

THE PYRAMID OF TRAINING – THE YOUNG HORSE

Introducing the Horse to the Stable, Tacking up, Lungeing and Backing

Purpose

- To prepare the unbacked or just backed horse with systematic graduated training, thereby laying a sound foundation for future specialization.
- To develop the natural capabilities of the whole horse.
- To enable the horse to move as freely with a rider, as he does without a rider.

Goals

- Horse accepts all demands connected with its future use (i.e. in the stable, indoor school, strange surroundings, dressage arena, show jumping courses, etc.);
- Horse accepts the aids of the rider and learns to follow them (especially seat, leg, and rein aids);
- Horse gains enough confidence, strength, and endurance to go through a novice test without too many mistakes, a small jumping course obediently; and cross-country course at a prescribed speed with safety.

Application

“In most cases, the horse’s basic training takes place in a different environment from that in which it grew up. Settling in, and getting used to its new surroundings, stabling and diet is crucial to the horse’s future development. The trainer must be prepared to use tact and patience, and give it the necessary time to adjust. Usually a few days will suffice but in some cases several weeks may be required.

During the period when the horse is being backed, turning it out more in a field or exercise area will help to work off excess energy and tension and to keep it happy and well adjusted.

Particular care should be taken over the first stage of training, which consists of familiarizing the horse with the saddle and bridle. It is best to introduce it to these in the familiar surrounding of its stable. The pleasant association of the stable, i.e. food and comfort, will help it to accept the unfamiliar equipment.

First the bridle is put on. It is a good idea to attach a lunge line to the bridle to ensure that the trainer keeps control if the horse tries to pull away. If it manages to escape when the saddle and bridle are being put on for the first time, it often takes a long time to get it to accept them calmly.

To start with, many horses dislike the girth being tightened, and the saddle should be put on for the first time in the school, for example, where there is a soft surface, or at least in the yard where there is plenty of room. An elasticized girth will help to avoid creating unnecessary tension. Even if the horse knows the handlers, and has been familiarized with the saddle, it is almost inevitable that it will give a few bucks to try to get ride of it and this could lead to falls and serious injury if it is in the stable or, even worse, in the stable corridor at the time.

The trainer should always work with an assistant – never alone. A quiet manner and a reassuring voice are important. Food can be used as a reward during training.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 147-149]

Lungeing

“Lungeing is an effective, and in many cases essential preparation for ridden training.

The aim of lungeing is:

- To get the horse used to working;
- To teach it obedience;
- To develop rhythm and looseness (Losgelassenheit);
- To teach the horse to turn on a correct circle. [*Principles of Riding*, p. 148]

“Lungeing is also useful in later training as a means of correcting faults in the horse’s position and gaits which have developed under saddle. It is also beneficial for horses with conformation defects, and for improving problem areas such

as the back and neck. Other uses are for giving light exercise to horses which have been ill, or simply to provide variety in the training.” [*Principles of Riding*, p. 148]

Please refer to *USDF Lungeing Manual* for extensive reading on lungeing.

Backing and Preliminary Work Under Saddle

“The horse is prepared for backing as part of its daily care and handling. It gets used to feeling the groom or handler run his hand over its back, pat it all over or lean carefully across its withers.

Even the quietest, most phlegmatic horse will sometimes take fright and react violently if the rider suddenly sits on its back with no warning, and so backing the horse should always be carried out very carefully, in a quiet, relaxed manner, and the trainer must be prepared to take his time. Choosing the right rider can be crucial. He or she should be experienced and knowledgeable, neither nervous nor too heavy, and have a good, balanced seat. Situations may arise which could otherwise be dangerous for the rider and at the same time cause the horse to lose confidence. The success or otherwise of this experience will be crucial to the horse’s future progress.

The horse should be mounted for the first time on the lunge, in an enclosed arena, or better still, in an indoor school. One person should hold the horse, while another carefully legs up the rider. With nervous horses it is sometimes a good idea to lie across the saddle first. The rider should then slide smoothly into the saddle, without touching the horse’s croup (this in itself requires a certain skill). The stirrups should be slightly shorter than normal so as to avoid putting too much weight on the horse’s back.

Being patted, praised and fed sugar by someone it knows and trusts will help to keep the horse’s mind off the new experience. The rider can hold on to a neck strap or the mane in case the horse bucks. On no account should he hold on by the reins.

The person holding the lunge then carefully tries to lead the horse forward, and talks reassuringly to it. When the horse starts to move, the rider follows the movement elastically but passively. Frequent halts and patting help to put the horse at ease.

When the horse starts to move forward more confidently under the rider’s weight, the lunge can be gradually lengthened until the horse is on the normal circle used for lungeing.

These early exercises should be fairly short. The horse should learn to accept the rider’s weight calmly, at first in walk, and then in trot. At the end of the lesson, the rider can practice dismounting and mounting again a few times, perhaps using the stirrups to mount if all goes well.” [*Principles of Riding*, p. 149-150]

“Sending the horse forward a bit too freely is preferable to trying to shorten its natural way of going. The reins should be long enough to prevent unintentional interference with the horse’s mouth.” [*Principles of Riding*, p. 150]

“The horse should learn to move under saddle with its natural, rhythmic, springy, ground-covering action. This is only possible if the back muscles are free from tension. Tension is created by the rider sitting on the horse’s back, and must be counteracted by exercises aimed at developing looseness (Losgelassenheit) and calmness.

As the horse relaxes, in a loose rein walk to start with, it will stretch its head and neck forwards and downwards, its back and tail will start to swing and it will take rhythmic, ground-covering steps with its hind legs engaging well underneath its body. Only when this stage has been reached should the rider start to work on the horse’s position and carriage by riding it forward into a light contact in trot, canter, and finally in walk.” [*Principles of Riding*, p. 151]