



Breaking In Process

"Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay." James 5:12

The next part of the process is the breaking of the yearlings to ride, with a view to turning them into racehorses. It has become unfashionable of late to use the word 'breaking', with terms such as 'starting' being adopted instead. However, breaking has been normal usage for centuries, and we will stick with it, though obviously we try our best not to, in any negative sense, break our new investment. What we do want to achieve is a horse capable of showing the very best form of which he is capable whilst being handled by people with a less than perfect grasp of the plot. The Old Man, as we addressed my father in his absence, always said that he made a mistake with the first yearlings he broke in forgetting that they were to be ridden by stable lads and trying to make them into show hacks. That was 50 years ago when the lads were a lot better trained than those we have now; we should always remember the parameters within which we have to operate.

The success of our plan to survive in the racing business will hinge on the viability of our purchases as frequent and productive competitors. This can best be achieved if they are trained for racing in all senses of that word. As well as being fit, they must also learn how to conduct themselves well both in their races and throughout every aspect of their daily routine. If it were possible to enlist the help of some riders with a basic understanding of collection and impulsion for the early stages of our horses' ridden career then that might prove very beneficial in teaching them to carry themselves to the best advantage before their serious training began.

The breaking period is certainly one of the most important stages of a racehorse's career, although the ease with which the process is completed may bear little relation to ultimate success on the racecourse. In fact, many horses that sail through this part of the proceedings without a murmur will spend their whole lives simply going through the motions in the same way if we are not constantly alive to that possibility. This may be even more likely in a big yard and it demonstrates the sometimes fairly close resemblance between equine and human behaviour. This is not anthropomorphism; a horse is naturally not human in his thought processes, but all young things seem to share a tendency to identify quickly the easiest way to get along.

Experienced horsemen will recognise the syndrome whereby an animal that has been allowed to take things too easy becomes resentful if that regime changes. This is very evident in many small ponies, most of which must presumably have started off quite normal, otherwise they would never have been selected as suitable for children, but which often become quite evil in their attitude after being allowed too much leeway. In a similar way, many lads from the bigger stables have become virtually institutionalised and this can hardly avoid affecting their charges. If any assumedly quiet horse is seen to become troublesome with a weaker rider then that rider should be changed immediately, even if only for a few days, in order to prevent the bad behaviour becoming established.

Most of the yearlings we get today are far

Racing Horses

easier to deal with than they used to be. Unfortunately, this is often not the case with the homebreds. The sales preparation today is in most cases so well managed that many youngsters are nowadays virtually broken when trainers receive them, certainly by the standards of 30 or 40 years ago. Unfortunately, the skill of the lads who will have to ride them has been decreasing at a very similar rate. What would happen were today's riders faced with the almost untouched intake that was then the norm is anybody's guess. Happily that is not the case, although we are now suffering the effects of a benign, rather than a vicious, circle in that because awkward horses are now uncommon the necessary procedures that allowed them to be handled relatively easily have been dropped and very quickly forgotten.

We will try to describe here a basic traditional method based on the assumption that the subject is virtually untouched, in the hope that it may prove of interest and instruction. Obviously this does not mean untouched in the sense of wild, but it does imply that the youngster's education has not yet started. Although many of the procedures described may seem time-consuming they were actually designed to be time-saving originally, and it will do no harm for a (not necessarily the) correct system to be adopted. If these procedures are implemented without fail we should not only have a sensible racehorse, but will also have benefited from the fact that this year's assistant breaker should have sufficiently absorbed the theory to be able to take over the breaking himself after a couple of seasons. We are hoping to describe a method that should prove equal to any foreseeable situation, but the need for these procedures to be adhered to closely cannot be overstressed. Any changes that may prove necessary are not to be made by staff without discussion and instructions. Using these methods, a really experienced man will handle most situations comfortably even without an assistant. What

we advocate here is a belt and braces approach, aimed at producing both well-mannered horses and creating trained and competent personnel.

All yearlings should have their teeth attended by the vet or by an equine dentist as soon as they are quiet enough to be handled easily. All vaccinations should also be reviewed and put in order, and a worming programme initiated.

The safest and most efficient way to approach the breaking process is for an experienced lad, with a helper, to be delegated to handle all new yearlings for the first few days. He can then observe their characters and start them off in the correct manner. This is much safer than allocating yearlings to all and sundry as spares before we know anything about them. Two novices together always used to be regarded as a recipe for disaster. Under our system the yearling will have some basic stable sense before he gets his own lad, although the new groom must be made aware of the routine he is to follow if the foundation is not to be quickly undermined. To this end we can strongly convey to all staff that there are only two basic ways of doing things, these being number one, "All the other ways", and number two, "The way you will do it if you want to stay here!"

The team leader will be aware of the vital part played by voice in these proceedings and must impress this on his assistant. The actual words used make little difference, as unlike in some other disciplines a racehorse will not be routinely required to recognise very specific verbal commands, but the tone and inflection of the voice are important. Many excellent yearling men will keep up a constant conversation with their pupil, rather like a mother with a baby, and although it is rather one-sided the horse is obviously listening and taking confidence from his teacher's voice. It is very apparent too that the horse is well aware of displeasure, as indicated by a dramatic roughness of tone when he is wilful; however, this correction must always be directly

Breaking In Process

connected in the horse's mind to an unacceptable act on his part. He will also be encouraged to greater efforts to please, in the same way as a dog or a small child, by being addressed in a very hearty and enthusiastic manner. Like a child, his attention can often be distracted from a potential problem in this way, as long as the handler is thinking ahead. Unfortunately, it can be extremely hard to make the average stable lad accept this as they seem afraid of sounding silly and so tend to operate in silence unless frequently reminded otherwise. For handlers who are not particularly aware of the finer points of equine body language the adoption of constant spoken contact along these lines is a viable alternative; in fact, their own body language may tend to reflect, and so to reinforce, their verbal communications, and vice versa.

With luck, however little has been done with him the horse will be wearing a head collar when he arrives. It is not uncommon, though, for whoever delivers him to remove this when they drop him off, sometimes leaving us with a distinct impression that our new inmate has had very little human contact when we try to fit a replacement. As a general rule, all yearlings should wear their head collars constantly at this stage; adopting this policy is much easier than wasting time on the odd horse that is hard to catch.

All work with yearlings must be done in a calm and reassuring manner. We must give an impression that there is nothing to worry about; however, it must also be quite clear that we are in control of the situation. An experienced man will be able to do this with a minimum of fuss, but the presence of an assistant for the first day or two can make things go that much more smoothly, as well as reinforcing safe procedures in the assistant's mind. Horses much prefer to know where they stand, and are better off not learning any bad habits that may be prevented by the presence of the helper. As a matter of course both should always be on the same side

of the horse in order to avoid it jumping away from one and on to the other.

Initially we will not attempt to tie up a yearling, as he will often have been used to having a holder whenever anything was done to them. If we assume this to be so when we commence, we will soon form an impression of whether or not he is nervous of anyone working with him. It is quite common for a yearling never to have had his stable cleaned or tidied when he was in it, and if he has also never been tied up we can run into a problem straight away. With the helper holding, preferably with a shank, it is simple enough to shake up the bedding quietly and generally straighten his box without starting any great commotion. Yearlings tend to make a mess of their beds anyway, so we need only get him used to the idea of the fork and the bedding moving around his legs as we roughly clean the stable. If new shavings need to be added to the bed this should be done with care as this often causes alarm initially. The water can also be changed, if necessary, while a holder is present as this too may well be outside the horse's experience and frighten him.

When his stable is tidy we can see how he responds to a gentle wipe over with a soft dandy brush and a rubber. The sale yearlings should all be quite happy with this. If we find one that objects, we don't need to make an issue of it, but we should simply complete a token effort with the minimum of excitement. In many cases the improvement overnight will be considerable, and this will be found to apply to many other aspects of his education. The next step might be to see how he is as regards his feet. We must be quiet but firm; even though he may have been shod it is no guarantee that he will be perfect to handle. If he is at all difficult in front we can ignore his hind feet for today.

It might be as well to introduce a couple of little mottos here. The first is adapted from a gambling system: "Always stop when you are

Racing Horses

winning.” This might be the most important single thing to remember when dealing with young horses, particularly with any difficult animals. We must always part on a successful note, even if we have not achieved all that we had hoped for. The second maxim is borrowed from Aesop: “More haste, less speed.” Every time we forget either of these mottos when working with young horses we are inviting difficulties.

