

Hey Neighbor



For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Gentle process teaches colts to lead

Breaking foals to lead doesn't have to be like a rodeo. Much has changed in recent years used train colts to lead. Modern day methods are much improved for man and horse alike. In the past man tried to overpower colts when first training them to lead. This procedure often resulted with injury to horse and handler and was not positive for either one.

Handling foals right after birth, called imprinting, is used by some owners for getting colts used to humans. This gentle training helps the foals to lead and makes them easier to work

with throughout life. However, this is not always possible. Colts can also readily be taught to lead after weaning at six months of age.

Duane Walker, a leading breeder of halter and performance horses, has registered over 1,700 horses in the American Quarter Horse Association. That's a lot of foals to break to lead and the Canton horseman has been involved in the early training of them all.

"We have changed our way of handling colts now," Walker said. "When we were raising 100 head a year, there were the time and labor factors involved,

and it took a combination effort to get them ready for our annual sale."

Typically, Walker and his employees would bring the weanlings, never touched by man, from pastures to the headquarters. They'd put the colts in a specially built chute, halter each one with a Johnson rope halter and tie the foal's head up high to an inertube in a stall.

This situation was entirely new to the colts, and they'd spend considerable time fighting the major change that had come into their life. The weanlings would eventually stop resisting — giving to the elas-

ticity of the tie — and the handlers would begin leading them, usually not without some conflict.

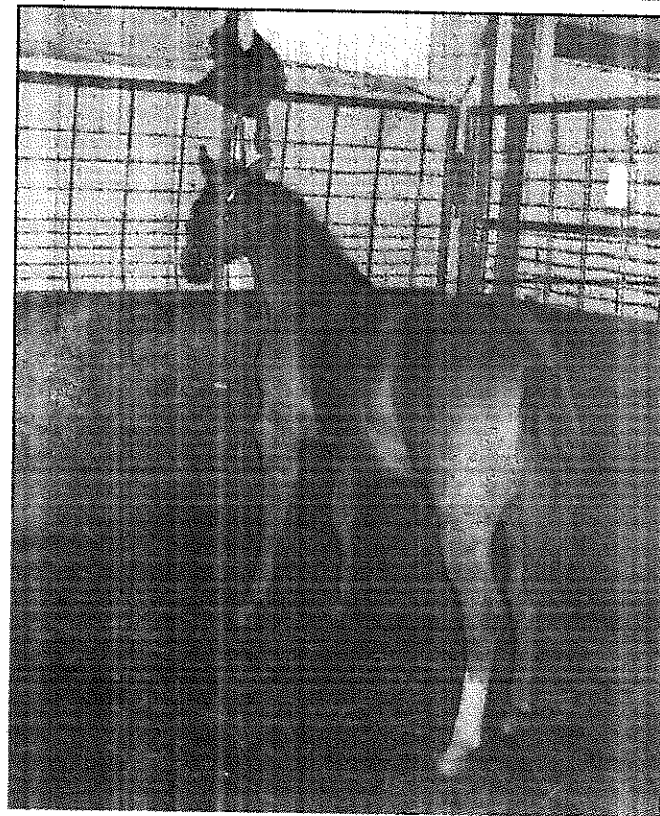
"Tying the colts is now the last thing we do in the training process," said Walker, who still raises about 25 foals annually. He does most of the halter breaking personally, with some help from a grandson.

"I halter the colts with a one-inch nylon halter in the chute and then put each one, dragging a 10-foot, 3/8-inch braided poly rope, into an individual stall," Walker said.

While in the stalls, very little handling is done with the foals for three or four days, although Walker works in the barn and gets in the stalls so the colt can get use to him.

"I just stand in the stalls until the foals understand that I'm not going to hurt them," Walker related. "Before long, they'll calm down and start facing me."

Walker credited Bill Smith and Ray Hunt, who are nationally recognized



Once weaned foals have learned to accept humans — after being worked with a poly halter, respond to pressure and release and will readily lead in a stall — they are tied high in a stall to a 15-inch rubber innertube

for their gentle horse training procedures, with introducing him to a pressure and release procedure to get the foals to lead.

