

What will your Young Horse Know and Do after time with us?

Many years ago Robert Fulghum wrote a book entitled, "All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten". His theory was that the early education of a child is really the foundation of life skills that everything else is built upon. Regardless of your equine discipline, the foundation your colt receives will determine how well they perform, once in advanced training.

There are some basic maneuvers that we will be able to demonstrate with your horse after working with him. Whether you will be able to accomplish these things depends totally on your experience and horsemanship skills. Young horses demand a great deal of direction and support. If your horse does not feel leadership coming from you, you will not get the smooth responses you witnessed when we ride him.

It is important to know what we do with your horse so we don't only work with your young horse but we aim to get you and your horse together. We will spend time with you before you pick up your horse so that when you take this horse home to ride yourself you will be set up for success.

- We want to spend time with you not just your horse.
- We will demonstrate how the horse responds in different situations.
- When we feel the horse is safe enough, we will give you some lessons with your horse, helping the two of you get together.

The following is a realistic list of expectations for a sixty day training program for most horses and we often get these in 30 days with many of the horses we work with.

Your Young Horse Should:

- Lead and follow respectfully.
- Be able to be tied and stand tied.
- Be able to pick up all four feet well enough to be trimmed or shod.
- Readily enter and exit a horse trailer.
- Stand still to be saddled.
- Be bridle without being evasive or pulling away, accepting the bit quietly.
- Lunge both directions with smooth change of directions and transitions
- Stand still and calm for mounting.
- Be ridden at the walk, trot, and canter in both directions in a relaxed manner
- Transitions through these gaits should be fairly smooth.
- Be able to maintain gait with a steady cadence.
- Be able to stop and back up.
- Be learning to yield away from leg pressure for lateral movement.
- Be able to be ridden outside as well as inside the confines of an arena.

Allow me to stress that I am talking about the majority of horses, most of the time. I recognize that each horse is an individual and there are exceptions to every rule. Some young horses will progress faster. Others will need more time. Some horses are naturally quiet and gentle while others are sensitive and high strung. Yet there are some basic

principles that most horses should and can understand at the end of a sixty day foundation. Do not discount this essential time in their development. Build a proper foundation and it will last a lifetime!

Here are some steps we take to begin laying a foundation for your horse:

Step one: We seek to get their attention with what we call the attention game where we get the horse in a learning frame of mind.

Step two: Establish leadership in the round pen through mirroring and join up.

Step three: Dancing Partners I want the young horse stick to me like he did his mother? (I want him to move when I move, in the direction I move, at the speed I choose) Can I direct his feet on the end of a lead rope? Can I send him left and right in a twenty foot circle? Will he back away when I wiggle the lead? Can I disengage his hind quarters with his inside foot crossing over his outside foot? I need to control his feet. I must be able to direct his movement while handling him on the ground.

Step four: Desensitize; All of our body movement and all of the equipment we use can easily be seen as a threat to a horse so we must gain his trust and help him understand the difference between friendly, play, obedience, and discipline. We put our hands and equipment all over his body using rhythm until he is comfortable and accepting of anything we approach him with. Now we help him accept our body. We hop up on both sides of the young horse. We lay over his back and continue rubbing. We end up laying on the horse and eventually sitting on him and riding him bareback.

Step five: Saddling: We prepare the young horses for this experience so it produces as little trauma as possible. We will often place the lead rope around his girth, snug it up and ask the horse to move his feet. These are little things that will help him grasp the big picture. Next we rub the saddle pad all over his body as we have previously executed with our hands, rope, and body. Again, everything is administered on both sides. Next, we set the saddle on his back. This is where you need to have feel, timing, and balance. A horse might spook and your saddle can end up on the ground pretty quick. Now you have a leery horse who is convinced that he shouldn't have this thing strapped to his back. We smoothly snug up the cinches, step back and turn him loose to do his own thing. Most young horses will hump up and buck a little (or a lot) when first saddled. We don't worry about it. As long as the saddle stays on, he will soon get comfortable and ignore it. I don't pressure them at this point, but I do want them to move out through all gaits.

This article is not a comprehensive manual of everything we do, but it describes some of the steps (in very general and abbreviated terms) which we take in preparing a young horse for his first ride.

Sometimes we can accomplish all of this in thirty minutes. With other horses it might take days. This is not a speed event. Like the old horseman said, "Take the time it takes and it will take less time!" We will get there one step at a time!

RIDING:

Before mounting, we are sure the young horse is comfortable wearing the saddle and moving out through the full range of motion with it on.

We both free lunge in the round pen and also on line. Sometimes we also pony your colt off of another horse, or turn him loose in a larger pen or arena and move him around. The main thing is we want him to experience all kinds of transitions and turns multiple times before mounting.

We ride the young horses in a halter and lead initially. Then we will eventually transition into a snaffle bit. They will carry the snaffle bit for several days during ground work before we ride them in it. In the first few rides we really don't care where the horse goes and we are not trying to steer them. If the horse gets scared and starts to buck we do NOT pull back on the reins in an effort to survive the wreck. This usually scares them even more.

Before climbing all the way on, we step up half way, rub the horse on his neck and rump and then step down. We do this on several times on both sides. Next we step half way up, bend his nose around, kiss or cluck and encourage him to step his hind quarters over. He should already know this from the ground work. We want him to realize he can move his feet with a person on top.

We are big on teaching him the concept of lateral flexion before we ride and during our first rides. This will be a good "emergency brake" if things start to fall apart. We do this equally on both sides and we do it a lot.

Once in the saddle we encourage the horse to take one or two forward steps directly after moving his hindquarters out of the way. We often use a person on the ground to support the forward motion. Our goal at this stage of the game is simply forward momentum.

When people think of riding a young horse for the first time, they're biggest concern should be how to get him to move, not how to stop him. We need to start getting forward impulsion right away. In fact our goal is usually to canter the horse on the very first ride, and if not then at least by the second or third ride. This is where we use an assistant on the ground, which is why I don't start the young horses alone.

As the person on the ground is moving the colt around the pen, the rider must try to rub the horse all over and get him really comfortable with the whole experience. Remember the full range of motion concept? The quicker the horse learns to walk, trot, and lope with a person on his back, the less of a big deal it will be.

We do NOT steer and guide them too much at this early stage. We do NOT want to micromanage him because it usually creates confusion and a bad attitude in your horse. When we leave the round pen we usually have the young horse following someone on a saddle horse. Horses are natural followers. A young horse will usually "line out" when he has someone else to follow. However this technique can become a crutch if over used, so we make sure he ventures out on his own flight path before long.

One thing you will NOT see us doing is pulling back on both reins at the same time to either slow down or stop a young horse. We use one rein at a time and do a lot of bending exercises which help create suppleness and can prevent the horse from getting bracey. We are also careful to not use too much leg because a lot of squeezing and kicking can create a cranky, sullen colt with pinned back ears and a ringing tail. Rather, we will slap our leg or spank behind to encourage forward motion. The point is we create some kind of energy and then get soft the moment the horse moves forward.

Once we establish good forward then we start putting the belles and whistles on the horse, lateral moves, stopping backing etc. We don't normally ride the horses in a round pen more than 2-4 times, and we normally take them out on the trail within a week or so.

We will lay a proper foundation on your youngster. Even though \$750 per month seems expensive it will be a relatively small investment in the twenty plus year relationship you can enjoy with your equine partner.