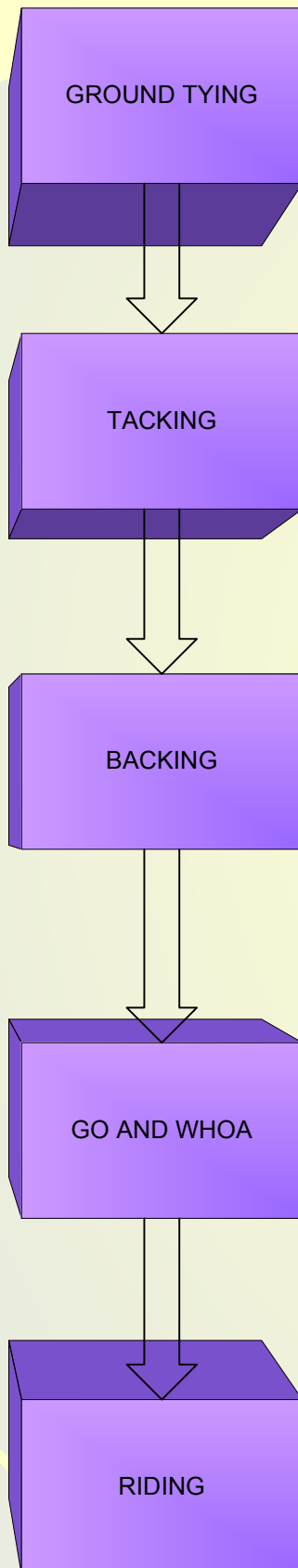


# Starting

...at Lucan Lodge

**We start horses as we mean to go on – no anxiety, no discomfort, and no gadgets. Horses are first backed in an open space, unrestrained. Each horse is treated and trained as an individual, but according to the following tried and true process.**



We begin with the starting process on the ground. To establish confidence in the horse, we introduce the ground tie. This is where we train the horse to stand still in one place without being restrained. In the ground tie, we systematically desensitize the horse to handling – we touch the feet, ears, girth, flanks, crest, wither, barrel and legs from both the left and the right. We teach the horse to be comfortable accepting human contact and pressure on all parts of his body, as well as being approached, circled and walked away from, without moving his feet or showing any signs of anxiety.



Once the horse is confident in the handlers, and can stand attentively without anxiety, we introduce the saddle cloth, saddle, girth, traces, reins, bridle and bit, as well as boots, bandages and rugs. Maintaining the ground tie, we accustom the horse to all his gear, and ensure he is confident in the way it feels, moves and sounds against him. We pay particular attention to safety and comfort – before introducing the bit it is imperative that the horse has appropriate dentition, and we fit each saddle correctly.



Once the horse accepts handling, pressure and having tack placed over him, we begin the backing stage. We start out by bouncing alongside the horse to accustom him to sudden movements. We work from a mounting block or ramp to accustom the horse to seeing its handler stand above it. Working from both sides, we put pressure on the horse's back and reach over to touch his flanks and barrel with our hands. We lean across the horse, and proceed to mount, firstly assisted by boosting and then unassisted by vaulting. We back the horse without a saddle initially, and in the head collar, to maximise contact with his body while minimising the chances of too much pressure or any discomfort.



Having established complete confidence in the horse at a ground tie in being handled, tacked and mounted, we return to the ground and work with the horse in-hand to establish cues for go and whoah. We work using a short lead, and teach forward to walk and trot, back to walk and halt, back up, turn on the haunches and turn on the forehand. Once these cues are established in the head collar, we continue the mouthing process we began in the tacking stage. With the reins we establish contact, as well as flexing and restraining aids. We undertake limited lunging in the saddle to accustom the horse to its feel.



With the ground work established, and the horse accepting the weight of a rider and the feel of the saddle and girth; and with the contact well developed and the aids understood; we put everything together and start riding. The first few rides are taken bareback, and the head collar is used in tandem with the bridle until the horse is accustomed to being ridden. Then we systematically introduce the saddle, remove the head collar, and progress through walk to trot and canter. We ride in the arena, on trails and over obstacles. Throughout the entire process, the horse remains calm and confident.

