

Passing Through a Gate While Mounted

By Sue De Laurentis and Allen Pogue, *Imagine A Horse*, 2015

So you're out riding and come upon an unexpected gate. Do you hop off and then hope to get back on? Seriously, opening a gate while mounted is easier than you would think.

Opening a gate while mounted makes trail riding easier and helps to perfect your horse's physical dexterity and finesse. Your horse should already know how to side pass a few steps each direction and the halt, take a step or two forward and also a few steps back. You'll teach each tiny segment as an individual move.

For the best control, the rider should open and close the gate without the horse touching it. If you were in a competitive trail class, you would be required to keep your hand on the gate and the horse should not touch it with his nose or you would be disqualified.

So here are the tools you will need

Your regular riding tack

A gate that is not too short to reach while mounted

Treat pouch and your horse's favorite flavor of treat; We prefer Manna Pro's Bite-Size Nuggets or Start To Finish Horse Treats

In teaching, I vary the steps and giving the treat so he is obedient to each step separately before I put them all together. This keeps him engaged and accurate. If he gets in a hurry, go back to the beginning and calm his anxiety.

In the training phase, I'll separate each move with a halt. You can treat for position at any of the halt points.

Ride alongside the gate and halt. Ask for just a step or two to the side so you can reach down and touch the gate latch.

This is a crucial halt position. You don't have to reach down and unlatch the gate. Just having your horse be willing to stand quietly is a big step. Over a few repetitions he will begin to understand that he is to halt at the gate and that's all that's required.

In following sessions, you can acclimate him slowly as you reach a little farther toward the gate latch. Opening a gate while mounted is a series of many tiny and incremental moves and should be taught as such. There should be no hurry.

Take a side step or two and halt. At this point, I usually mix up the steps I ask for. One side-pass, halt. A step forward, several back and so forth. We don't want him to anticipate the separate steps.

Work progressively so he will execute any of the tiny steps as you ask him before you take a side step as you are actually holding the gate. Holding it will be taught in a progression also.

When you feel you can accurately get any or all of the steps I've described so far, go ahead and try to put them all into sequence. It's ok to give a food treat at any of these small steps but vary the treat sequence.

When you can unlatch the gate, take a couple of steps forward as he bends his body around the gate. If he's going slowly, go ahead and keep your hand on it. It's ok in the training to let go of the gate at any time, especially if you feel off balance.

After you've mastered opening the gate, you can repeat all the slow steps you took in opening it but in reverse.

Over time, treat him only upon completion. Go slowly and let him learn in incremental steps. Reward variably so he isn't anticipating the treat.

So remember:

Break the steps down into tiny increments
Add dwell time or separation time between them
If he gets in a hurry, go back a few steps
Treat for position to reward his progress