A true horseman will often recognise the need for a minor change of plan in order to finish the lesson on a positive note if he sees an approaching difficulty, and he will instinctively make that change. Actually he will take pride in knowing that no audience, and quite probably not even the horse, would notice there was in fact a potential problem. He will also avoid putting himself in situations where adequate time is unavailable to complete the task in hand safely. This fine judgement, however, is not learned easily, but only by working with many different animals. Any opportunity to observe a top horseman/showman, or indeed sheepdog or gundog trainer, at work can be very instructive, although the performance may need careful analysis in order to obtain maximum instruction from it. The one thing all the top animal handlers do have in common is that they never ever become flustered. They may often, by distracting the attention of both their subject and any onlookers from potential difficulties, appear to proceed with great ease in situations that threatened to go amiss. The more yearlings we handle using this system, whether they need all its safeguards or not, the less likely we are to encounter any problems, and the easier we will find it to deal equally smoothly with anything untoward that does arise.

The use of the term ‘horseman’ is not meant to imply a specific gender but is used to denote any person who, by their acquired skill and knowledge, may be capable of selecting, caring for, and training the horse to a high level. In a male-dominated sport, many females will never have been instructed in breaking procedures,

but, generally speaking, girls may tend to be more conscientious than lads in faithfully applying specified procedures and are well worth educating in this area.

As the horse settles in to his new surroundings we constantly assess to what degree we can safely move on to the next stage. In most cases he will be unafraid of having his litter done in a day or two and can then be tied up. A loop of bale string should be attached to the back ring of the head collar, to receive the chain and to prevent the head collar being broken by the chain if he does fly back in alarm. The string must not, as is sometimes seen, go on the wall ring for the obvious reason that the chain will then be flying around his head if he does get loose. It is essential to have everything likely to be required to hand before tying him up. He must not be left tied up and unattended for an instant at this stage, and if we do find we need anything he is to be loosed whilst we fetch it. Only having left a yearling for a few seconds at this stage is not an excuse if he should get loose. The horse need only be tied on a long chain at first, so that he doesn’t panic. Initially we must always keep towards the rear of the box so that if he is inclined to pull back we can hustle him back up to the front wall. If we are paying attention this is quite easy, as long as we remain behind his girth. The fact that the front half of the box may not get much attention for a day or two is far less of a problem than a horse that knows he can get loose. After a couple of days, most will be fairly comfortable with us moving around the box and will move themselves about as required. If he does have a problem with moving across, and if he does tend to crowd into the corner looking back at us, then it is best to get the helper back to resolve the problem quietly rather than fluster him. We never get in front of a yearling when alone with him until we are confident he won’t take fright and fly back, and initially we never ever leave him alone when he is tied up. Assuming that he soon settles on the

Breaking In Process

chain, which he should as he has had no reason to do anything else, we can continue to wipe him over and handle his feet, again calling on a holder if necessary. When wiping his face he should always be untied at this stage to avoid alarm. After a couple of weeks we may judge him ready to be left alone when tied up, but this should at first be for a few minutes only and we should stand silently outside the closed door. After a short time he may become restless and as soon as he shows any inclination to lean back on the chain we must immediately hustle him up vocally, preferably without him actually seeing us. If we do this a couple of times he will probably think we are always watching and will settle down. He should then be loosed and this procedure should be repeated for two or three days. It is time well spent to have a horse that goes through his life without getting loose in the stable or breaking a head collar. Yearlings should never have their hay in the stable whilst they are being taught to tie up, so as not to tempt them into scraping or getting loose. There is no point in chastising an animal on returning to the stable and finding that he is loose or has been scraping his bed. Any correction will only be effective if applied when the offence is actually in progress. The success of many of the horse-tamers of the 19th century was largely based on various devices which were designed to cause the subject some inconvenience or discomfort, automatically and immediately as soon as he erred. Without realising that the man was even involved in the matter, the horse assumed that his own action had caused an unpleasant reaction, and eventually decided not to provoke it. The fact that such procedures fell into disrepute and disuse was probably because the appliances did more harm than good in the hands of those who had failed to grasp completely the basic theory.

We may occasionally come across a subject that has already formed the habit of getting loose from his tie. Rather than make too much of the situation, a lunge rein should be run

from his head collar through the ring on the wall so that even when he does run back he has not actually escaped when he reaches the back wall and he can soon be manoeuvred back into position without any fuss. He should not be left unattended even using this method. After a few days he will normally accept matters quite happily, and will eventually become quite trustworthy in this respect.

It is now time to consider the handling of our yearling outside, which may in fact be considered the actual breaking process, the previous notes having covered stable manners. It is a good idea in most cases to remove the shoes before we start, for the simple reason that there is a great tendency to lose them anyway. Most yearlings should have enough growth of foot to go barefoot as the early exercise will all take place on a soft surface. Although soft ground tends to make all horses pull off their shoes by delaying breakover, it causes no damage to the bare foot. Apart from the disruption of continually waiting for a farrier to refit the shoe, there is great danger of breaking the foot and some danger of serious injury through a shoe that doesn't come off cleanly if we persist in keeping the yearlings shod at this stage. After removing the shoes, the foot should have the edges rounded, in the same way as would a horse being turned out to grass, to prevent them from splitting.

The whole breaking process is much simplified by having a properly constructed fenced arena with a suitable surface, and serious consideration should be given to achieving this, preferably at reasonable expense. The main requirements might be a lunging pen of about 45 feet diameter and an adjacent area to do very basic ridden work. Both should have safe surfaces with some degree of weather resistance. If there is easy access to the gallops, so much the better. It is important to monitor the condition of the lunging area regularly as the cushion will tend to be thrown continually to the outside. This

Racing Horses

drawback will be largely avoided if horses being lunged are continuously moved around the arena so as not to make a track, rather than being confined to the single circle, as soon as they are well enough behaved to do so. The drainage should be as good as possible, with some mix of sand and rubber or plastic the best footing. This can be reasonably achieved on a self-help basis with a local contractor rather than involving specialist schemes. The addition of coarsely chopped car tyres seems a great help in frosty conditions, and some form of oil or jelly will improve frost resistance although it will greatly increase the cost. Obviously a covered arena takes a lot of the pressure off the surface, and extremely competitive quotes are available for steel buildings.

To begin at the beginning is the most sensible approach to breaking, whatever the history of a new arrival is said to be. Over a large number of yearlings much time will be saved by not cutting corners, despite assurances that others may have already completed various stages satisfactorily with some arrivals. It will soon be obvious if a horse is in fact well versed in his education up to a certain point. We can much more easily press on after ensuring for ourselves that a lesson has been taught and learned than we can resolve a disaster caused by our making erroneous assumptions.

The first step is the fitting of the bridle and in most cases this is no problem. As in everything we will adopt a procedure which assumes an unhandled subject. The type of bridle to be used needs to be considered. Traditionally, British racehorses have started their education in a ball cheek jointed snaffle with keys to encourage a wet mouth. However, these tend to come in a size that may be too much of a mouthful for some yearlings and there can be a tendency for a horse to get these bits through his mouth to the extent that the keys are out at one side, usually the left. An alternative may be one of the sweet-mouth bits

now available. These do not have keys but the different metal is supposed to produce the same effect and as these bits tend to come in smaller sizes they do appear more comfortable for smaller horses. Many standard breaking bridles are also too large and have the alteration holes too far apart for small yearlings.

When putting bridles on yearlings we should always let them well down to avoid difficulty in getting over the ears. This takes 20 seconds, but it can often save 20 minutes straight away and will also avoid creating the ongoing problem of a horse being nervous about the ears. Once on, the bridle should be adjusted so that the bit barely wrinkles the corner of the mouth. Because of the unsuitable size of the traditional bits, the keys are often hanging too low in a small horse's mouth, which is far from ideal. The adjustment should be even on both sides. If the holes are too far apart for correct fitting then extra intermediate holes can easily be added. The traditional bridle has a loop to hold the side bar close to the cheek-piece and some horses appear to find this too rigid, but the loop can easily be dispensed with. If fitting the bridle does prove difficult, it should be accomplished with the aid of our helper and if possible without becoming a major confrontation. It is better to use a humane twitch or sedation rather than have a prolonged battle and in this situation the bridle should not be removed after exercise, and sometimes not for several days. The bit can be unbuckled and removed, with the ends of the cheek-pieces left buckled onto the bottom ring of the head collar until the horse has gradually learned to accept having his head and ears handled. It is not generally appreciated how often this problem can be created when taking the bridle off, and for the first few days we should always let it down before we take it off as well. As previously noted, the head collar stays on at all times, except on the rare occasion when some soreness may occur behind the ears.

