

Just come to the Publisher (6)

Educating the Gaited Horse from Start to Finish

The Beginning: 3 months to 6 months

The 'For the Horse Method

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This article will pick up again where I left off from the May/June Issue and address longeing the foal. Depending on the part of the world you may live in the term lunging is also acceptable. At 3-6 months foals have a good bit of life experience as seen through the eyes and mind of a foal. If we have spent the time to develop the proper basics in handling exercises so far, and have a trusting, willing foal, it is time to expand on creating the working dialog between handler and foal. Longeing the foal is a good exercise in asking the foal that to date has been used to us being close in their space when working while asking the foal to be haltered, leading, flexion exercises, grooming, legs lifts and hoof cleaning etc.

The tools used are the same flat nylon or leather proper fitting halter and a 14 foot long, 3/4"-1" round cotton or parachute cord line with as small of and strong snap as possible. I do not encourage the use of a tied on ropes to the halter in case of those situations that can happen that a horse or foal get away from a handler for some unexpected reason. A snap on the rope can be removed quickly if need be. I also do not encourage the use of bull snaps on horses or foals due to added weight and not being easy to manipulate these types of snaps to be removed from the halter if need be. A 3-4 foot dressage whip can be used if need be to encourage the foal kindly and softly only to move forward on a small circle. It is recommended before ever using any type of whip or rope, that a foal/ horse be acclimated to them softly yet with confidence from the handler and are used to the sense of feel to these tools, but never in an aggressive abusive manner from a handler.

Longeing the foal is asking the foal to be a farther distance from the handler and learning to be comfortable with this increase of distance. Start with the foal walking forward and around us quietly staring with just 4 feet away from the handler who is also walking a smaller circle in the center of the circle with leg joints open and soft, not stiff and braced in the handler. The handler is not pulling the foal forward

by the head and pulling the head forward but walking to the point of the foals hip at a safe distance to encourage the energy of the foal to use the hind legs to move the body forward.

Our goals also are to teach the foal also in a small way to be forward, yet balanced and in as much straightness as possible. For an understanding the term and goal of straightness refer to SA issue Sept/Oct 2012 issue.

Start small and as the foal is comfortable and confident in being 4 feet out on the line walking slowly ask them to stop. Ask for the stop in putting up a hand to the inside eye of the foal that can be seen and with the handler stopping but making the final step toward the front of the foal with a stiffer leg joints at this time. Say the word whoa or stop, which ever a handler is comfortable with using while a soft vibration to the longe line that can be felt to the foals halter. This is to receive softness in a good quiet easy stop not a reactive fearful stop. They are foals so sometimes they don't yet understand the aid or even receive the stop aids, we may

have to ask 2 or 3 times before they receive it and get it with clarity. If at all possible never jerk on the longe line or whip it around in a snaking manner to stop the foal. These are big reactive moves that may get the foal to stop but it is not in an asking manner that is easy on the head and neck of the foal while developing and maintain a relationship of a trusting and working together. The "For the Horse Method" is not one of bullying, dominance, fear or disrespect to the foal when teaching.

When the foal has stopped this is when a handler teaches them to stay stand and not walk into the handler, but the handler walks to the foal to give verbal and or touch reward.

To encourage this stand stay the handler places a hand up and to one eye so as to be seen by the foal and say stay or stand as in a blocking intent and again one may have to do this a couple of times for a foal to understand this new request on a longe line.

Once this stand stay is achieved and rewarded then once again ask the foal to move forward again on the longe line. It should not be over worked and only for a few minutes at a time and then ask for a change of direction by stepping to the shoulder of the foal to redirect the head the direction of travel desired and step as soon as possible to the point of the foals hip to send the foal forward on the longe line.

Repeat the stand /stay exercise and then continue to ask one more time for the foal to walk that circle 4 feet out from the handler, and then stop again. Reward and end the session. We are not working more that 10-20 minutes depending on the understanding and attention span of the foal. The next session another day starts again with that same small circle only done at a quiet walk speed. As the foal recognizes the exercise then a handler can ask for a larger circle of 6 feet out working overtime to larger sized circles to 10 -12 feet away from the handler. There is no hurry, just take the time it takes to teach a youngster this type of work which is confidence building for the foal. This work later translates and is very important in preparation to respond softly to hand aids to the halter; voice aids, our energy in using intent, preparing them for later education.

Some Points of importance are not to teach a foal to pull on the longe line or lead rope. This later can transfer to pulling on reins, leaning in to a bit or any head gear as well taking us away from softness and self-carriage of a horse. When a horse learns to pull this is a defensive reaction to protect themselves from an uncomfortable situation.

It can be read in many worldwide writings of Master Horseman and world Calvary manuals that anything executed improperly by a horse is the fault in the teachings of the educator, not of the horse.