

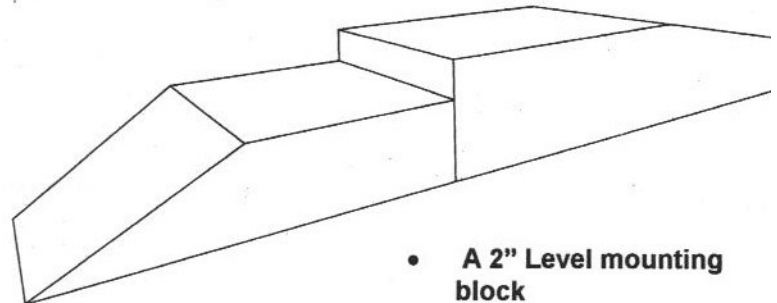
How to Build a Mounting Block

by Sonia Koczekan, CTRI

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by saying that there is no such thing as a "Universal Mounting Block" that would be perfect for each and every operating centre. Design and construction must vary according to the unique requirements and problems of individual facilities. There are, however, a number of factors that should be taken into account when building the block that would best meet the needs of your particular centre. These are:

- type/degree of disability of your particular clients; their ability
- space available for the block and ramps
- location (indoors/outdoors)
- whether you will require a wheelchair ramp or not
- what materials are available
- how much money you have to spend
- the expertise of the builders
- size of the program
- is it being built as part of the structure of the building or is it to be free-standing
- even the size of the horses used in your program may affect the design of the block you build (i.e.: height of the block.)



BUILDING MATERIALS

- There are a number of options, with wood, metal and cement being the most common. What you decide to use depends on your preference and your needs.
- Many people prefer wood to metal or cement, primarily because it is lighter to move around, but also because it is more forgiving in case of a fall.
- You can build a cheaper block by utilizing used materials, but then you have to remember that it may not stand up as well to wear and tear and, therefore, may need to be replaced sooner.
- Do use material that will be low-maintenance (like pressure treated wood which will not need to be painted).

MOVEABILITY

- If your centre can afford only one mounting block, you may want to consider making it portable in order to be able to take it to special events.
- If this is the case, you will want to make it light enough to lift, but sturdy enough to withstand damage when moving it about. This will mean paying particular attention to size, material, and design.
- Using wheels on a portable unit leads to problems as the wheel linkage is a weak point where breakage will occur most often.
- If you don't have a suitable braking system, you run into the danger of the block shifting at the most inopportune moments (safety risk).

DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION

- Never have a raised lip or cleats around the edge of the block or running up the ramp as riders and/or volunteers may well trip over them.
- Never put handrails up on the side of the ramp between the horse and sidewalker - in the event the horse spooks, the rail will prevent the sidewalker from moving with the horse and rider.
- All handrails built at right angles to the front of the block should be recessed approximately 12" to avoid having a rider's foot caught when coming into or leaving the block while mounted.
- Handrails on ramp and platform should not have any protruding pieces and should not have any sharp pointy corners.
- If your present mounting block does have sharp corners, you can cover them with rubber or carpet.
- Sharp corners and/or edges of the block and ramp should be covered in either carpet or strips of rubber to save the horse from hitting itself and as protection in case a rider falls; the same goes for railings. Strips of rubber cut from car tires are good for this purpose and old bike tires are ideal to cover metal tubing. Tennis balls make a good cover for ends of pipes.
- Any support beams, edging, etc., (metal or wood) should be cut off flush with the main structure (no protrusions).
- A 2-level block gives you more versatility (scope).

SIZE

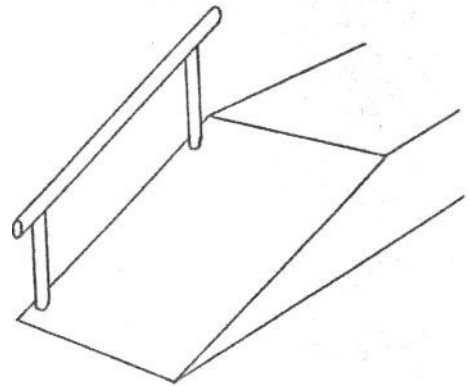
- The platform itself should be large enough to accommodate the rider, at least two helpers, and a wheelchair--and have enough room to spare so that all these people and equipment can move about safely without bumping into each other.

RAMPS

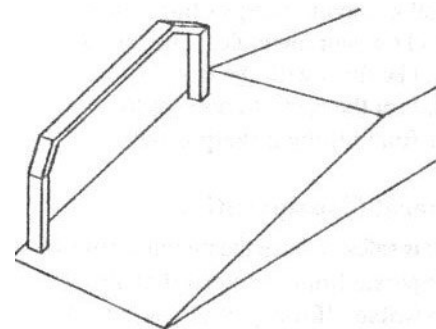
- Make sure the incline of your ramp is not so steep that persons in wheelchairs or using walkers/crutches/etc will have a hard time getting up themselves.
- You may want to have a set of stairs (possibly at the back of the block area) as well as having ramps--this would depend on your clientele.
- The ramps should be flush with the front of the block (not the back) to prevent the horse from hitting a sharp corner.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- It is safest to have the mounting block separate from the arena if at all possible. If it is part of your arena, make sure that there is some sort of barricade that will stop a loose horse from running into the blocks and possibly dumping a rider.
- Blocks should be built in such a fashion that horses can be brought in from either direction (for mounting persons with hemiplegia).
- For safety and ease of mounting, blocks should be built with a second block on the off side of the horse to bring the assistant up to the same level as the person doing the mounting.



Protrusions of any kind on handrails are dangerous



Try to avoid pointed corners on handrails - round off wherever possible

- If you can't build in hydraulics, a two-level block will give you more choice in mounting procedures.
- You may want to include a trapeze (hoist) with which a person in a wheelchair can lift themselves onto the horse.
- The mounting area should be kept clear of all clutter, including any farm equipment.
- The mounting block should be kept clear of all unnecessary people (parents, siblings, unneeded volunteers).
- If building a ramp/block from metal or cement make sure you have a non-slip surface installed on it.
- Loose or weak handrails are a safety hazard.