Yearlings should always wear boots in front for exercise in the early stages since they may

Breaking In Process



(All breaking photos courtesy of "Titch" D. Coombes.)

be prone to sudden and erratic movements when fresh and are likely to become careless when tired. Occasionally we find one that brushes behind, in which case a double thickness of tubular elastic stocking, kept up with tape, can be used. The tape should not be too tight and should be fitted close above the joint. The stockings can easily be washed out and will last a few days. Extra protection can be gained by inserting Gamgee between the two layers of stocking. These cases are often due to weakness, but the balance of the feet should be checked. The ideal front boot is a simple neoprene one with Velcro straps incorporating some elastic. The elastic seems to have virtually eliminated the problem of lost boots, but it may need renewing occasionally. When fitting the boots it is essential to be aware of the possibility of causing a blemish to the tendon as this will definitely not enhance any horse's value, even though it usually has no effect on his soundness. The way to avoid this is to secure the bottom strap snugly, with the boot at the correct height on the leg, and then make sure the top strap is slightly more loosely fastened.

The boots must be rigorously brushed, inside and out, between horses to avoid chafing and should be dried each night and brushed again to soften them in the morning.

We are at last ready to commence! The lunge rein should initially be attached to both the bit and to the back strap of the head collar to prevent too severe an impact on the mouth [1]. The head collar should be adjusted so as not to pinch the corners of the mouth between it and the bit. This method allows some of the pressure to be transferred to the nose and the arguable slight loss of control is not a problem in an enclosed space. The fact that the pressure, should he attempt to get away, is not straight on the yearling's mouth will be much less alarming for him.

Once in the arena we can quietly lead the horse around to let him get his bearings. If he is a little green, whether flighty or reluctant to walk, we can call on our helper to do a little gentle chasing as required until the horse is leading quietly. When the yearling does get the hang of it we can call it a day. A very flighty horse should be kept almost pressed against the fence until he relaxes. Very occasionally we will get one that will not lead at any price, and rather than have a major row it might pay to get a pony to walk in front of him which should prove a quick and painless solution.

On the second day we can make a start on actually lunging in the round pen with a helper. It is a good idea to have on hand one of the long but very light lunging whips which are quite inoffensive, but which greatly extend our range of pursuit. This will do away with much rushing about by the helper. We select the area to be used and lead him around it a few times following the circle we intend to describe. If the whip is used it is only to give the horse the sense that he is being pursued, not particularly aggressively, but just enough that he feels that he should keep moving. Gradually we can give him a little more rein and the assistant can gently pressurise him to keep walking rather than allow him to wonder

Racing Horses

why we have to some extent left him. A natural progression will normally see him jogging round fairly happily in a few minutes, although there may be one or two fits and starts which we will do our best to ignore. Of course we keep up a constant rhetorical conversation with the horse the whole time we have him out, and that is always to be taken as read throughout the whole breaking process. There should be as little charging about as possible, and if the horse doesn't settle down to a jog after a little while we should resume leading him, so that the lesson finishes happily. Funnily enough, some of the sales yearlings are actually much more difficult to lunge than the untouched ones because they often think they can do what they like based on their experiences before the sale. With these we may need our helper to join us on the rein sometimes with a horse that may have become accustomed to getting his head straight and getting away. With these animals we might prefer to put the rein straight onto the ring of the bit. They can't actually get away from us in a round pen, even though many seem to have been accustomed to doing so in their previous home, and they normally soon settle down.

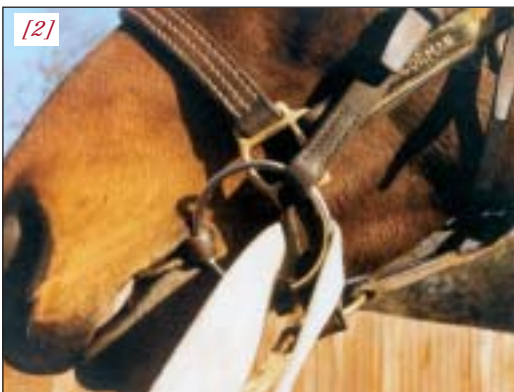
If the yearling seems to accept things quite readily we may try him going round clockwise, and we first need to change the rein to the offside. To accomplish this we first take several feet of the end of the lunge and slip it through the ring [2] before we unbuckle it to transfer it to the other

side, so as to have hold of the horse should he become startled during the changeover.

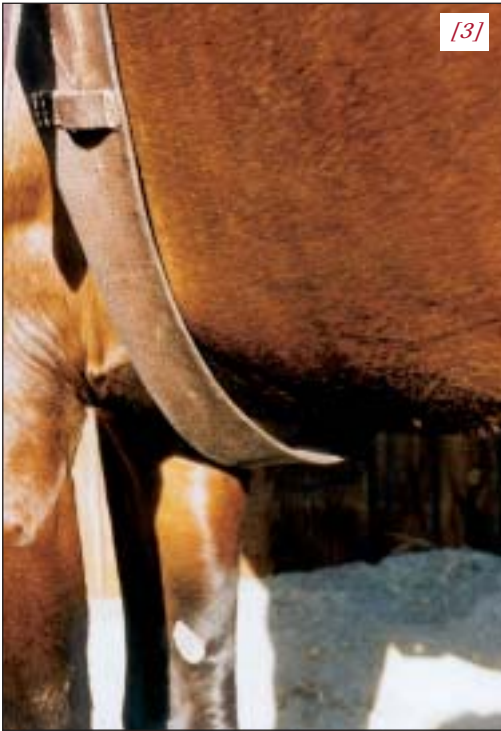
It will save time to repeat the leading process around the reverse circle before we start as, possibly because of the equine optical mechanism by which each eye sees a different picture, there is every chance that he will view this very similar task with extreme suspicion. We simply repeat the procedure, but we must be prepared for at least a repeat of any difficulties we encountered going anticlockwise. The yearlings that have been previously lunged by others may frequently be very troublesome going this way. As before, the object is to resist any excitement and to finish on a positive note.

Depending on the yearling's reactions we should now press on with his education as quickly as we can without at all alarming him and causing a setback. The reason for this is that we cannot absolutely predict the attitudes of those horses still to come, and if there is a difficult one we may need more time to spend on him. The riding lads will also be more relaxed about their task as soon as the first ones are ridden away successfully. The weather can also be unpredictable, and it is not ideal to have many horses still to break if we do get frozen in.

As soon as he is lunging calmly it is time to get some tack on our pupil. Opinions vary as to the best method, but this one has been found safe and effective. On his return to his box after exercise we can carefully fit him with a light roller with a breast girth, such as is worn over paddock clothing at the races. As this is very insubstantial it causes very little objection in most cases. We keep the bridle on and we first allow the horse to smell and examine the roller. Next we place the roller, which is folded in half, gently over the withers. When he seems comfortable with feeling it moving and touching him, the breast girth can be carefully secured. There is no need to tuck the strap ends into the billets at this point. Once the breast girth is fastened we can lift the doubled up belly band up and down a few times to let him see



[2]



and feel it before carefully passing the buckle end over to the off side. We do not throw it over and we try to ensure it does not flap against the off knee causing him to jump. Whilst keeping the horse occupied both with voice and by moving the bit in his mouth, we can reach down and do up the belly band extremely loosely [3]; it should not initially come within three inches of the horse. With a big horse we may need a longer roller as we do not want him to plunge and try to get it off if he suddenly becomes aware of it because there are not enough holes to fit him loosely to start with. We give him a turn around the stable and then take the roller up a hole, and repeat this one hole at a time. This will occupy a little time, but he should soon be quite content with the roller secured, so that it is just touching him but without feeling tight, and nothing worse will have been done than putting his back up a little. This is a far better system than one that risks alarming the animal by pulling the roller

up too quickly, from the angles both of safety and of trust which is vital to the learning process. The less crashing and banging the prospective riding lads hear, the better for their morale! Once we are satisfied that the roller has been accepted, we can tuck in the ends of all straps, ensure that the breast girth is reasonably tight but that the belly band is about half an inch or so from touching him when he is standing relaxed, and leave him in soak. We can check now and again that everything is still in place and we may by evening stable time find he has somehow or other got out of it, but, as long as he hasn't destroyed it or eaten it, he should not object to having it carefully refitted. Horses that do flinch when the roller is put on or off for grooming should continue to wear it in the stable, even though they may have progressed to the saddle for exercise. Of course, many yearlings will have worn stable rugs before the sale and will be unconcerned by the roller; however, these procedures assume that the horse has never worn anything about his body. Always do the breast girth up first and undo it last; this is an absolute rule, which also applies to all rugs in all stables at all times.