"It varies with each colt, but within a few days, I'll pick up the lead rope and put a little pressure on his head. The second he moves his head around to me, I'll release the tension on the rope. I refuse to fight with him," Walker clarified.

Each day, more pressure is exerted to the lead rope, so the foals learn to move their heads to each side when asked. They'll then move their feet upon request and soon start moving forward.

"I always ask the colts to move with the lead rope and release pressure when they respond," Walker emphasized. "It's no big fuss, and it's amazing how quickly they learn."

The process continues daily with each foal worked just ten minutes or so. "Sometimes it's not that long, but the pressure and release is the key. I never try to out muscle the colts," Walker said.

Certain foals require more time than others. "I'm in no hurry," Walker said. "Some will respond unbelievably, and it will just take a few days, while with others it could be a month."

When Walker can readily lead the foals around the stalls, he'll tie each one about six feet high to a 15-inch rubber innertube.

"With their heads tied up high, the colts don't have the leverage to pull back as hard, and the innertubes ease the pressure on their heads," Walker clarified.

Within a few days, Walker will unhalter and rehalter the weanlings without resistance. He will then give them their first lesson in leading outside the stall.

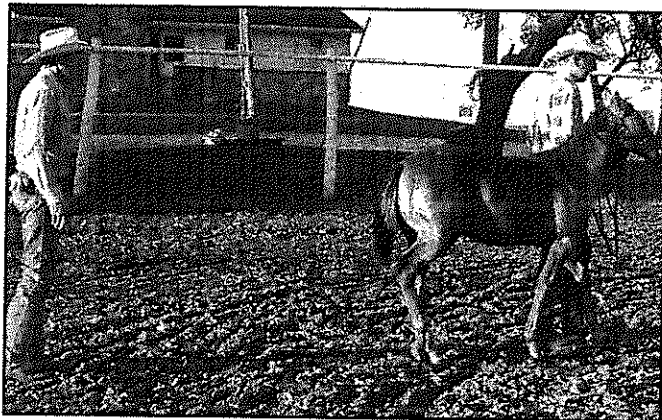
Because they've been in the stall for so long, the foals are "fresh" and might move freely for a short period.

"They aren't scared and don't try to get away," Walker confirmed. "I like to have another person to walk behind them if possible. I want the colts to lead right beside me. I never want their heads to get

ahead of me, because they are stronger than I am if they'd decide to run," he said.

"Butt ropes" over the hips of foals have been used by Walker in earlier years to persuade them to move forward.

Burros have been tied to older horses to help break them to lead. "I've never used burros on colts, but it could probably be done," Walker said. "It's amazing how these colts respond to pressure and release. It's easier on them and a whole lot easier on me."



The first time leading a foal after working with him on pressure and release in a stall for an extended time, he can be lead outside. The colt needs to walk right beside the leader, not in front or behind, with a person following to keep him going forward.

Pressure, Release Gently Teaches Colts To Lead

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Modern day methods contrast from when man tried to over power colts when first training them to lead. This way often resulted with injury to horse and handler and were not positive for either one.

Handling foals right after birth, called imprinting, is used by some owners for getting colts use to humans, gently training the foals to lead and making them easier to work with throughout life. However, this is not always possible, and colts can also easily be taught to lead after weaning at six months of age.

