

The First 30 Days

In our last article we talked about how to work with your long yearling when it comes to you in training for the first time. In this article, I am going to explain what I do in the first 30 days of a colts life under saddle. Saddle breaking a 2 year old and getting it ready to ride for the first time is beyond the 800 words for this article, so I will go over the process in general. Keep in mind that it should be done by someone who has experience with young horses. This is a very important time for your prospect. How he is started can make a huge difference in the long term success of your colt. It is the foundation that is built at this time, that will determine how much of your colts potential he will give to you in the future. I've established their trust from the work I did with him as a long yearling and have him desensitized working in the round pen with the saddle on and lunging him. A lot of people like to put the first couple of rides with a side pole or halter, but in my program I prefer to use a smooth loose rein snaffle bit. I stay out of the horses face with my hands, but if I need the bridle for control I have it. Once I determine the colt is ready for me to get on his back, I will ride him in the small round pen, 60 feet in diameter, for approximately 3 or 4 days, before moving to the arena. The first couple of rides I just want for the horse to establish forward motion, I don't ask for anything more then he wants to give at this time. This could be at the walk, trot or lope, I just want him relaxed and not afraid of my cues. It may start out with just 1 step forward away from my leg that is bumping his side, and I will not steer the colt at all until I have relaxed forward motion. I often tell people not to get overconfident if their horse is very quiet during the first or second ride, the horse may be scared during this time and are easily impressed. Once the colt gets confident with you on his back, he may decide to test and

see how serious you are about riding him. Most of the horses I have had that bucked, did not do it on the first ride.

I build on this process until the colt will walk, trot and lope comfortably in both directions and I will change direction by using only 1 rein at a time. I pull his nose into the fence and get him to move forward in the opposite direction. Once I can make a figure 8 in the small round pen at the trot, I will then venture outside to the arena.

The key to control of your horse at this stage is to keep his feet moving. If you can keep him forward, you can keep his mind focused and it will be easier to steer him. For the next couple of days, I just get my colt used to his surroundings and am not trying to teach him any special exercises. A colts attention span at this time is very limited and their stamina is usually the same. I keep my training sessions short so that I can keep him busy and end on a good note. You

Photo courtesy of Valentine Reining Horses



don't want him to get bored with what you are doing because this will create resistance.

Once he is relaxed with the surroundings of the arena, I will start working on teaching him to find his circle.

This is mostly done at the lope and I will just continually steer him back to the circle every time he leans away or gets distracted. Again, do not over do it, he might only be able to lope for 5 minutes without a break. For Reiners, the circle is a very important component of the sport and it is the biggest part of a horses foundation.

By the end of your first 30 days under saddle, you want your colt to be relaxed while he is saddled, mounted and working in the arena at a walk, trot and lope. He should give you forward motion when cued and be able to start to track a circle. During this time I have not pulled on this horses face very much, I want to stay slow with my hands and guide him with minimal contact. Less is more during this first months foundation building, take your time and the horse will be more willing. I was told a long time ago when you are working with horses, that if you act like you only have 15 minutes it will take you all day, but if you act like you have all day, it will only take 15 minutes.

In the next article, I will talk about starting to teach a 2 year old basic Reining maneuvers.

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Nick Valentine owns Valentine Reining Horses in Lucama, N.C. He focuses on showing, training, sales, coaching and clinics at Francois Gauthier's facility, Sunny Pines Farm go to www.valentinereining.com for more.