With most yearlings we can quite easily upgrade from the paddock roller to the breaking roller, which is much more substantial. As we already have the light roller fitted we can take him out to lunge with it on, keeping his attention so that he does not attempt to plunge when he comes out into the open. He may also be inclined to plunge at first when we start to lunge, but we should avoid this if we let the belly band out a hole or two for the first few turns and then quietly take it up, and repeat the procedure. If this goes smoothly it is time to substitute the heavy breaking roller, and again we take a few turns with it quite loose before gradually tightening it. This roller feels much more restrictive to him but we still wish to avoid him having a go if at all possible. As the change of rollers takes place with virtually no

Racing Horses



time lag it is normally easily accomplished.

One of the old theories that has stuck in people's minds is that horses should be encouraged to struggle and fight in order to "get it out of their system". This is almost certainly based on a faulty recollection of an old theory of correcting spoiled horses through the use of some self-punishing appliance. However, particularly in the absence of anyone competent to apply such a theory, it seems reasonable to assume that if we don't teach our pupil to buck he may in fact never buck, which will obviously be an advantage to all concerned. Trainers need to be aware of their ever-increasing responsibilities under the Safety At Work legislation, and to implement the safest possible procedures.

Once we have the big roller on and have gradually tightened it to the extent that it is quite stable although not yet squeezing him, it is time to add the side reins. Again these will be introduced in such a way that he will scarcely notice them at first. Both side reins should be attached to the roller at a length that we judge will be too long for him to feel them at all even with his head right down [4]. They are crossed over the withers and fastened to the bit below the lunge rein. After a few turns we can shorten them slightly, and we repeat this until he is conscious that he has them on, in that he can no longer get his head right down, but not to where he feels he wants to fight them [5]. An approximate measurement might be that the

side rein should hang three or four inches below an imaginary line from the cross on the withers to the bit when the horse is standing normally. After he has become accustomed to them and has been round both ways a few times we can call it a day. We should, as always in the early stages, take care that the clockwise circle is not allowed to become an excuse for excitement.

The horse should if possible be given his exercise without getting black with sweat and if this proves difficult he should be trace clipped. Funnily enough, most yearlings are quite simple to clip at this stage. To save time and trouble if they do show a tendency to kick whilst being clipped, we need trace clip only as far as the stifle. This will save us from trying to make sure the rear view matches whilst also trying to avoid getting kicked. As long as the neck and belly are done, that is sufficient. Difficult cases can, of course, be sedated. The fact that, on average, most yearlings prove easier than most older horses to clip is indicative of how easily they tend to accept things of which they have no previous experience, as long as they do not become alarmed. This is the prime reason for not wasting time on the breaking process with those animals that progress normally, as familiarity does tend to breed contempt if too much time is spent without progressing to the next stage.

It is a good idea to ensure that all yearlings are quiet with the hose pipe at this stage, in order to save time in the summer when they

will be bathed daily after exercise. Obviously we will not bathe them in the cold weather, but they should become accustomed to having their legs and feet washed. The hose pipe should be carefully introduced, initially at low pressure, to the feet and then to the legs and to the girth area. We must always have an assistant and be prepared to waste a little time at first; however, learning this lesson properly will save hours over the course of the animal's career. This procedure should be learnt with a minimum of fuss, so as to avoid accidents such as the horse slipping over. In difficult cases two assistants may be necessary and sensible use of one of the more humane twitches, a war bridle or comealong halter, or even of sedation, might be indicated. Once a horse has accepted the hose pipe he is normally sensible with it for life, and in fact it can prove an important lesson in overall obedience for certain rebellious types. Actually, many old horsemen relied heavily on desensitising their pupils by obliging them to accept distasteful situations, thereby emphasising the fact that the horse could not resist the instructions of his handler. As remarked elsewhere, these practices fell from grace because they came to be badly applied by those who failed to understand their reasoning properly. The troublesome subjects will invariably be those horses that have been accustomed to resisting their handlers generally before we get them, rather than the completely unhandled ones.

A common injury to horses being lunged, even if they are barefoot, is an overreach on the bulb of the front heel caused by a blow from the hind foot. Any minor flap of skin should be removed, and the wound should be cleaned thoroughly. Either the ubiquitous blue spray or an antibiotic cream such as Dermobion will normally prove effective, and the wound should be left open to the air in most cases. The spray is alarming to some horses as the hissing sound it makes is swiftly followed by a severe stinging sensation, and this can cause much apprehension

at the follow-up treatment. Yearlings seem to take very little notice of these wounds, although the same thing might render an older horse quite lame. There will sometimes be chafes caused by the boots, although these will be kept to a minimum if the boots are religiously cleaned. Dermobion is normally effective in dealing with them, although a piece of clean lint should be worn under the boot until the leg heals. If a horse should ever sustain a very serious cut it is well worth treating it with honey, although it is obviously a very messy remedy; veterinary advice should, of course, also be sought.

Although the horse will normally continue to wear the roller 24 hours a day at this stage we must ensure that it does not cause him to chafe, and his girth mark should be removed as well as possible before the roller is refitted and he is loosed. The roller should be just loose enough to admit a couple of fingers, about half an inch from his body when he is standing normally [6].



Racing Horses



As long as we are quite confident that our pupil has accepted his lessons so far with good grace, we should proceed to the next step, which is the saddle. However, we must always remember that more haste often means less speed. There is no point in rushing if it will mean we lose time in the end. The only point of trying to make this fairly rapid progress is to allow more time for any difficult horses so it is obviously vital that we do not create an additional problem by overtaxing our current pupil.

When we do decide to put the saddle on it is important to know beforehand exactly how we intend to go about it. We should do this in the stable, not in the open. The bridle and boots are fitted as usual. We should always put the boots on before fitting any tack on yearlings, as it can save them jumping on us when we are bending over their legs should they suddenly feel the tack and have a momentary fit of panic. If this happens when we are standing up it is unlikely that we will be hurt, but if we are bending down it could easily lead to an injury. This is a reminder that no horse should ever have his legs attended to without first being tied up; accidents from this cause may be infrequent but they can be extremely serious. As a boy I had four or five square inches of bone removed from the top of my skull by a very quiet horse called Dan Somers, purely by ignoring this simple standing instruction and letting him down to eat his evening feed before attending to his knees.

Next, we put on a standing martingale, at a long adjustment, and fasten it to the bottom ring of the head collar. With the assistant holding the yearling, or with the lunge attached to the bridle and either held or in a neat coil on the floor below the horse's head – that is to say the horse should not be tied up for this first saddling – we can let him inspect and smell the saddle and pad in the same way we did with the roller. Using an assistant is safer. The side reins should be attached to the saddle and again should initially be left very long and must obviously be level. They should be tied in a loose knot in front of the saddle and the buckle ends tucked through the near side stirrup, while the other ends should be under the second girth strap and pointing back out of the way [7]. Both stirrups must be tied up, not just run up on the leathers. It is important to insist that the saddle is also arranged like this every time it is taken off a yearling in order to prevent problems with putting it on the next horse. Throughout the yearling season, all keepers for attaching side reins to the girth straps should be securely tied to the top of the girth straps with string, in order to avoid time wasted searching for any those that fall off when the saddle is being used for an old horse (which would obviously not require the side reins themselves). The best type of pad or numnah is a soft one that is well worn and pliable. The mock sheepskin ones in the shape of the saddle do very well. After the horse has

Breaking In Process



been allowed to examine the tack with his nose, we first place the pad on the horse's withers and let him feel and see that it will not harm him. When we are sure he is quite happy we let him feel the saddle as well, making sure that the girths are folded over the seat and that they will not alarm him. We now, quickly but without rushing, sit the saddle in place on the pad, gently take down the girths, making sure they don't touch his legs, pass both girths through

the martingale, and do the girths up loosely. If the old practice of poling young horses, or gently but repeatedly touching them all over with a light pole, were implemented at the commencement of breaking they would obviously be less sensitive to everything that touched them subsequently – including the starting stalls. This is something that is worthy of cautious investigation. If we have an assistant, he attracts the horse's attention by

