult to eliminate in the older stallion. For a savage biter, the cage muzzle may be the answer.

It is always better to fix a bad habit, but sometimes the vice is not serious enough to be worth the risk or commitment required to change it. This may be especially true of an older horse that has spent most of his breeding life behaving in a certain manner.

I ran into an eighteen-year-old stallion who tried to bite every time you went to put on the halter. The fellow who had been working with this horse solved the problem by leaving the halter on-a viable solution, except that I have never liked leaving a halter on a horse in a stall. To keep my ego from being damaged, I was determined to come up with a way to halter him without getting bitten. At first I tried punishment and reward, but on a horse who had been practicing this habit for fifteen years, it would have taken a lot of punishment to make an impression. It just was not worth it. I decided to hook my thumb under his jaw as I went to put on the halter. When he tried to reach around, I could push his head up with my hand and foil his attempt to nip me on his first try. The nice thing was that once he had tried, this stallion was satisfied. Haltering could then proceed without further ado.

Pawing is another behavior stallions exhibit. They don't have to learn this, and a little can be tolerated because it is a natural response when approaching a mare. However, there are times when a stallion may get up on his hind legs and take a little punch at you. Usually he will rear up and paw like he is annoyed with you for being there. As I mentioned, some horses just feel that people don't belong in the breeding shed.

There are many things to do in this situation, but the one that works the

best for me is to sidestep as he rears and give him a good boot in the stomach. This will bring him back down to the ground. Rearing can put a stallion in a vulnerable position, so be ready to turn his threat to your advantage.

Bolting and charging at, around, or past you are all behaviors that show a lack of respect. Once you get the stallion's attention, he must realize that you deserve respect by reason of whatever force is necessary and your attitude toward him. Remember! Never take your eyes off the stallion. You have got to be ready at all times!

Excerpt from The Stallion: A Guide for Breeding and Handling by Dr. Jim McCall