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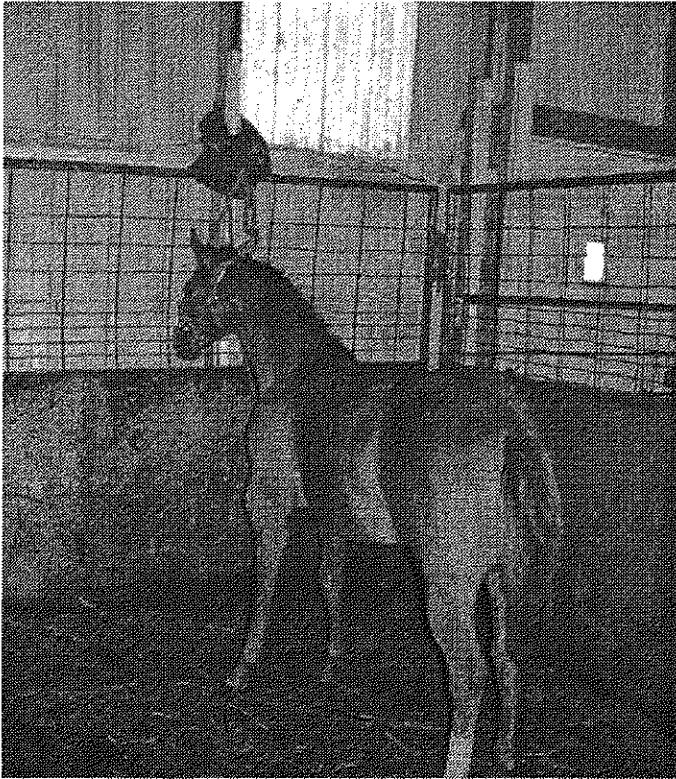
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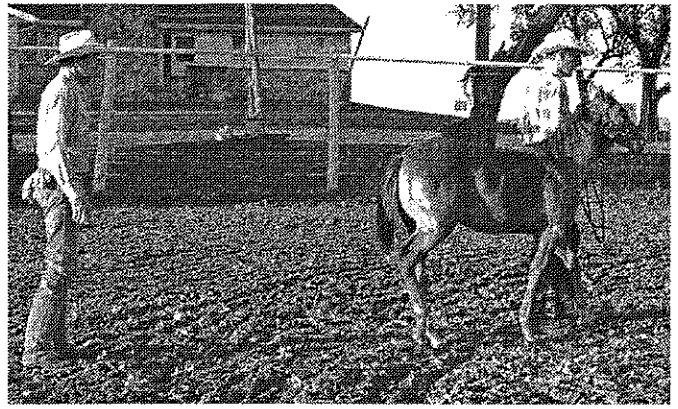
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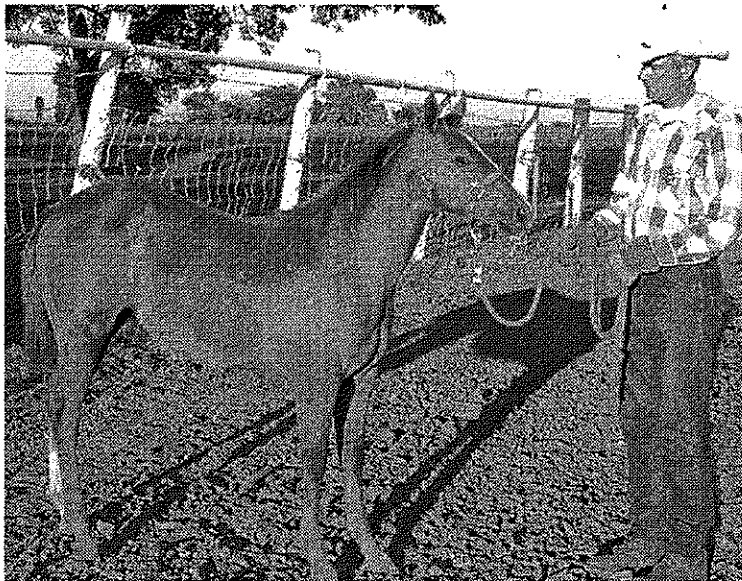
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After weaned foals, with a 1-inch nylon halter and 10-foot long 3/8-inch braided poly lead rope, have learned to accept humans, respond to pressure and release, and will lead readily in a stall, they are tied high in a stall to a 15-inch rubber innertube.



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Pressure and release are keys to gentle training of weaned foals to lead. When pressure is applied from the lead rope and the colt responds, the pressure is immediately released, so the weanling does not fight or get into conflict with the handler.