Racing Horses

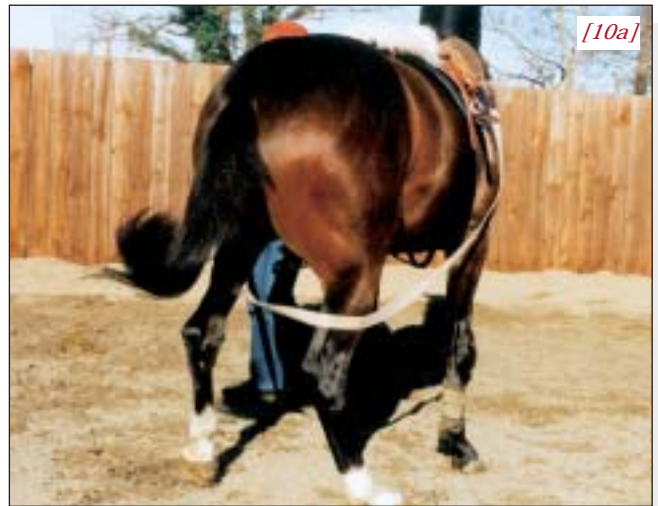
gently moving the bit; if not, we should have the dangling rein over our left arm so as to get hold of him easily if he jumps. Again there must be constant verbal communication with the yearling, especially at every fresh stage of his education. We now gradually tighten the girths to the degree that he is used to from his all-day roller, and we can then give him a turn or two around the box. The side reins can now be untied and secured to the bit, below the lunge as before. They are to be crossed over the withers and this cross is under the neck strap of the martingale. It is best to make sure that the saddle pad is further forward than normal, although the saddle obviously sits in its usual position, because the pad may tend to work back until the girths are quite tight, causing unwanted hold-ups for readjustment [8].

We are now ready to make a start on the mouthing and educating of the horse, both of which may have great bearing on the success or otherwise of his career, and we take him again into the arena. When he begins to go round this time he may tend to be aware of the new equipment, but it is not going to restrict him at the present adjustment and any jumpiness will pass quickly. We want to avoid him trying to fight his way out of the tack due to feeling trapped. When he has settled down we gradually take up the side reins as before, at the same time making sure that the girth is reasonably tight so as to avoid losing the pad [9a and 9b]. Then we can shorten the martingale to the point where he cannot quite feel it when holding his head normally but will be prevented from raising his head too high. Assuming that all goes smoothly and that he lunges quietly in both directions, we will now pass a second lunge rein over his neck and fix it to the offside of the bit, above the side rein and also through the back strap of the head collar. It is quite possible to put the second rein around most yearlings at an earlier stage, but by waiting until all the tack is on before doing so we will have much more control over the

occasional objector.

The process of physically putting the rein round him for the first time is an important stage and needs careful handling. Once again a helper can prove beneficial, although an expert may feel that things can become too crowded as initially two men and a horse will be occupying a circle of only 10 or 15 feet in diameter. We gently work the offside lunge back until it falls behind the horse's quarters, but we must keep his head towards us as he will probably panic to some degree when he feels it [10, 10a, 10b]. If he does start to run, as long as we keep him tight to us and speak to him, no harm will occur and he will soon relax. More difficult are those horses that try to sit down on the lunge and are afraid to go forward as these often tend to keep turning in towards us. The assistant may initially need to chase them round but once they are going forward the problem is soon resolved. As always, we try to avoid the horse charging about, and the steadier they go the better. To change direction we merely repeat the procedure from the off side but we must expect at least the same degree of difficulty. Once he is going both ways we begin to teach him to turn from one direction to the other [10c, 10d, 10e] without us having to stop him and actually change sides. This is relatively easy in a round pen but at first we may need to face him up the fence to stop him [11]. We can then walk across behind him before setting him off in the reverse direction. After a few times he will realise what is required and will turn easily due to the change of pressure from the front to the back rein. When the horse has grasped this we can untie the knots in the stirrup leathers in order that the irons gradually come down and start banging against his sides [12]. It may needlessly alarm him and distract his attention from the business in hand if we do it any earlier. Once this stage is reached we can alter the attachment of the lunges so that they are buckled directly onto the bit. We should realise that this set-up is more severe, but he will be ridden straight off the bit

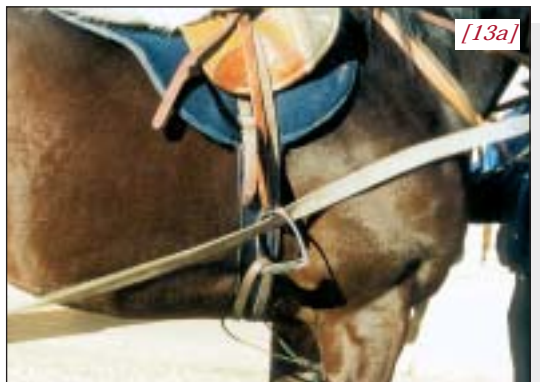
Breaking In Process



Racing Horses



Breaking In Process



and he must get used to it beforehand. We now have more control should the horse tend to be heavy-headed, which does occur in some that have previously been lunged. Working straight off the bit requires a lighter touch because none of the pressure is absorbed by the head collar, and some horses may be a little sensitive to the change at first.

There are two difficult situations which often arise at this stage. The first is the horse that will not stop running away from the back lunge; with him we initially have to use the outside fence as

a brake and if that does not soon work we can use it to stop him completely and then have the assistant lead him around until he relaxes. The second is when the horse continually kicks the back rein up and over his back. If we cannot prevent this by trapping the rein under his tail (low down, not under the bone where he can

Racing Horses

clamp down on it), we may have to run the outside rein through the stirrup [13]. The stirrups are let down and a strap is run from one iron to the other on top of the girth [13a]. This will stop him getting the rein over his back. Unfortunately, if we don't stop and reverse the attachments of the reins whenever we want to change direction then some horses will find the indirect pull on the inside rein [13b] very severe.

Very occasionally, and almost always with a filly, we will get a yearling that will not accept this back rein procedure at all. The best thing to do is to move on without too much confrontation. This will mean she cannot be driven, but many horses are successfully broken by other handlers without ever being driven. Prolonged struggling with this type does not normally produce a happy ending, and we should avoid it. If we are determined that a pupil that really objects must have the rein around, then it is best to let her desensitise herself by wearing a piece of lunge rein firmly attached to a roller or in place of the tail string of her rug constantly, until she accepts that she cannot get rid of it but that she will not be hurt by it. She should have plenty of bedding in her stable so as to avoid slipping over before she accepts that it will not come off. This attachment should initially be left in place whilst the second rein is used at exercise, in the hope that the second lunge rein itself (which is purely to enable her to be mouthed) is scarcely noticed.

Our yearling has now progressed to the stage of lunging in both directions as required and next we want to teach him to drive, so as to educate his mouth. This is an extremely important stage as it will greatly influence the way he conducts himself when ridden. The purpose of this part of his education is to teach him to follow the instructions he receives through the bit, to be steady with other horses and with traffic, and to stop and stand still as required. If he learns these lessons well, life will be easier for all of us. We will also teach him to back, not because that is a common



requirement normally, but because it is an effective form of painless correction occasionally useful for horses that rear or otherwise misbehave.

As soon as the yearling is used to the saddle, a light exercise sheet should be added, which should always have a tail string. This avoids the problems caused by his first wearing one on a wet and windy day and becoming alarmed by it flapping. Care should always be taken that whenever an exercise sheet or rug has the corners turned up, these are placed on top of the pad [14]. Now and again we can get a blemish on a horse's back caused by the weight coming on top of the area where the corners overlap if they are straight on the back. This is unsightly, uncomfortable, and difficult to get rid of, but it will never happen as long as the sheet is turned up on top of the pad and the

Breaking In Process



saddle has a proper central channel.

If we wish to put a rug on him in the stable we can basically use the same method as for putting on the saddle. The rug should of course be the right size and should initially be folded in half so that the back edge touches the withers [15]. Once the horse has been allowed to examine it we can slip it on as easily as the

saddle without alarming him and this careful method should always be used for a few days. It is quite simple to unfold the rug over his back, but the breast strap must always be secured first. The same procedure for the girths is followed as before but the flank strap should not come within two or three inches of touching his belly. The rug should have a tail string and some antichew preparation should be applied. Occasionally a particularly nervous horse that has not had any handling may have to be desensitised by wearing a rug in order to avoid wasting too much time because he is unusually frightened of the tack. Great care should be taken in fitting and removing the rug initially in such circumstances, and there must be plenty of bedding to avoid accidents.

