

Starting a Young Horse

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For thousands of years before men used horses for riding, the horse was a flight animal. A flight animal is any animal that would rather flee or run away from danger rather than fight. A mistake that I see many people make with young horses is that the owner tries to ride the horse at 2 and then starts asking the horse to do things that scare him/her. If you can not do something with your horse on the ground then you are probably not going to be able to do it while mounted. I have had great success with starting horses by using the procedure below. While I am not a professional by any means, the information that I am going to share with you below is revolutionary to the horse industry.

Gearing Up:

Problems occur often when the proper equipment is not used on the young horse. I prefer to use a soft lead rope-one that is easy to grasp. I like to use a nice long rope. I prefer one that is about 15 ft in length. Another key piece of the training puzzle is a properly fitted halter. A rope halter gives the trainer a lot more control because of the severity of the rope halter concept. Rope halters should be made to fit the horse exactly and the halter can be re-made or adjusted as the horse grows.

The Round Pen Is Not The Only Training Tool:

The round pen should be used only to get the horse lunging. It is a mistake to keep the horse in the round pen too long. If the horse is in the round pen too long, the horse may have trouble getting going on the trail. Once the horse is lunging to the left and to the right correctly, it is best to start working the horse in other confined areas such as a paddock or a pasture. When lunging in general at this point I would also start correcting the horse when it gets going on the wrong lead. If you let the horse get away with being on the wrong lead or wrong diagonal at this point, you will have a lot more trouble when you go to riding the horse and start asking for lead changes. If you yourself do not know what the correct lead looks like BEFORE you start training your horse, ask someone who knows to show you. When you start lunging a young horse it is easier to start with a gate such as the lope and then slow your horse into the trot and then slow your horse into the walk. Once you can slow your horse into the appropriate gates, it is then time to start working from the walk up. Also be consistent with your commands. For example, if you are going to say jog and cluck from that point on always say jog and cluck. When asking for the lope it is common to say lope and kiss to the horse. You can create your own que that you wish too but those are the most common.

You Walk Your Dog. Why Not Walk Your Horse:

This is the key to a successful quick start with most horses which about 90% of horseman do not believe in or do. Once you have built up some trust with your horse on the ground, it is time to take that trust to the next level. I have found that walking the horse around much like you would your dog makes it that much easier when you go to ride. Walking your horse down the road, across the field, or across the lake teaches your horse that you are right there with him and are on the ground. When walking a horse down the road I am not concerned if the horse is walking next to me or in front of me or even behind me. What is important is that we are moving together down the road. I have found this training incredibly valuable in exposing a horse to modern life. Since we are not living in the Wild West anymore, our horses must adapt as we have. I find that whenever an experienced rider gets on a horse and the horse reacts to anything new the rider instinctively becomes nervous and agitated with the horse and starts to react. Also, the horse is nervous with the fact that someone is riding him and then compound that with seeing a baby stroller the horse is beside himself. That is why early exposure to items such as these are valuable when assessing the horse for the first time. While walking your horse down the road, I recommend that you do not use a traditional lead rope-instead use your lunging lead rope. Then when you encounter an object that scares the horse simply lunge the horse past the object much like you would lunge your horse at home. Once the horse has successfully been lunged past the object, follow that up by walking your horse past the object several times to ensure that your horse is not scared of the object. If your horse acts curious, allow your horse to safely smell or touch the object.

My Space, Not Yours Game

At this point of the training it is time to play some games with your horse, such as the Your Space game which uses body language or a squirt gun to define your space and does not let your horse enter your space without your permission. An average horse catches on to the idea in three to four times if it is not already used to walking over people. A smart horse usually grasps the idea in one or two times, particularly if it is a sensitive horse. A slightly retarded horse will act offended and clearly not understand what you are asking. It may take several sessions before a horse with a learning disability understands the concept of my space your space. Now that you know what kind of intelligence level you are working with you can start the next part of the training according to your horse's needs.

The Outfit Is Everything

As you go to saddle the horse for the first time a mistake that I see people make is to saddle slow and cautiously like that are waiting for their horse to explode or react to being saddled. If you walk to your horses in the stall or in the round pen with confidence and show the horse the pad allow him to smell it and then throw it on his back and then remove it so that the horse finds that there is always relief at the end, the horse will relax and accept being saddled. Once you have worked through any issues with the pad do the same with the saddle. Once the horse is saddled, walk your horse around with the saddle on so that he can get use to the strips and fenders hitting his body. If you are going to ride your horse with a breast collar or a flank strap do so immediately when training, do not wait to add this equipment later. It is important, to walk your horse with a short lead so that you can control the horse if he reacts. Once you feel confident with your horse's behavior it is time to try to lung your horse with the saddle on. It is also important to lunge your horse to the left and to the right; you should not just lunge the horse one direction. Lunging should be done in both directions so to work both sides of the horse's brain.

The Hot Potato Approach

When you go to mount your horse it should be done in a way that shows the horse that if he does not react the pressure will be taken away. I do not recommend doing this the same time that you saddle the horse for the first time. Start by attempting to place a foot in the stirrup and then place all your weight in the saddle. Hold the position for 5 seconds and then dismount and praise him. Next do this a few more times. Once your horse is comfortable with this, increase the amount of time you hold on the horse before you dismount. If your horse seems comfortable and is not "dancing" all over the place, it is time to take the next step which will be swinging your leg over the saddle. When you do this again do not sit there and wait for your horse to react. Swing your leg over secure it in the stirrup and then start touching your horse and praising him by rubbing his neck and his shoulders and then also touch his butt and rub even at the base of his tail.

Short Is Better Than Long

Now you are ready to ride your horse do not over do it. This is a common mistake. Set small goals that you feel are easy to achieve. For example, today I want to get my horse to walk forward without dispute, or today I want him to turn to the right, and finally today I want my horse to turn to the left. Once you have your horse going forward and turning to the right and left and stopping on command, it is then time to start working on gates. Start slow and work your speed up. Do not go on to the next speed until you and your horse have the current speed. As you increase the speed of your gate it is important to be sure that at all times you have control of your horse and your horse does not have control of you. As your horse starts to settle down, you can increase the ride time and at the same time do not be afraid to take the horse out on the road or out on the trail that you have been walking him down.

Once you have your horse going forward, stopping and turning, it is time to work on reverse. Do not just start pulling on your horses mount and tell him back. Go back to your training gear (the rope halter and lead rope) and from the ground tell him back and then swing the rope in front of him and when he takes a step back stop placing pressure on the horse and praise him. Repeat this until you can get him to back without the use of the rope. Once you can get him to back from the ground, then go ahead and try it from the mounted position.

Cowboy Up

Well above I have given you the basics for starting a young horse under saddle. While each horse is different and will progress at different speeds, it is important to be patient and understanding with your horse. Please remember horses should be fun and you should have fun training and working with your horse. If you are not, then you are doing something wrong. I hope you have enjoyed my article and look for other articles to come. If you have a specific topic you would like me to address just visit my web site and let me know www.schuetzfarms.com. Happy trails and be careful.

FUTURE ARTICLE TOPICS

Standing At Attention, it is not for everyone

Is It a Trailer Or A Box of Death?

Access your horse's health and groom in under 5 minutes.