

TRAINING YOUR HORSE

It requires patience, careful handling and skill to develop a horse.

In training a horse for pleasure or work, your object is to obtain a friendly, obedient animal that will respond quickly and with animation. How do you get these results?

1. START THE GENTLING PROCESS EARLY

Handle the foal frequently, build his confidence, and he will lose his fear. You may want to halter-break him when he is only a couple of weeks old. He is easier to handle at this age. Many horsemen do not start the training process until weaning age, but training should start before he is many months old.

In these early weeks and months he gradually accustoms himself to handling. These daily training sessions should be short lessons, repeated often. Young foals, like young children, have a limited capacity to absorb new things. They learn by repetition, and in step-by step order. A half hour lesson every day is ample.

2. THE FIRST LESSON - HALTERING

The best classroom for the foal is a small pen away from other disturbances. There should be no outside distraction. He should be handled gently but firmly. Frequent brushing with a soft brush or hand rubbing tells him there is nothing to fear during the lessons. When he has learned to eat grain use a little to help gain his confidence.

The very first halter lesson can be done by two people crowding the foal into a corner where he is haltered. After haltering he is pulled gently and slowly to one

side. As soon as he takes a step or two steps the pull

is eased up, he is petted and given a taste of grain. The trainer then steps to the other side and pulls in the opposite direction, repeating the process.

Usually after 8 or 10 lessons the young foal has become an apt pupil.

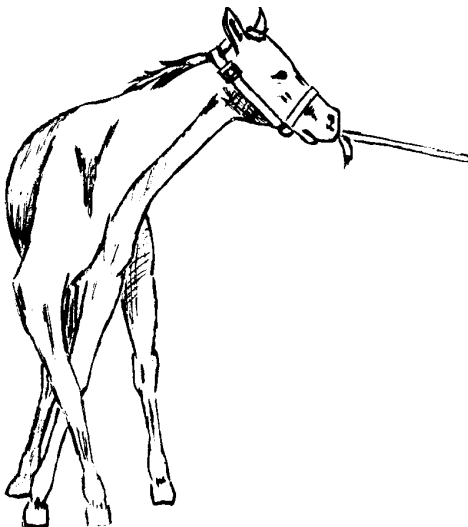
After he has been gentled to a halter, a non-skid loop is slipped over the hind quarters to help teach him to lead promptly. This step should not be taken until he handles quietly.

3. YIELDING HIS FEET

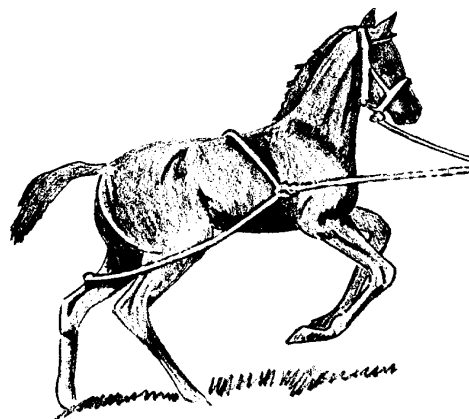
After several lessons on haltering and leading, start working with his feet. After the colt is leading, then start handling his legs. Work with him quietly, picking up the front feet first. Do it many times and, if he resists, put the foot down, pat him, quiet him down, and do it all over again. First lift up one foot, then the other foot. Next train him to yield his hind leg as if he were going to have his foot trimmed and shod. Patience and time are necessary. If he starts struggling, let the foot down and pet him. In a few minutes pick up the foot again, repeat this process until he no longer objects to yielding his feet. Some colts learn in two or three lessons, while other colts require many lessons.

4. TEACHING VOICE COMMANDS

The lessons as a foal or weanling were on leading, handling the feet, and gaining confidence. As a yearling he is ready for the next grade. Many ranchers and breeders of a large number of colts do no further training until he is two and one-half years old, but in training your own colt the yearling age is an ideal time to work him on a 25-30 ft. line in a circle (longeing) where you teach voice commands of walk, trot, canter and whoa. It combines muscle building exercises with