The driving process evolves easily from the change of direction on the lunge. We simply let the horse walk in the circle whilst initially walking level with his hindquarters but a few feet to the side [16,16a,16b]. This is very similar to what we have been doing when we lunged him, and the only problem is to let him know we want to walk rather than trot. Again we can do this by use of the outside fence as a brake, but he will quickly realise what is required. As soon as he seems ready to walk we can leave the round pen for the adjacent open arena, but it is safer to remain in a fairly enclosed area until we are quite confident that our student is relaxed and is responding to the bit. When teaching him to stop we again make use of the fence. Initially we let him approach it at 90° so that he has to stop, which makes him associate the stop with the positive but fairly gentle pressure on the bit and the request, "Whoa". Immediately he stops the pressure on the bit is relaxed and the horse is warmly praised for his cooperation in the tone used to praise dogs and small children. The success of our whole racing enterprise will largely depend on the degree of cooperation we get from our horses.

When driving, the horse should walk on freely and boldly and should be encouraged if

Racing Horses

necessary with vigorous slaps on his sides with the lunges as well as a positive voice. The noise and the movement will have more effect than the discomfort, but he must absolutely learn to go purposefully forward on command. We should look ahead to anticipate all real or imagined terrors and encourage him to satisfy himself that there is no danger whenever we do encounter anything that may appear strange to him. The lunges should be neatly furled at all times to allow controlled adjustment, and their relative lengths should be subject to constant subtle change rather in the way the steering wheel of a car is fed through the hands. Basically, we do not send a left turn signal without completely relieving the tension on the right rein, and as soon as he responds to the left turn he is rewarded by the increased pressure being taken off the left rein. When walking straight there should be only very light physical contact on both reins, while constant verbal contact continues. It is recommended to walk slightly to one side of the yearling, normally to the left when travelling straight, but towards the outside, like a sheepdog, when turning. This is in order that he may see his driver, even though there is constant verbal contact, and so that he can be easily turned in a circle in an emergency. Should the latter occur, we have simply reverted to a lunging situation and can easily stop him and then set off driving once more.

Many people drive with the lunges through the irons as described previously for kickers, but this can cause serious problems if things do go wrong. Should the horse ever turn to face the driver through fear of something in his path, then the rein will be pulling him in the opposite direction and a complete tangle is the likely outcome. When the reins are not through the irons it is much easier to get out of such minor problems without their escalating. The driver is sometimes seen to be running behind a yearling, but this is extremely foolish as they will have no chance of stopping the horse if he does become startled and make a run for it.

The tone of voice is as important as the word and, although purists maintain that verbal commands should be absolutely specific, this does not happen in the racing environment. For example, "Whoa" is commonly used for both slowing down and for stopping by racing lads without seeming to cause any confusion; "No!" as a corrective does not seem to cause any confusion as the sound is so similar and the anticipated result is not dissimilar. The various requirements to walk on and trot on, and all acceleration commands are normally conveyed by a click of the tongue or a chirrup. With high rates of staff turnover, it would prove very difficult to implement a standard vocabulary. Racehorses are probably handled by more different people than any other horses except riding school inmates, and actually cope surprisingly well considering that they are also to some degree under constant pressure. Basically, all slow down requests are to be made in as quiet and as calm a voice as possible to inspire confidence, whereas speed up instructions are designed to create excitement. A brisk, no-nonsense tone should be employed when the horse seems to be undecided, and expressions of displeasure are gruff, sharp and instantaneous, so as to be obviously relevant to the offence. It might prove interesting, if the stable jockey were closely involved in riding the young horses, for him to experiment with the teaching of "Right" and "Left" to one or two of his mounts purely for his own benefit in races. This would only cause problems if attempted with the general run of lads!

When the horse has mastered the stop lesson we will teach him just two specific verbal instructions, "Stand" and "Back". Although this is not the usual racing practice they can both, on occasion, prove useful. These two lessons will both follow naturally from the stop lesson [17]. To teach the horse to stand we merely allow him to remain still after he has stopped, but we relax the pressure on the lunges whilst repeating the instruction, "Stand", and praising him [17a] until he

Breaking In Process



accepts that he is not to move. Initially, we can make use of the fence to prevent his walking forward. If he moves we simply return him to where he was. When we do wish him to move away we must signal this by a brisk click and by restoring contact through the reins. There must be an obvious relaxation in our attitude when we are standing. If this lesson is properly learnt it may prevent difficulties when he is first ridden, and it may later prove useful when saddling at the races, or in the starting stalls.

The command "Back" is simply "Stand" taken one step further. Initially, it is probably easier to have an assistant to gently push the horse back whilst we exert gentle pressure on the lunge. Again, the command must be constantly repeated as he comes back, and the pressure on the bit must be relaxed as soon as he steps back; at first one or two steps are enough [18, 18a, 18b]. Obviously, the end of the back

lesson leads into the beginning of the stand lesson and this should be reinforced verbally. This lesson well learnt can be useful in some loading procedures and in manoeuvring in confined spaces, but that is not its primary purpose. It is most useful simply because horses do not like to go backwards and will only do so themselves if they wish to avoid an even less attractive alternative. If the reversing procedure is perfectly learnt, we can use it to tackle the situation when we have a horse that continually refuses to cooperate, simply by offering him the unpleasant option of backing up or of going quietly about his business. This can be amazingly effective, but success is absolutely dependent on the back lesson having been so well learned that the horse does not contemplate disobeying it. This method of correction should only be applied in serious cases and with a good rider. In fact we should always think in terms of offering an uncooperative horse a less attractive alternative rather than punishing him with a view to him thinking that the sensible thing to do is, in effect, be sensible!

After two or three days mastering these lessons, and becoming accustomed to driving around the yard and seeing everything there, the yearling is ready to see the outside world. This should not be attempted until we are sure he has a sound grasp of steering and stopping so as not to be a danger to himself or the rest of the world, and he should have his basic exercise on the lunge before he goes out for a drive. For the first trip off the premises an assistant is an advantage, as he can walk beside the horse in order to give him a little more confidence. He can also take hold of the horse's head should we meet anything too alarming and allow him to examine it and touch it with his nose. In most cases, the horse will not then take any notice of the same obstacle the next day, even without the helper. In the same way that we gradually worked away from the fence in the arena, we try not to take the yearling into a very open space too suddenly. It is much safer to stay by a hedge or a fence for the first day

Racing Horses



until he gets his bearings, particularly as he is now likely to see strings of ridden horses, which he may regard as most exciting. We should remember that after so few lessons he may well suffer a relapse in his composure and we should always anticipate such a possibility. Obviously we will have selected an area with minimal traffic, and that traffic is probably aware of the horses, but we should exercise extreme caution in introducing him to cars and lorries. It is best to occupy the middle of the road so as to oblige traffic to stop and then to be effusive in our thanks rather than to depend upon their good sense. When passing an approaching vehicle or other horses, we always take the right-hand side. We practise the horse's new skills constantly during the course of the trip; in fact, if we do get tangled up with a string of racehorses, then the stand lesson may prove invaluable.

It is worth remembering that all horses, not just young ones, are often alarmed by the sight

even of what we would regard as objects familiar to them when such objects appear in an unaccustomed setting.

After the first day or two outside, it will be easy enough to take a more adventurous attitude and explore the various gates and railings he will encounter on and around the gallops. It is a good idea to drive him over various road markings and on and off any artificial gallops so he can become familiar with their different appearances and the steps up and down that they involve. If there is an opportunity for him to stand and watch other horses cantering, so much the better. This can prove a useful accomplishment in later life as he can be used as the trainer's hack when required.

Some methods will have acquainted the yearling with the starting stalls on the gallops at this point. This does involve some risk of getting into a confrontation without having the help on hand to resolve it successfully. Given

Breaking In Process

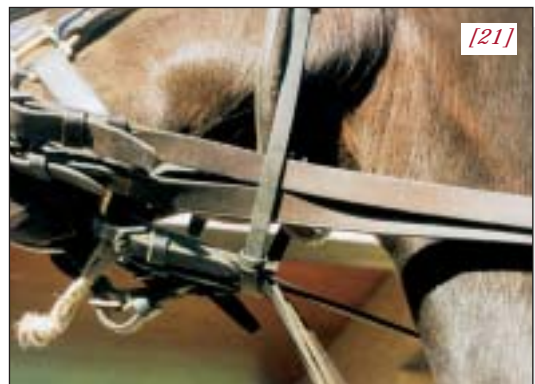


the long-term importance of stalls manners, we can hardly regard that as a sensible risk. If we do have stalls at the home premises, we can effect an early introduction with enough help available to ensure success.

