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HORSE BREEDERS AND OWNERS CONFERENCE

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TOPIC # 2 TRAINING AND DEVELOPING A CHAMPION

You can select a horse with great conformation, tremendous abilities, a willing mind, and bred to do what you desire. All these ingredients are nothing if you don't have a trainer who knows how to develop the abilities of a horse. A horse trainer is but one piece of the pie. He is the piece of the pie that brings all the other pieces together.

Developing a champion is to know how to bring each individual horse to its maximum of performance. The first things that I will do with a horse brought to me is to eliminate any hindrance to his training. Lets say that I have been brought a horse who is just turning two years old .

A. Teeth--I call my horse dentist and have him go completely over the mouth of this horse. He has the knowledge to inspect his mouth for wolf teeth, caps, teeth that are out of alignment or need pulled. The mouth is my telegraph station to the rest of the body. If the telegraph keys are all messed up and hurt each time they are touched--the body of the horse will respond by stiffening up, bracing, or simply running off. A horse whose mouth needs attention will often not be able to receive nutrition from his food.
ELIMINATE THE PROBLEM.

B. Feet--My shoer is called in to go over the hoof and get us started off in the right direction. Sometimes he will suggest that I leave the 2 year old barefooted until I am ready to start hauling and seasoning it. I have sandy soil and not many rocks. Sometimes he will suggest shoeing it. I value his opinion and stay open to his suggestions.

C. Health care--next, my vet and I start the horse on a consistent health program. I keep careful records of medications, shots, worming and/or any specific needs of each individual. We look over the animal for any sores, fungus, or potential problems.

D. Mind--by the time I have caught and saddled the 2-yr. old, I can tell alot about his attitude and also have an idea how he has been handled up to this point in his life. You can have a horse with great abilities and a bad mind and he may never make a champion. You can also have a horse that had a good mind and ruin him in training. Some of the things that ruin a mind are:

1. Pushing young horses beyond their maturity and ability to learn. **THEY ARE ALL INDIVIDUALS. TREAT THEM AS SUCH.**
2. Abuse--there is a big difference in training a horse and forcing him. The difference is abuse. A key factor here to remember is this: If the horse is learning, he becomes quiet and confident. If he is confused and scared, he becomes nervous and excited. When training for the LONG HAUL, there is no place for abuse. An abused animal will never trust and love his job.
3. Overworking a horse until he becomes sore in his body--you must know when to start and when to stop. You must know when to let a horse air up and fill his lungs. Most breakdowns (in sound conformation horses) result from running a horse out of air. Study up on this.
4. Expecting too much--too fast. Spurs and whips enter in here. **REMEMBER** this: If a horse does not understand a maneuver and you spur or whip him--he will do the maneuver **WRONG BUT FASTER**. If this what you want--or do you want a horse that understands exactly what he is doing and gets it solid? The choice is yours as a trainer. **A SOLID FOUNDATION IS WHAT I AM AFTER.** I have found over the years that you can go back and tune up a horse over and over that has a sound foundation. You always have a place to go back to start. Rush him prematurely and you are likely to have a horse who associates training with nervousness and gets too scared to learn. (The same holds true with children that I work with who have been pushed, yelled at and shamed by their parents.)
5. Training for futurities or training to develop a long-lasting champion. This is a good place to say a word about futurities. The big money futurities in the barrel racing industry are for horses in their 4-year old year. There are also some for 5 yr. old horses, but the biggest monetary gain is for 4 yr. olds. This means that you will start the horse in his two year old year--be exhibiting and seasoning him in his 3 yr. old year and take him to futurities early in his 4 yr. old year. **THIS MEANS THAT YOU ARE HAVING TO LET THE CALENDAR** tell you where you need to be in his training. I have a problem with this in that if the horse is not ready to be pushed, I would rather

skip the next payments on the up-coming futurity and prefer to train the horse as HE shows me he is ready to go to the next step.

This is obviously a controversial subject because the money is very large for the horse in his 4 year old year. I LOVE HORSES more than I love money. I am sometimes sickened by what I see at big futurities. Will you train by the calendar or by the signs that your colt is giving you? You have a choice. In my training contract with the public, I reserve the right to send your horse home if I feel that it would be ruined by training by the calendar. (There are plenty of other people who will take it--this is a personal conviction)

E. First rides: I prefer to start my own 2 yr. olds because the first saddlings are so important. I do them all exactly alike. I have a small gag bit that I put in their mouth. I hook a lead line to the side of the draw bit and lunge them in a large circle without fences. They learn to circle while respecting the inside rein. Their head is slightly turned to the inside, and when I can pull slightly on the inside and they give me their head both directions and stop when I say WHOA, I usually get on them. I ride most of them the first day. If they are real spooky, I sometimes pony them around the place on a seasoned horse, or get my daughter to keep me on the line for the first ride or pony her on their back. You learn to read a horse and simply know pretty much what he is going to do after you have worked with many of them.

My greatest aim is to gain their trust and confidence. I have no great program or anything difficult--it is very, very simple. I want my two year olds to learn to walk, trot, and canter confidently--lope circles--stop, back-up and trail ride quietly through the pasture. I start them around the pattern and do the same thing in the same spot EVERY time. Horses are creatures of habit and you must teach them consistently to have a consistent champion later.

F. Facility--To train and develop a champion, you must have a facility. It need only to be workable, simple and clean. It does not have to be elaborate, but some things are a necessity.

1. Ground--you cannot train a horse to turn around a barrel without footing that gives him confidence. If he feels his feet slipping, he will protect himself by stiffening up and lose his suppleness and confidence. When a horse turns on slick ground and his hind leg goes out behind him, it will cause him to become sore in the stifles, hip musts, and/or up in his back.

There are many types of soil and they change with weather conditions. If you are not sure how to prepare the ground in your area, ask a knowledgeable person to help you. You may need to invest in sand hauled in and mixed with your area soil. You may need to haul some sand out--whatever the investment, it will be worth it to have ideal conditions that will bring confidence to the horses you are training.

2. Equipment--You cannot train a horse without proper fitting equipment. Bits that pinch, saddles that do not fit--etc. are a great hindrance to training. This was one of the hardest parts of training in Brazil--the lack of available equipment. I never realized how much I took for granted until I was without some of the equipment that we needed.

3. Housing Conditions--Your facility must have a clean, safe place for your horses to live. If you keep them in stalls--they should be clean, level, and safe. If you have outdoor pens, be sure they have a place of shelter in case of severe weather. Good, clean water, and top quality grain and hay are a MUST in your training program.

Breeding

Conformation

Mind

Ability

Facility

Equipment

Patience and Knowledge

Health Care

Consistency

Training

There are many pieces to the pie--you need all of them to develop champions.

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