HALTER LESSON



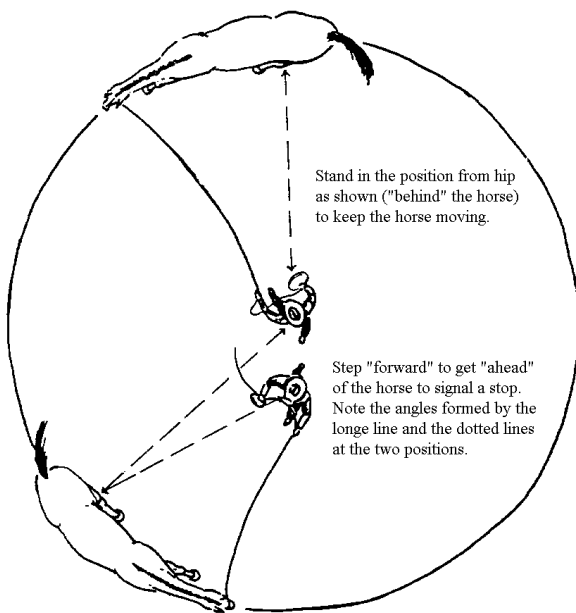
TEACHING TO LEAD

learning. Start the foal slowly in a quiet confined area. Carry a whip that he can see and begin by making the circles very short. Gradually he will work to a larger circle as you play out the line. Make him go in both a clockwise and counter-clockwise direction. Teach him to stop at the end of the line and reverse his direction. These lessons in the beginning should be for no more than ten minutes, and can gradually be lengthened to 20-30 minutes as he advances in his training.

5. PREPARATION FOR SADDLING

As the colt approaches two years of age he should be getting ready for saddling. If you have worked patiently and frequently with him he should not fear movement about him but to help him conquer any remaining fear tie him up and rub him with a soft sack. Then flip the sack over and about his body and legs. The same thing can be done with a soft cotton rope by drawing the rope back and forth across his body.

In this series of lessons, the next step is to use the saddle blanket. Lead him for awhile until he is completely quiet: then let him smell the blanket which is then slipped over his neck and withers. Then push back to its proper place. This is continued until the young horse accepts the blanket without moving. After he becomes thoroughly used to the feel of the blanket, a surcingle can be slipped on and tied moderately tight. Then lead him around a few times. This is repeated until he no longer flinches. The surcingle can then be fastened snugly around his chest.



WORKING ON THE LONGE LINE

If, in the beginning he should jump and start to fuss you can put a hand against the surcingle and pull the colt toward you and thus keep his movements in a short circle which prevents much jumping.

SADDLING AND RIDING

1. SADDLING

The young horse is ready to be taught the feel of a saddle. First, review his previous lessons. He should be quiet and gentle and understand that no harm will befall him. Slide the blanket on and off several times until he is used to it. Then slip on the saddle, cinching it only moderately tight with a single cinch. Lead him around the corral at a walk while he gets accustomed to the feel of the saddle on the back. During this leading session, lead him close to you and turn him either way. As the lessons progress, gradually tighten the cinch and continue to lead him. It would be well to saddle and unsaddle him several times to get him accustomed to the saddle before you ever try to ride. Some trainers, after leading the colt with an empty saddle, like to tie up the bridle reins and turn the yearling or 2 yr. old loose to trot and canter until accustomed to the feel and squeak of the saddle and the swinging of the stirrups. If he should happen to buck, which is rarely, then catch the colt and lead him at a walk before you turn him loose again with the reins tied up.

At this point, some trainers teach the horse to drive so he will learn responses to the bit. Cotton rope lines (0.3 inch diameter and 20 feet long) are attached to the bit and passed through the saddle stirrups for driving lessons. In the first lesson the line on the near side is left out of the stirrup. Then if the horse turns and looks at the trainer, this near line can be used as a lead to straighten the horse out. After the horse is accustomed to driving, the near line can also be passed through the stirrup. This training teaches responses to the bit and lets the horse become accustomed to having ropes touch his hind legs. Initial schooling in backing can also be given at this time.

2. RIDING

The next step is to mount the horse. Be sure that he has satisfactorily passed all his other lessons. First get your horse under control by adjusting the reins evenly with enough tension to feel the bit and hold the horse steady. Don't get the reins too tight. Hold the reins in your left hand and place this hand on the neck in front of the withers. Grasp the ridge of the neck or a lock of mane. Twist the near stirrup with your right hand and

place your left foot in the stirrup with the ball of your foot resting securely on the tread. Brace your left knee against the horse and move your right hand to grasp the saddle horn. You are now braced against the horse with two hands and the left leg forming a triangle of support. Push with your right leg and spring up and over the seat of the saddle. Swing your right foot over and into the stirrup quickly, lightly, and smoothly. Because the colt is trained to lead, it is often better to have someone lead the colt with you on his back until he gets used to the new experience. Some colts may walk the first time he is mounted without any additional assistance.