This part of the curriculum should last about a week, which may mean we have now invested a total of two weeks in an averagely sensible animal. With reasonable luck, another week will see the yearling riding quietly and ready to commence his actual training as a racehorse.

As a general rule we always try to get any yearling ridden for the first time at the beginning of the week if possible. If, unavoidably, an individual does happen to first get backed at the end of the week then he should go out on Sunday, so as not to risk forgetting his lesson at an early stage. It is remarkable how well many horses seem to digest something new overnight, in the sense that they will appear much improved next day, but it is also true that to miss a day at any pivotal stage is inviting trouble.

We will make a start on the backing of our horse after he has done his full exercise so that he has already got his back down. We must fit a pair of riding reins to the bit, and when the horse is to be ridden they go above the side rein [19]. The main control rein always goes on top, so for lunging and driving the lunge should be on top. If possible, all breaking tack should be made to a standard pattern as various items are frequently



broken or lost; if everything is interchangeable, two halves will make a whole. Because of other horses' exercise we may not immediately have a suitable rider available and we may have to leave our yearling in soak until we do have one. If we do this we must always be certain he cannot get in a tangle as we don't want to risk leaving him tied up for any length of time. The stirrups must be safely tied up and if the riding reins are fitted they should be crossed over the withers and their end placed under the back of the saddle [20]. Everything beneath the horse's neck, that is, reins, side reins and the martingale, should either be caught up inside the throat latch, if it is long enough, or else be gathered together with a short piece of string in order to prevent him getting a foot over them [21]. The hay should be taken out of the box so that he does not try to reach it.

When our riding lad does appear, we remove

Racing Horses

the tie from the reins, take the reins from behind the saddle and reattach the lunge. The lad should introduce himself to the horse and should not be wearing a very bulky jacket or crackly waterproofs. He must wear his helmet. The top door should be closed to lessen distractions and there should be plenty of bedding in the middle of the stable.

Holding the horse's head towards the wall to prevent his jumping forward too violently, we gently lift the lad to lean across the saddle with his left elbow hooked over the horse's neck to give him a little purchase. If this results in a violent plunge, the lad simply slips down and we try again, talking positively and soothingly to the horse (and the lad!) all the time. In most cases, if the lad is willing and fairly supple there will be little difficulty, but the reason for the dress code is now obvious. We quietly persevere until we can take one or two turns around the box, then slip the rider off. This should be repeated until both going up and coming down are completely accepted. After four or five repeats we can normally get the lad astride, reminding him to make sure he goes up cleanly, and to keep his head down for a short time to avoid visually alarming the horse. After one or two laps crouched over he can gradually straighten up. Throughout this procedure the wall is to be used as a brake in the event of any charging about.

After a few minutes the lad can allow his new mount to feel his legs against his sides. He can then pick up the reins and shift his weight about in the saddle, although control is still through the lunge rein. If we give him a turn in the other direction without difficulty we can loose him and let the lad ride him, both ways, around the box for a few minutes whilst we watch from outside.

We always take hold of the horse's head before the lad dismounts as this can easily cause alarm, leading to an ongoing bad habit. It is best to reinforce the mounting lesson several times before we finish for the day. In fact, yearlings should always be carefully dismounted and then remounted a couple of times when they come in

after exercise for the first few days.

We have to decide how well each yearling accepts the lad before going any further, as some will obviously do so quicker than others. A good, though not foolproof, guide is how much the horse has his back up. A back still raised normally foretells a possible explosion, but we cannot guarantee that a relaxed horse won't suddenly light up, so we should always hope for the best but be prepared for the worst.

A great disadvantage to yearling breakers nowadays is the virtual absence of anyone willing and able to ride anything remotely challenging. Previously, the younger lads used to be mad keen to show that they could do a man's job and far from being frightened they might have been too bold. Unfortunately, nowadays that particular age group seem to assume that they have nothing to prove, and tend to be very short of the necessary pluck when it is required. This does not imply that we should be looking for cannon fodder but it is indisputable that any horse can immediately pick up on nervousness. Many of the problems that do occur would be avoided if the riding lads were more confident, which in turn would naturally lead to the lads themselves being more competent. That is why an absolute and seemingly rather pedantic procedure is advised, in the hope of giving the lads and the horses more faith in themselves and in each other. The present fashion of riding with only the tips of the toes in the iron is not recommended and we should not allow it. A relatively minor plunge can very often produce a loose horse, when the foot being well home in the iron would have enabled an uneventful recovery. The argument that there is less likelihood of becoming hung up is indicative of a defeatist attitude which is of no use in a yearling rider.

As long as the backing went fairly smoothly, the following day should see the yearling ridden in the arena. He should be lunged for 10 or 15 minutes so as to take the edge off his natural freshness, and the previous day's backing procedure repeated exactly. When he has

Breaking In Process

completed a few turns of the box with his rider we can take him out. The girths should be checked for security but should not be too tight, and the side reins can be shortened slightly. The lunge is attached and we lead him straight to the arena, making sure his attention is centred on the leader by voice and by jiggling the bit in his mouth. We will sometimes encounter a little excitability when first in the open, but we should do our best to reach the arena as quickly and quietly as possible. If a pony is outside the door when we come out we are virtually certain of getting to the arena without any fuss, as the yearling will be watching him with great interest. The pony referred to can, of course, be a horse in training, just as long as he is quiet and will not kick whatever happens. Obviously he must be a male, preferably a gelding. The object is to phase in the situation of tacking up the yearling and mounting him immediately like an old horse, but we should take care to progress gradually in a manner that does not create any unruly habits.

All yearlings should be ridden with one of the lad's fingers in the neck strap to avoid pulling on the horse's mouth in an emergency and to give extra security. However, as this can tend to produce one-sidedness in a horse's mouth, care must be taken to change the stationary hand regularly. This will need constant reminders, but will also prevent the riders from becoming one-sided in their use of their hands.

Once we get into the arena, assuming the yearling has not really got his back up, we can lead him round the perimeter behind the pony. After a lap or two we tell the pony to jog on and we follow, being careful not to allow the yearling to charge about, if possible. It is normally safe to undo the lunge almost immediately and most yearlings will continue trotting behind the pony without registering any change. The lad on the pony must always be aware of where the yearling is and should try to maintain an invisible contact of not more than one or two lengths, otherwise the pupil may fall behind and

get confused. He will then be very likely to stop. If, on the other hand, the yearling is tending to run all over the pony's heels, the pony boy must ensure that his mount is not provoked into kicking. He should also be on his guard against a cheeky colt jumping on the pony. In fact, he must always remember that the yearling rider does not yet have very sophisticated control and that his own job is to assist as much as possible without unduly risking the pony, which may be needed for many subsequent missions. The pony rider should also keep up a cheerful sing-song, both to keep his own mount's mind occupied and to reinforce the idea that the pony is something to follow.

If the yearling does have his back right up when we reach the arena it is best to lunge him with the lad on board for a few minutes before turning him loose. If yearlings miss exercise for two or three days for any reason, it is as well to do the same thing.

Occasionally the yearling will seem too confused to follow the pony, even if he has previously done everything perfectly. When this happens we must improvise. If we run beside him and the pony comes past from behind he may join in. If we lunge him and have the pony drop in in front of him he may get the idea, or if we chase him waving our arms and tossing clods of dirt he will probably, in running away from us, have lapped onto the pony before he realises it. The vocal encouragement should always sound cheerful, like a huntsman encouraging his hounds. The riding lad must be sure that the horse does have his head so that he can go forward. The side reins will prevent him from getting his head right down to plunge, and if he does shoot forward the rear of the pony will stop him. For the safety of the pony, the benefit of unshod yearlings in this situation is obvious. The lad on the yearling cannot be expected to take quite such a conscientious view of the pony's welfare and will probably have little regard for keeping his mount off that schoolmaster's back legs. In the unusual case of

Racing Horses

a yearling absolutely refusing to go, we should try to finish on a positive note in some way, even if it is back on the lead rein, and he should be put back on a purely lunging and driving routine with emphasis on teaching immediate start-up on verbal command. It is essential that yearlings are not overtired by too severe exercise at this stage, despite the wishes of the riders. The very sullen and defiant types at this stage will normally not prove to be satisfactory racehorses in the long term.

