

# Starting the Youngster Under Saddle: For the Horse That Has Been Raised with People

By Katherine Lark

**F**or the foal that has been raised with constant human contact or one that has been orphaned, some of the popular methods for starting wild horses are not as useful as old-fashioned, classical gentling techniques.

The handled colt knows how to lead, tie, etc. And, if he was taught to lead with a butt rope around his haunches, he understands moving forward from behind instead of being pulled. The handled colt walks beside his person instead of following behind. When the person is at the colt's shoulder, both human and horse are in the safest position.

for the handler, to help the colt feel successful without the use of fear or bribery. The longe is not a place to "wear down" the young horse; it is where he learns to behave and listen and carry a variety of tack before the rider adds the burden of her weight.

If the colt is too full of energy or the day is cold and windy, allow him to run freely in a field, turn out, arena or a round pen before the lesson starts.

The use of verbal commands/aids is essential to this foundation work. As the trainer, you must master yourself and con-

longe cavesson or a bosal. A halter will not do because it can twist so easily about the head, and the signals become confused.

The longe cavesson will have a padded metal, hinged plate over the colt's nose with three rings, one on top and one on each side of the nose plate. You fasten the line to the ring on the inside of the circle direction you plan to go or on the top/middle ring. I prefer the top ring, but I use the side rings on a horse that likes to pull. If you are using a bosal, simply tie the longe line into the heel of the noseband where the reins attach.



Two-year-old Ghia, who was orphaned at birth, relaxed and confident on the longe line.



Ghia working in-hand to the left.

When the colt is at this stage (easily accomplished with handling from birth or even from weaning), the lessons on the longe can begin at age two with walking and halting only. These longeing lessons are the foundation – the first important steps to work under saddle. Because the young horse is on a constant circle while longeing, each session must be short, five-to-ten minutes in each direction. The colt's attention span is short also, and the goal of these lessons is to teach respect

and control – you speak to the colt only while you longe him and use the same consistent words and tones of voice in a clear manner so you do not confuse him.

The first basic equipment used is simply the longe line (25-foot long will do to start), the longe whip (start with a simple four-foot stick or wand and use the longer whip with a lash when the horse is on a larger circle; this is an extension of your arm to position and drive the horse, not to strike or punish him), and a

You hold the line (safely folded so it cannot tangle around your hand, legs, neck, etc.) in your hand toward the horse's head and the whip in your hand toward his haunches. Stay in line with his shoulder so that you form a "V" with the longe line and whip. You face his shoulder and rub the whip softly over his shoulder, barrel and hip to ease him and show him that this whip is an extension of your arm and hand. Stay close to him at first and walk a concentric circle

yourself as you ask him forward with the word "Walk."

If he moves toward you, aim the whip at his shoulder to send him out – wiggle it or touch him if necessary. If he does not move into a walk, aim the whip toward his buttocks, wiggle if needed, but be careful about touching him if you are within the kicking range of his hind legs. I usually tap the ground with the whip to get a colt's attention and get him moving without startling him. You may have to move the whip back and forth from his shoulder to hip to shoulder to hip to keep him moving and prevent his coming in toward you and the center of the circle.

If the colt moves off too quickly, keep him turning on the circle while you tug and release on the longe line (active aids will always get a better response than static ones),

humans tend to handle them more from the left side (equipment adjusts and fastens on the left, etc.). It is essential that the colt be worked equally in each direction. To reverse the horse on the longe, I always halt (say "Whoa" in a low, calm voice, wiggle the line or give gentle tugs, step toward the horse's head, etc.), then move out to the colt, change the line for the new direction if needed, then send him back on the circle, keeping him between my longe line and whip with me in line with his shoulder. I find that reversing the horse while he's out at the end of the line teaches him a possible evasion – he might try to whip around and go the other way on his own. I do not want him to know how to do that. I want him relaxed and confident with no thoughts of sudden movements right now.

not matter – just be certain it causes no pain and that you are comfortable and secure riding in it when the time comes to mount the colt.

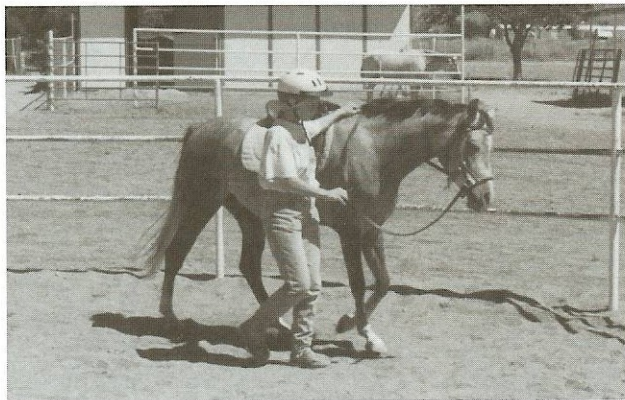
---

## Always think of pushing your horse forward, rather than pulling him.

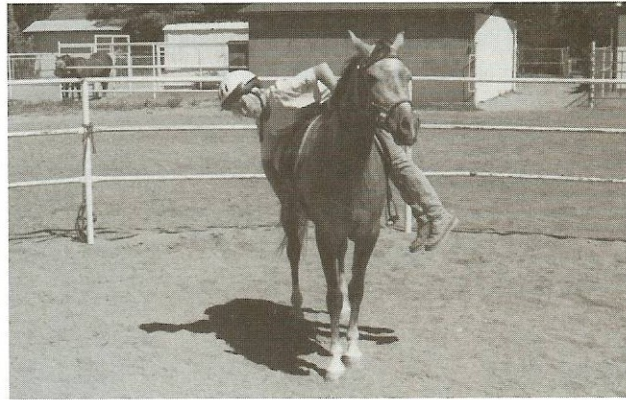
---

Add new pieces of equipment one at a time and allow the young horse to get used to each new item before adding more or adding difficulty to the lesson. Never decide to try out leg wraps or boots for the first time on the day you decide to mount for the first time!