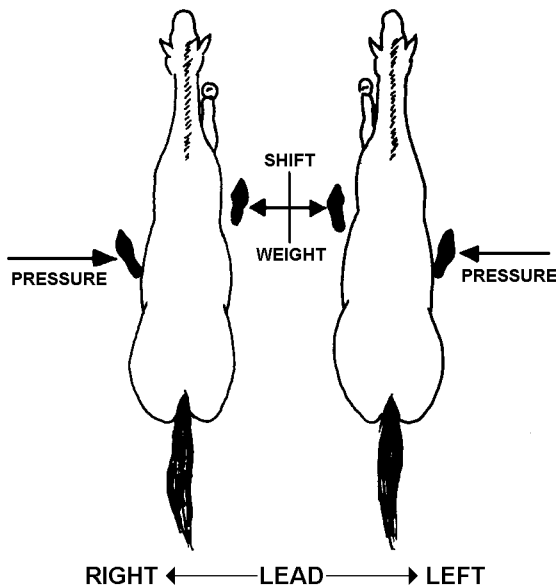
This first lesson, which is held in a corral, should be done with only a little guidance from you. When the colt learns to relax and walk well, you can turn him and make him travel back and forth.

Start your horse by squeezing your legs gradually. At first you may have to tap him with your heel, but with patience he will learn to start on pressure. A horse will learn faster with two short 20 minute lessons than one long lesson a day.

Remember he is just a youngster and tires easily. As his lessons progress, gradually start training him to trot and later on to canter a little, but take it easy.

3. NECK-REINING

To teach neck-reining you probably will need to use two hands at first, one to pull with and one to bear on his neck. This is called "leading and bearing rein". By working with him in the corral you can anticipate his turns and use the reins as a signal. As you ride up to a barrier and you know he is going to have to turn, then



use your reins to indicate to him that the rein is the signal to turn.

4. TRAIN AT SLOW WORK

A horse learns best at a slow walk, a walk or a trot, so the initial lessons should be at those gaits. Except to train him to break from a walk into a canter his other lessons should be done at the slower gaits.

Usually his training to this point is with a hackamore. However, at this stage a bridle may be placed under the hackamore until he gets used to it. Then add reins and use the two together until you can finally use the bridle alone.

It has been said "no mouth, no horse". A properly bitted horse responds to the bit and becomes a pleasure to control. Be careful and never bruise the bars or tongue of your horse. Be sure the head stall fits. These early lessons with a bit are to get him accustomed to its feel and use.

5. BACKING UP

Horses used for stock work should back well. Start this training from the ground.

Stand in front of your horse and push back on the reins, tap him with the quirt or reins on the breast and legs. Be patient and repeat often.

Then mount, squeeze your legs as you would to start him, cause him to pick up his foot, pull back lightly, making him move his foot to the rear instead of the front. These short lessons will soon train him to back up.

6. SCHOOLING AT THE WALK, TROT, and GALLOP

The young untrained horse has no difficulty handling his own weight at any gait but he does not have sufficient coordination and muscular development to carry a rider. This must be accomplished by proper training procedure which is a progressive movement from a walk to a trot and to a gallops follows:

First, walk the horse slowly in a large circle until he is fully relaxed and carrying your weight with ease.

Second, move the horse into a slow trot for a round or two and then advance to a fast trot.

Third, when the horse is moving fully at a fast trot, use the correct aids to push him into a gallop. leading in the direction you are turning. Hold him on the gallop at

this lead around the circle two or three times. If the horse does not take the correct lead or changes to the wrong lead, stop him and start over again, beginning with the walk.

Fourth, stop the horse, reverse and repeat the walk, trot and gallop in the other directions.

Fifth, forget speed and strive for perfection in these movements. Remember, 20 to 30 minutes per lesson is long enough.

This training procedure is actually an athletic exercise by which a horse is developed for further training. Until a horse can perform these movements with ease, he is not ready to be advanced in his schooling.

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