If the rider can be persuaded to take an attitude of benevolent aggression at this stage, it usually prevents problems in a few days' time when the yearling will have found his 'sea legs' and may be inclined to take his rider on and rebel to some degree. This does not imply any cruelty, but it does mean that the rider should have no hesitation in making free both with his heels and on occasion with the buckle end of the reins (whips should never be carried on yearlings, ever) to get his horse going freely on command. However, human nature being what it is, most of our riders will be extremely passive if we allow them to, being satisfied to settle for a quiet life presently even though they might be asking for trouble in the future. Although it may appear rather rough, a certain amount of rousing during the first couple of ridden sessions definitely produces the best long-term results in most horses. As it is currently almost impossible to find lads who do understand these matters, we hope our system may teach them as well as the horses. Obviously, we do not want to abuse any horse, even if only from a commercial point of view. However, experience proves that a yearling is far more receptive during the first lessons as everything is new to him, and it makes sense to teach him thoroughly the basics of going where we say and when we say so at this stage. While appreciating that many may find this offensive, it is a fact that the more passive the regime the higher the percentage of graduates that do eventually cause problems.

It is very important in educating young

horses to observe logical processes, as perceived by the pupil. It is senseless to continue to punish in any way an animal once he is going forward. If the rider maintains a stranglehold through apprehension then a confusing signal is sent; the horse must always be given enough freedom of his head to enable him to go on when he is required to do so. It is also quite illogical, although not uncommon due to fear and apprehension in the rider, to pet a horse when he is refusing to go as directed. If any horse does get in a state of extreme excitement the stand lesson should be employed rather than seeming to praise the animal for disobedience.

Unusually nervous yearlings again call for a certain amount of improvisation and cannot always be subjected to all of our normal methods. In fact, they may take several extra days to accept each of the above stages. It is because we never know when we may have to invest an enormous amount of time in one of this type that we should get on as quickly as is reasonable with the quiet ones. The first rule with the nervous ones is always take your time and do not take any liberties at all as they can often explode. However, because of the extra trouble taken with them, these horses very often become the best rides in the end. The most difficult type of all is the nervous colt that is also cheeky and above himself, and this type does require extreme caution to achieve a good result.

Those yearlings that appear incapable of learning normally should be regarded with suspicion, particularly should similarly afflicted individuals share a common background either as regards breeding or the premises from which they were drawn. Any obsessive or erratic behaviour or apparent stupidity quite possibly indicates some impairment of their brain or central nervous system. These animals are unlikely to race consistently at a respectable level. Howard Beissinger confirms, in *The New Care And Training Of The Trotter And Pacer*, that to persevere in wasting time with slow learners is, overall, a sure recipe for disaster in

a racing stable. The number of stupid ones that will eventually make the grade will not repay the extra time spent on these animals as a whole. Symptoms associated with Lyme disease in humans, as described by sufferer Angela Knight in *The Daily Telegraph* on 29 June 1999, include inability to concentrate and impairment of short-term memory, overacute hearing and jumpy vision. We may see some yearlings whose behaviour might be well explained were they suffering similar symptoms. If untreated, these problems can hardly do other than severely compromise any hope of meaningful athletic achievement in a racehorse.

It should be noted that certain diseases may well be transmittable to humans in a variety of ways, and in the light of some very unpleasant examples worldwide in recent years this fact should be borne in mind.

When the yearling will follow the pony happily around the arena, perhaps doing a few figures of eight, we can finish the first ridden lesson. We practise dismounting and mounting the rider three or four times before putting the horse away.

The next day our yearling should require only a brief lunge before being ridden and, if he has previously proved sensible to mount, the lad can be put on in the arena without going back to the stable. We place the horse's head against the fence as a precaution when mounting and the pony should be standing by.

When he has been going round for a few minutes with a lead we can send the pony out or to one corner and see how the yearling goes on his own. If he seems relaxed and steers well enough in the figures of eight, we can take him off the premises to see how he reacts. As he has been driven outside on several occasions he will probably behave well. We should not be too complacent, however, and unless we have complete faith in both the yearling rider and the pony rider we should go with them on the first trip. Once again it is advisable to remain close to any fence or hedge until we see how the land

lies, but as long as the yearling seems calm he will soon be able to venture into more open territory and jog in circles to practise steering. At first he should stick close to the pony but after a few minutes he may be taken a short distance away to learn to steer rather than follow. Care must be taken that he is close to the pony if they meet a string of horses at this stage, as although he may become excited and forget himself he will tend to follow the pony. Over the next days he will be taught to become self-reliant.

Any nearby artificial gallops can be walked on and off. If this is not practised, long delays can sometimes result when we have to cross one of these tracks, which might involve a step of over a foot high, on the way to some distant part of the gallops. The stand and back lessons should be practised before taking him home. As previously stated, it is important not to get yearlings too tired.

After a day or two, the yearling should be fit to be mounted straight away but as he is no longer being lunged it is advisable to ride him around the box a few times before going outside. The mounting and dismounting after exercise should continue for a week, or until he is perfect, and if there is ever any question of not being perfect the practice should be reinstated, as a horse that is difficult to mount is a nuisance at the races.

This general programme is continued for a few days and by the end of the third week we should have a fairly civilised embryonic racehorse. He will have had an introduction to hack cantering but this should initially be very steady, with the lad sitting in the saddle to avoid any danger of excitement. Hopefully he will have a decent mouth on him and will have learned his two verbal commands, although these should be reinforced daily for some time.

By now the yearling should be treated almost like an old horse in the stable but patience will still be required. He should not be left tied up for too long as yet and his hay should not be in the box when he is tied up so

a not to tempt him to get loose. The method used to prevent him from getting loose should also be effective in preventing him from scraping his bed up when left tied up; he will soon form the impression that there is always someone outside watching him. However, there is absolutely no point in chastising him when he is not actually scraping, as often happens purely because the lad cannot be bothered to adopt the correct procedure. Twenty minutes teaching this lesson over three or four days will save hours straightening his bed over the course of the horse's career. He should be required to pick his feet up carefully whenever he gets across the stable, initially by having them gently tapped with the side, not the point, of the fork.

The turning and figure of eight period is now largely behind him and we may think about getting the yearling reshod in front as there will now be less danger of the shoes getting pulled off at exercise. There is no need for hind shoes at this point unless they are fitted for a specific purpose such as to prevent brushing, although attention should be given to keeping the hind feet balanced. We will deal with shoeing elsewhere.

The breaking tack can now be discarded for a plain, jointed snaffle with a bib-running martingale. If the sweet mouth was used for breaking there will be no change of bit. The martingale will normally be adjusted so that the ring almost touches the angle of the jaw and the throat when the horse is standing normally, but may be better slightly shorter for the first day or two. A bib presents less danger of a horse getting hold of his martingale, which can cause a panic. The side reins should be left on for a couple of days and should go outside the bib [22]. Martingales should not be used with buckle-on reins unless stops are fitted to prevent the ring lodging on the buckle which can cause a panic attack.

It is best not to allow yearlings much hard feed whilst they are being broken, although they should have good hay ad lib. A Timothy mixture

is probably best, but it should be bright in colour and not too hard in texture. Top-class meadow hay of the type seen sometimes as feed for show goats would be ideal, but does not seem to be available; presumably it is carefully made in small quantities for a specialised market. If they also receive a small feed at night, about four pounds of good oats with some wet bran, or a similar amount of manufactured mix, it will be quite sufficient until they start to canter properly. In fact, even this small amount of hard food can add to the difficulty of breaking some particularly uncooperative yearlings, and these rebellious ones will come to no harm on hay and water until they are going quietly.

This breaking regime will not be regarded as fashionable nowadays, and indeed there may be much to be said for those systems that are based on total cooperation between man and horse. They are certainly refreshing in that they have resurrected knowledge of, and general interest in, equine behaviour worldwide. However they do tend to be reliant on personnel who are both knowledgeable and dedicated, and so are of limited use in a racing environment. The method described above may seem, particularly in its emphasis on minor detail, to be both old-fashioned in its recommendations and boring to read. It is offered as a basis for safely breaking the vast majority of yearlings under the prevailing conditions. It has produced the most prolific winning two-year-old in Britain on six occasions.

