

Starting Your Own Horse

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

In this, our sixth article, we will be discussing the importance of introducing the saddle correctly in order to avoid some costly mistakes. In this article I will be introducing the saddle to our 3 year old Arab Stud Colt "Fonzi".

Why are we dedicating an entire article to this?

When done properly introducing the saddle for the first time should be totally uneventful and with most horses I find it usually is as long as all the prep work to this point in the training has been done properly. The last thing we want at this stage is to create a wreck with your horse running frantically around the farm with a saddle half strapped on, dangling under its belly. Not only could you horse get injured, but good luck trying to put a saddle on the next time, never mind climbing into that saddle.

So where do we start?



First Photo - In this photo I've taken a cotton lunge line and I am rubbing it across his back, shoulders, hips, legs etc. I guess you could call it sacking out without the sack. The idea is to make sure your horse is comfortable in case your girth, cinch or stirrups bump or rub him while lifting the saddle on his back. One of the important things I would like you to notice is that I am keeping Fonzi's head level. A level headed horse is calm and relaxed. The exercise would be counterproductive if I allowed him to dance around with his head in the air.

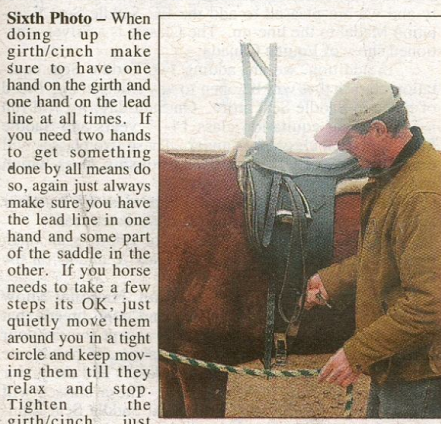


Second Photo - In this photo I am taking the cotton lunge line and wrapping it around Fonzi's barrel where the cinch/girth would go. I will then squeeze the rope to simulate the tightening of a cinch/girth. Some horses do not respond well to this tightening around their chest. This is the safest way to find out what their reaction will be. If there were a bad reaction, just release the rope, no harm done. Most horses accept this without a problem. Please note once again that I am maintaining Fonzi's level headed frame in order to keep him calm and cool.



Third Photo - Now that I know that Fonzi accepts the pressure around his barrel in his girth area I will introduce the surcingle. I like to introduce the surcingle just to get an idea of how comfortable the horse will be while exercising with constant pressure around his barrel. Tighten the surcingle just enough that it stays in place without tightening too much at this point. If your horse humps up or stresses, back it off and try again slowly until he is comfortable. If all goes well, take your horse out and lunge them as per the description in our previous article.

Fifth Photo - When introducing the saddle for the first time I suggest taking them into an arena, round pen or fenced in area. Cross ties would not be a good place for this. If your horse gets nervous they may need to take a few steps and that's OK. If they do need to take a few steps just move them around in a tight small circle with one hand on the lead line and the other hand holding the saddle. For these purposes just find one of the lightest saddles you have in your tack room, one that would likely fit reasonably well. You will need to do a proper saddle fit before your first ride. Make sure to keep one hand on the saddle at all times in case you need to quickly abort the situation and pull the saddle off.



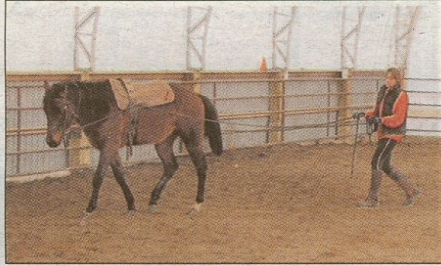
Sixth Photo - When doing up the girth/cinch make sure to have one hand on the girth and one hand on the lead line at all times. If you need two hands to get something done by all means do so, again just always make sure you have the lead line in one hand and some part of the saddle in the other. If your horse needs to take a few steps its OK, just quietly move them around you in a tight circle and keep moving them till they relax and stop. Tighten the girth/cinch just enough so that the saddle will stay in place and then praise your horse by giving them a nice rub on the withers.

Now that we have introduced the saddle uneventfully we are one step closer to our first ride. Through proper handling, trust and confidence continue to grow between the horse and handler. One step closer to the uneventful first ride.

- Topics yet to be covered in this series
- Ground Driving
- The First ride

To reference all of the articles in this series "Starting your own horse" visit our website at www.symphonystables.com

So where do we go from here?
In our next article we will be introducing the final step before our first ride, ground driving. We will be taking you through the steps leading up to and including the first driving sessions of both our young stallions.



Written by Walter Mantler - Symphony Stables
Walter & Gisela Mantler own and operate Symphony Stables, a training facility in south-western Ontario. They have apprenticed directly under Chris Irwin for years and are recognized among his top trainers. They breed, 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 & services please visit: www.symphonystables.com



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