

# Starting Your Own Horse

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

In this our eighth article of this series, we will be looking at some steps and precautions that should be taken before and during your first ride. In this article I will be putting a first ride on our 3 year old Arab stud colt "Fonzi".

## Taking the time it takes

All the exercises we have done in this series have been done to earn our horse's trust. Once we have their trust we can confidently climb into the saddle for the first time. Before we put our leg up over the saddle for the first time there are a few simple exercises/precautions that should be taken to make sure our first ride will be uneventful. Taking a few minutes to perform each one of these exercises could save you a lot of headaches as well as make your first ride a safe and pleasant experience for both you and your horse.

## So where do we start?

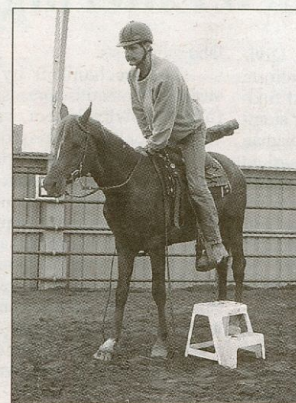
Most of these exercises have been developed in order to proactively address common problems / reactions encountered while starting other horses we have worked with. Remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.



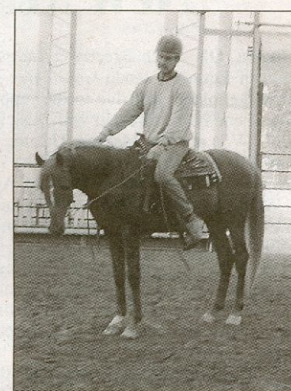
In this first photo I am setting Fonzi up to be mounted. I take both reins in my left hand along with a handful of mane. The inside rein is slightly shorter than the outside rein. That way if he walks off, he will do so in a circle around me. I will use a mounting block in order to make it easier on Fonzi when I go to lift myself into the saddle. By using the mounting block I am less likely to throw him off balance and upset him.



In the second photo I put only my left toe into the stirrup. I take my right hand and brush it up and over Fonzi's hips on both sides. This simulates my leg going up and over his hind end. This way he is less likely to startle when my leg goes over and brushes his hind end.



Fifth Photo - Well.... here we go. Everything leading up to this point has been positive so I no longer see any reason to delay putting my leg over. Just make sure you are confident and fully relaxed during this step. If you are shaking like a leaf and not very confident about the outcome it is probably not the right time to get on. Your horse will know you are nervous and they will mirror your nervous behaviour. Take the time it takes to make sure both you and your horse are ready.



Seventh photo - In this photo I am trying to get Fonzi to take his first step. Do not assume that your horse will walk off when you get on their back for the first time. Some horses will be very apprehensive about taking that first step with your weight on their back. In this photo I am bringing only my left leg back asking Fonzi to move his hind end/legs over. Once the hind legs begin to move over, only then will I ask for forward with my seat and both legs.

## AQHA and Forest Service reach understanding for land conservation

America's Horse, June 29, 2009 - The American Quarter Horse Association and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service recently signed a memorandum of understanding to work together on national land conservation projects.

The Forest Service is a federal agency dedicated to the management of National Forest System lands for a variety of uses and activities, including outdoor recreation. AQHA also wants to see the preservation of public lands for recreation, specifically equestrian activities.

By partnering together, AQHA and the Forest Service will actively promote public-private partnerships that encourage responsible use of federal lands by visitors participating in equestrian activities. Both organizations seek to disseminate information to the public regarding conservation, recreation and natural resource activities relating to equestrian and recreational stock use.

"By teaming with the Forest Service, AQHA is showing its commitment to trail conservation," said Don Treadway Jr., AQHA executive vice president. "We are pleased to partner with the Forest Service in efforts to preserve trails for equestrians and all outdoor recreational enthusiasts."

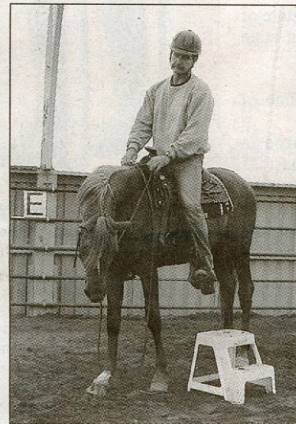
AQHA will work with the Forest Service at the national, regional and local levels to identify appropriate cooperative opportunities (trail projects, recreational use studies and educational programs) and pursue these projects with the recreational community in general and the equestrian community in particular. AQHA also will develop and maintain a communication network for equestrian users through its STEP (Stewards for Trails, Education and Partnerships) program.

"STEP will become the platform by which equestrians and land managers like the Forest Service can work in unison on issues concerning trails," said Stephanie McCommon, AQHA manager of affiliates, partnerships and recreational riding. "The STEP program was designed to help the Forest Service with trail preservation, and this memorandum of understanding further emphasizes that goal."

For more information on AQHA's STEP program and recreational riding initiatives, visit [www.ridegreen.aqha.com](http://www.ridegreen.aqha.com). AQHA news and information is a service of AQHA publications. For more information on The American Quarter Horse Journal, The American Quarter Horse Racing Journal or America's Horse, visit [www.aqha.com/magazines](http://www.aqha.com/magazines).



In the third photo I put my arm over Fonzi while my left toe is still in the stirrup. This way Fonzi is exposed to having contact on both sides of his body similar to that of having both my legs on him. I will take the stirrup and fender on the offside of the horse and tap it against him. I will take my left knee and bump it against him as well. It's better to find out if he is going to have an adverse reaction to this stimulus before we get on.



Sixth photo - Now that I am on his back I will just sit quietly and let his mind digest the fact that a human is sitting on his back. I won't ask for anything other than him being comfortable with me on his back. Depending on the horse sometimes I will just sit there for 5 minutes or so and then get off and leave it at that.



Eighth photo - In this photo we have established forward motion. I will not worry too much about which direction he goes just at this time. If he chooses to take the right bend then I will allow it however, I will keep him in a right bend for a short while. If he wants to change to the left, I will allow it however, I will keep him in the left bend for a short while. I just want him to get used to carrying my weight around the arena at this time.



In this fourth photo I lift myself up off the mounting block and put my full weight on Fonzi's back. I balance myself so as not to have too much weight on either side. Another purpose of this exercise is to position myself well above Fonzi in order to get him used to having someone on his back higher than he is. Both bearing our full weight and our increased elevation can sometimes be unnerving to some horses. Just keep your toe in the stirrup so that you can exit quickly if necessary. Practice this until you are confident that your horse is relaxed with the whole idea of bearing your weight and your elevated position.

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 have apprenticed directly under Chris Irvin for years and are recognized among his top trainers. They run a series of horsemanship and personal development clinics throughout the year. To learn more about their techniques and services please visit: [www.symphony-stables.com](http://www.symphony-stables.com)



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