

Starting Your Own Horse

Interested in "Starting your own horse" but not sure where to start? In this our second article of this series, we will be taking you to the round pen. This is the safest place to start working a green horse in order to establish the initial stages of respect and trust.

The name of this game is communication.

Horses communicate primarily via body language. In order to maximize our efforts, it is very important to understand the horse's body language and then make sure that we respond with our body language in a very clear, deliberate and appropriate way that the horse understands. We will respond to our horse's actions emulating how horses communicate with one another in the herd. We will call them on rude gestures and we will reward them for respectful gestures.

Rules of the game

Our body positioning and taking responsibility for the way we communicate our responses plays a very important part throughout this game. The angle of our approach, the timing of our approach, retreat and placement of our steps are crucial in determining the final outcome. Anyone can send a horse whirling around a round pen. Unless we can do so in a manner that gains their respect and trust in us it's merely chasing a horse around in circles. The series of photos seen below were taken within a 30 minute training session. There was no need to work him into a sweaty lather.

In this article we will be round penning our 3 year old Arab stud colt "Fonzi"



In this first photo Fonzi turns his hind end in my direction when I ask him to go forward. This is most definitely a rude gesture. In response I lightly flick my whip at his hind end calling him on his actions and pushing his hind end away, applying only the appropriate amount of push.



In this second photo we see several things.
 • Fonzi is coming off the rail in an attempt to push in
 • His hind end is tracking to the inside resulting in a rude cocked hip
 • He is leaning in with his barrel and shoulder
 The appropriate response is to sweep the whip along the length of his body. I am thereby asking him to move his hip, shoulder and

barrel away from me, telling him to not come on top of me. He is not touched with the whip; I simply drive him back to the rail.

Fonzi is feeling like pretty hot stuff. I have stepped back asking him to turn in, stop and face me. He did all of these things, however, he has flared his nostrils in my direction as he throws his head and tail in the air.

The appropriate response for these actions is simply acknowledging his behaviour by pushing him back out to rail for some more work.



Things are starting to settle down. Now that he knows that I know his game, he has stopped pulling his little stunts. Fonzi has been clearly, deliberately and appropriately called on his actions, allowing him to relax, lower his head and start to feel good about his job.

I have now backed up and asked Fonzi to stop and face me. He has done so very respectfully. He stands facing me and bows. The appropriate response for such good behaviour is to let him stand, give him a rub on the withers and call it a session by ending on a good note.



Having responded to Fonzi on his rude behaviour has made him aware that we know what rude horse behaviour is. Having responded clearly, deliberately and appropriately to his behaviour

was the first step in earning his respect and trust which is so important in the starting process.

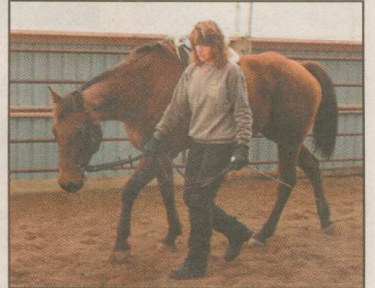
Appropriate response

Appropriate response is a very important element to the training process and I will be referring to it on a regular basis.

Appropriate response basically refers to the amount of "push" required when addressing issues such as a "cocked hip" or a "rude shoulder". We should use only as much pressure as necessary to get the job done. If we use too much "push" or force, we will jeopardize earning the horse's respect and trust, the very thing we are trying to earn.

Topics yet to be covered in this series that will lead to the first ride are as follows:

- In hand work
- Lunging techniques
- Introducing the bit
- Introducing the saddle
- Long lining
- The First ride



So Where to go from here?

In our next article we will start to work our horse in hand from the ground. Working the horse in hand introduces them to the concept of contact, bending and yielding their body parts to pressure. By working the horse in hand we start to bend them, and shape them in a way that feels good and makes them look forward to being handled by their human partners.

Written by Walter Mantler

Walter & Gisela Mantler own and operate Symphony Stables, a training facility in south-western Ontario. They start, train and finish horses for both Western and English disciplines. They run a series of horsemanship and personal development clinics throughout the year. To learn more about their techniques and services please visit: www.symphonystables.com





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Thank you to all participants and spectators at our 2008 finals. The weather finally cooperated and we had a great show and BBQ. Information about upcoming winter practices will be posted on our website as it becomes available. Stay tuned for more information. Results from our final show and year end points/award winners are available in our "Standings" section. Check them out at www.orcha.ca/Standings.htm.

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