

Starting Your Own Horse

Interested in "Starting your own horse" but not sure where to start?

In this, our third article, we will be introducing the horse to "in hand" work from the ground. This work will introduce them to the concept of contact, bending and yielding to pressure.

Why work "In Hand"??

By working the horse in hand we start to shape them in a way that feels good and makes them look forward to being handled by their human partners. It is the next step to earning their trust and respect while handling them up close which will make things like introducing them to the bit, saddle, farrier and first ride uneventful. We will teach them to yield their shoulders and hips; We will ask for a bend from their girth. Contact will be introduced. We will guide the horse so it can experience the feel of being balanced and level headed. Once this work has been done on the ground we will be able to transfer it uneventfully to the saddle. Consistency is the Key

As soon as we consistently start to balance and shape the horse into a frame that feels good we create a pattern. It's the kind of pattern that will earn great results. It will make the difference between a horse that runs away when we bring them in for training and one that meets you at the gate. Consistency x proper handling = Outstanding results. Throughout this article we will be concentrating on consistently keeping the horse:

- level headed
- on the correct bend for the direction we are travelling
- in consistent light contact in our hand
- yielding to our pressure

In this article we will be working with our 3 year old Quarter horse Stud Cold – "Gus"

In this photo Gisela demonstrates proper use of hand/rein contact. This exercise prepares the horse for contact before we climb into the saddle. It is better to deal with contact issues while on the ground beside the horse. With the dressage whip in her left hand she drives him forward from his flank into the contact of her right hand which is holding both reins. She concentrates on keeping the contact light and consistent. Walking back by his shoulder she maintains a "driving" position, not a "leading" position. This "driving" position will simulate the contact that he would experience if someone was on his back driving him forward into the contact. The contact helps to keep him level headed and in a frame that feels good. As a result the trust and respect continues to grow. One step closer to that uneventful first ride.



So Where to go from here?

In our next article we will demonstrate choosing the correct bit and introducing it for the first time. Correctly introducing the bit for the first time could save you many years of headaches. Everything we do that leads to riding our horse sets the stage for that ride.

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

We have now successfully introduced contact, bending from the girth and yielding away from pressure. As I've mentioned throughout this article the best place to introduce these elements is from the ground beside the horse. Some horses react adversely when introduced to these elements. It is much safer to work your way through these elements from the ground. Remember your horse's memory is second only to an elephant. The fewer bad memories the better.

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

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

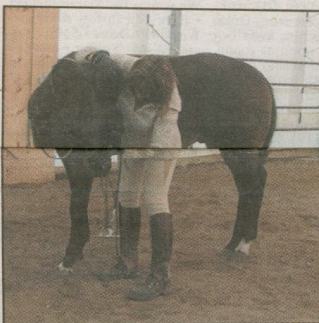


Photo on left: As we bring Gus into the arena an outside noise startles him. Horses stay level-headed and push Gus around her into a tight circle using a dressage whip to guide his hip, using the appropriate amount of push. Notice that Gisela never loses her contact throughout these manoeuvres. Photo on right: Within seconds Gisela's accurate, appropriate response has allowed Gus to relax, level his head and therefore develop trust in his handler.

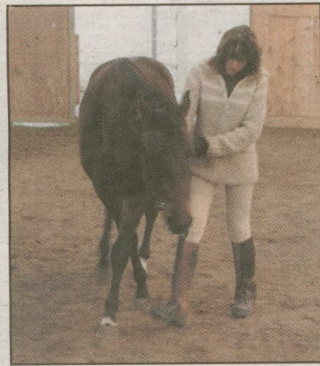
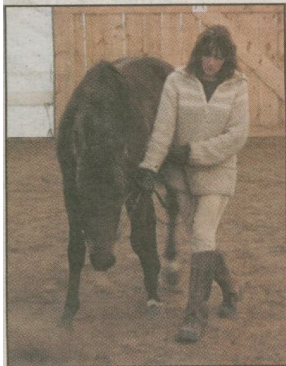


Photo on left: While leading Gus in hand Gisela asks him to yield away from the push of her left hand. This exercise simulates pressure similar to a leg yield that a rider would ask for when in the saddle. Different horses respond in different ways. Some horses react adversely while some willingly comply. It's safer for us to find out how the horse will react while on the ground beside them as opposed to sitting in a saddle. Photo on right: We see Gus crossing his feet over in the front, level headed and willingly yielding to Gisela's push.

In this photo Gisela demonstrates how to bend the horse from the girth. Touching the horse on the left side of the girth causes them to bend to the left. Later when we are in the saddle we will ask for this same bend with our left leg when we want to turn left. Horses do not like to be pulled into one direction or another by their head. By conditioning them to bend at the girth from our leg/hand we are setting ourselves up for an uneventful first ride. It is also another crucial building block for a solid foundation.



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