

2 *Most important team member: the horse*

Your vaulting team, and club, such as it may be, will consist of the following partners:

- the vaulting horse
- the vaulting children
- the lunger
- the trainer
- the vaulters' parents, whose support you need

When vaulting, the horse is your most essential partner – no horse, no vaults! It is never too early for the vaulters to understand this! So there must be interaction in the consideration between the humans and the animal.

Refer to the next chapter if you have to train an inexperienced horse for vaulting. It makes sense that it takes quite a while for a horse to understand *what* those people are doing up there! With *good* training it takes approximately one to two years to get the horse to be as balanced, understanding, calm and reliable as you wish him to be. So have patience.

Please don't choose a twenty-five year-old horse for competitive vaulting, because he is 'patient and good natured'. A vaulting horse must be strong and healthy, and should be able to get through a vaulting session without working up a profuse sweat. In competitive vaulting and in most shows, a horse must be able to canter for about fifteen minutes. This corresponds to a distance of approximately 7 km! Never forget that a vaulting horse carries double or triple load (up to 160 kg) *and* endures weight shifts which are making the canter harder work than in riding, because he has to counterbalance all the time.

For national competitions a horse must be at least five, international, six years old. Don't use a horse which is not fully grown. Above all, train him with patience: it always pays off!

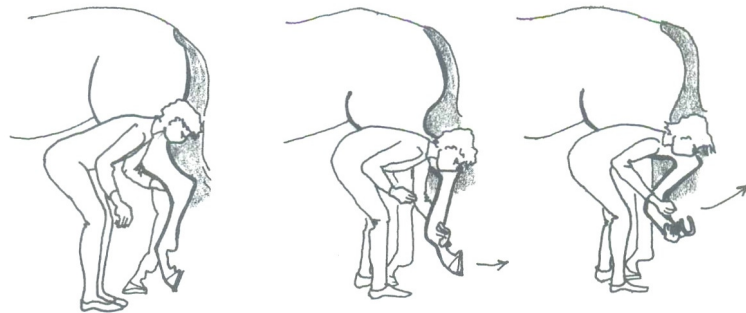
Don't use your horse for vaulting only. Give him plenty of other exercise, because vaulting is a very one-sided stress for the horse. The horse should frequently be lunged on both leads (without vaulter), should have basic training in dressage (including cavaletti work) and be ridden often in the countryside, if at all possible. This will greatly improve strength and stamina. (You can find more information on how to train your horse in the Rule Book for Vaulting.)

Vaulting children should be introduced to the horse in two ways: first of all the horse will be their friend. This means that the trainer will try to eliminate the fears that might exist in a beginner's little heart: that horse is *so* big seen from down there! But at the same time even a five-year-old *must* understand that s/he can not expect that horse to be a friend if it is not treated as one. And they must understand that a horse is intellectually inferior to them (although that is sometimes hard to see!) and therefore they have the *obligation* to care for it. If a child is too good to dirty his/her hands for the horse, that child does not deserve to vault. Make this quite clear to the parents, before a new vaulter enters your team.

Being that horse's friend should not manifest itself only in stuffing his mouth full of sugar cubes. On the contrary: in my opinion it is much more important to brush him, speak to him, find the spots where he loves to be scratched. The grooming aspect cannot be overemphasized! Treats, however, should mainly be given when earned.

Every child must take part in the grooming, taking turns and doing this job in twos or threes together. If some of your five-year-olds are afraid to clean out the horse's hooves, don't let them skip it. Also don't stand aside and force them to do it, although they are afraid. Do it *with* them, help their hands, explain how to stand and keep their faces away from a potential

kick, and *explain* why it is important to take such good care of those feet. If the horse pulls away his leg, *explain* why he did that at this moment. If you don't, a frightened child will always assume the horse wants to kick him – and never trust that beast. Demonstrate the correct position to kneel in, when bandaging the horse's legs. Even if the horse loves the children, he can still get spooked by something and kick. Don't allow the children under the horse's belly. It is not necessary to show off the trust like this. Always emphasize safety.



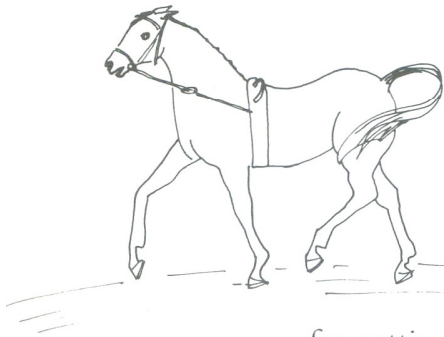
Correct way to pick up a hind foot

Make sure (and check before each vaulting session) that the equipment is correctly in place and fastened. Let the children check each time under your eyes that the buckles of the surcingle will not rub behind the legs. Consideration of that horse must become a natural impulse with your vaulters, no matter how young they are. If there are sore spots, show the children how to take care of them and make *them* do it. They will be proud of their knowledge and proud of being so important to such a big animal.

If a vaulting horse does not show it recognizes the vaulters after half a year, your team is doing something wrong. The children must understand that if they 'don't have time' to brush the horse before vaulting and cool him out and brush again after, they should take to bike racing instead. A bicycle can be parked, and rust removed after time of disuse. A horse is not a machine.

The grooming before and after are *part* of the vaulting lesson, just as the warm-up for the children is. Tell the parents to allow at least two and a half hours for the whole session, including the care of the horse and warm-up gymnastic for the children.

The children should get an understanding of the horse's way of thinking and learn to understand his body language. This is especially important for children who do not ride at the same time. What does it mean, when the horse starts swishing his tail like that? (Point out the reason for his nervousness or anger.)



Why does he throw its head around today? (flies?) Why did he buck? (You stepped down hard right into his kidneys, it hurts!) Children are egotistic beings, and often too spoiled to be able to think of someone else's troubles — with the horse they have to learn just this!

Don't *ever* allow a child to take out his anger or frustration about a badly executed exercise on the horse. Explain how confused that horse must be for getting punished (kicked, yelled at) for something he did not do. (Children *do* understand that sentiment!) Make them leave the training session until they have cooled down; if angry, they will only make the horse nervous. Always make the vaulters say 'sorry' to the horse and pat him, after coming down hard on his back or stepping into the kidneys. This will heighten their awareness of the horse's feelings and make consideration of the horse an integral part of your training sessions.