The young horse will move in a hollow fashion when first carrying



Going to the right in-hand, Ghia is wearing a simple side-pull bridle.



The prelude to mounting—rider stays ready to dismount and reassure the colt.

Photos by M. Elliot

saying "Walk" in a soothing voice until he slows to a walk on the circle around you or with you. Staying close to him is important at first. It does not take long to be able to send him out on a larger circle if the foundation work is done calmly. If the colt is just a little bit fast or distracted, wiggle the longe line to vibrate the cavesson or basal and establish communication again.

The young horse will probably go easier to the left on the circle than to the right simply because we

The colt should be longed in a variety of places – in a round pen, in an arena, even open spaces, as he learns.

By age three he will be trotting on the longe, and you can begin to add equipment to his lessons. A surcingle is a great way to start easing the colt toward wearing a saddle. He gets used to the feeling of a girth or cinch snug around his heartline. A saddle is next, or it can be used right away if no surcingle is available. The style of saddle does

the saddle while longeing. It is a natural reaction, and he must be given time to get used to the burden. If you tie his body into position with artificial aids at this early stage, you will have a stiff horse for life.

Keep sending the colt forward on the longe line while saddled to help him to understand that it is quite comfortable if he steps up under his own body with the hind legs and raises his back to carry the saddle. Think always of pushing  
*Continued on page 20*

*Continued from page 19*

your horse forward instead of pulling him.

When he is carrying the saddle with a relaxed frame at the walk, you can move the colt up to trotting on the longe while saddled. Eventually you work him into calm can-ters on the circle.

In-hand work comes next, and you add the bridle you will start fid-ing with. I use a simple side-pull and add a plain, thick ring or egg-

butt snaffle bit later. You can start with the bosal or just go right to the snaffle as well. Whenever you add the bit, it is important to feed the young horse a ration of grain or wet pellets while wearing the bit (always under supervision) to teach him where to carry it in his mouth with his tongue under the mouthpiece. This should be done daily for a week or two.

The in-hand work consists of walking at the colt's shoulder, reins

over his neck as if to ride. You use the reins to guide his head and neck and offer verbal commands/aids to walk and halt him as you reinforce with the reins. Walk circles and spi-rals in and out of the circle, staying at his inside shoulder. If you are using an English saddle, leave your stirrups down for this work to accustom the colt to their movement.

Work equally in each direction on the longe, in-hand, and under saddle.

---


## To start mounted work, choose a calm day when all the other work has gone well.

---

To start mounted work, choose a calm day when all the other work has gone well. Touch the colt all over. Talk to him, pull down on each stirrup. Wiggle the saddle a little. Check that the cinch or girth is tight enough. Gentle the colt to mounting by first just putting your foot in the stirrup. Then put a little weight on it. Stop often, walk him a little, and praise him. Take deep breaths to relax you both.

When he is calm, lift yourself up lightly and lean over the seat of the saddle (slip your foot out of the stir-rup) while you pet his off side and sense his attitude. Slip to the ground, pet him, then mount, settling lightly into the saddle. Take both feet out of the stirrups so that you can dismount quickly if the colt loses his balance.

Allow him to find his balance with the burden of your weight. When he is calm and confident (either on this day or the next, or the next), pick up your stirrups and guide him around at a walk on large, easy figures, using the verbal aids taught on the longe/in-hand, adding leg and rein aids to explain.




## *The Orphaned Foal*


The foal that has been orphaned presents its own set of challenges unlike those experienced with any other horses. This colt may understand that he is a horse if he has been raised around other equines (especially youngsters), but will believe in varying degrees, that he is also one of us — a human!

Timing is everything with these young ones, and at times we may have to set their boundaries (which they are constantly testing) in the same way another horse would — very firmly. The orphan raised with only humans around can become dangerous without consistent discipline. We simply cannot “play” with them, no matter how small, cute or playful they may be. Imagine any behavior you allow coming from a 1,000-pound monster, and you can let common sense dictate those boundaries.

With the orphan, it is difficult to “push” him away from you and quite easy to get him to follow (he may even want to sit in your lap — don’t let him!).

We are all ultimately responsible for all of our horses’ habits, and we owe it to them to teach good manners so that later on no one has to be brutal to undo some dangerous behavior.



Remember, small amounts of work, frequently given, help the colt to learn. Whenever there is a problem, go back a step or two. Take your time, avoid tension. Never get angry. Keep making it easy for the colt to do the good stuff and difficult for him to do the “bad” stuff. 

• • •

*Katharine Lark* lives in Organ, NM, where she operates Katharine Lark Equine Services—Whole Horse Care and Schooling. She has been teaching horsemanship since 1973. She can be reached at 382-0782.