

Training Month 1

Charles Meets Jaz

It's early October, and my new filly, Jaz Poco Salsa, has finally arrived at the ranch! Her barn name will be Jaz, and I am very excited to have her here and to get started on this project.

Up until the last few days (which includes the trailer trip from Oregon to the San Francisco Bay Area of California), Jaz has been living pretty naturally for a young horse in this day and age; roaming with a large herd of horses on about 300 acres. She had remained with her dam (and was weaned by the mare herself), and has barely been handled by people her entire life. Currently around 14 months old, she has had no training whatsoever—which is of course exactly what I wanted for this project.

The transporter arrived at seven last night, and despite never having been trailered before, and also being without other horses around for the first time ever, Jaz looked to be in good condition. When they arrive at my ranch, some babies have never worn a halter or been led, so to prepare for this I remove a panel from the paddock where they will be staying and tell the driver to back right into the opening of the paddock. Once six babies who had been herded into a trailer and had never worn halters arrived, and I unloaded them the same way into a paddock. The day a baby arrives and unloads from a trailer to a new home is definitely not the time to start a haltering or leading lesson. However, to my surprise, Jaz unloaded calmly with a halter on and was led out. She was not halter broke, but she was willing to give to pressure, though just barely, and did not appear to be stressed. She was attentive and watchful to her surroundings, but her overall demeanor was quiet. Sometimes babies can seem calm when they are really in a bit of mild shock, so I planned to watch her closely.



Meet my new filly, Jaz Poco Salsa. This photo was taken when Jaz was just 3 months old.

The driver led the horse from the trailer into the paddock, where I gave her some hay. I chose a paddock that has a shelter but is out in the open, so she will not feel too confined. After being on 300 acres, immediate confinement to a stall can be stressful in itself. Although I did choose an outdoor paddock, I selected one that was small enough to catch her more easily for halter-breaking once we began training. It's fine to think of putting a completely unhandled youngster in a pasture, but in most cases you'll be trying to catch her for days, if not weeks. Additionally, I selected a 12-by-24 paddock, which allowed her to view and touch other horses nose to nose, which often alleviates separation anxiety. I did not want to put other horses in with her in case they wanted to establish a pecking order, adding more traumas. I also wanted to quarantine her for five days, which prevents the possible spread of disease. You should always separate new horses.



Jaz arrives late in the evening after a long first trailer trip. She exits the trailer quietly as soon as the driver makes contact on her lead rope.

Relocations can be very dramatic for any horse, but especially for youngsters. It's critical that you really allow the horse the opportunity to relax and settle into new surroundings. Sights, smells, sounds . . . it's all new, usually terrifying, and for a horse who's been on 300 acres and formerly been able to flee a fearful situation but is now confined . . . well, that's a huge adjustment. Many times they need rest—and lots of it. The nervous energy from the trailer trip and separation from their herd is typically exhausting. And while Jaz was acting like she had done it all a hundred times before, I still left her alone; just the same as I would have if she had arrived wild-eyed and in a lather of sweat.

Her initial calmness certainly seemed to justify the good reputation of her breeders. Jaz is a National Foundation Quarter Horse, from Jaz Ranch in Oregon (see appendix B, "References," for more about Jaz Ranch). All of their horses are Poco Bueno bred and they breed specifically for the classic Foundation attributes: Brains, Bone, Beauty, Disposition, Trainability, and Versatility. They have earned a reputation for breeding truly amazing all-around working horses, which is exactly what I wanted for myself.



Checking out her new stall and paddock, she can see horses on three sides of where she is.

SELECTING THE RIGHT HORSE

For this project, I wanted to take the time to really chronicle how I believe a young horse should be started from day one, and to do everything right by my standards and beliefs. This meant also including the process of properly selecting the horse to begin with.

So before we talk about how to start training a young horse, let's review how and why I chose this yearling in particular, and why it's important that you make good decisions for yourself when your time comes.

My friends, I cannot say this strongly enough: *You simply cannot train for disposition.* You cannot train for a good mind and temperament. You can only work with what you have. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. But to have a horse who is naturally compliant, a horse who wants to please, wants to be with people, a horse with a real work ethic . . . those things make training not only significantly easier and more effective, but they also mean that you will always have a safer and better equine partner.

In my book *Building Your Dream Horse*, I talk about horse personalities and how they are created. Certainly one of the primary factors is breeding, and horse breeding is an industry. Like any industry, some people do it very well and others do it poorly. Some people breed horses because of the appeal. But these

breeders lack the education and experience that experienced breeders have achieved. Also, many breed for what I believe are the wrong priorities for the majority of horse owners. Remember, you only want to breed what you want to pass on to the next generation. For example, if you have a mare you like, but she is neurotic, this behavior can be carried on to the next generation. A foal takes on 60 to 70 percent of her dam's physical, genetic, and athletic traits.

Instead, these breeders breed for conformation, performance, even color, rather than a good mind, which is low on the list. In my opinion, that should consistently be a number-one trait you look to pass on. A great mind is pure gold—truly invaluable.

In addition to a great mind, the emotional level (flight instinct) is a very important area. The temperament, personality, and instincts of the horse are all hinged on the emotional level. The emotional level is also the hardest area to change. Most novice riders, unless extremely confident with low fear levels, should seek out horses with low to average emotional levels.

Gender also affects a horse's temperament. Geldings are the most even tempered. The sun sets and rises with a gelding. Mares are three times more difficult to train because of hormonal issues. However, there are exceptions like Jaz, who currently is very compliant, though she is only 1 year old and is subject to change because of hormonal changes. Stallions are five times more difficult to train. Their only job is to breed and fight. Again, there are nice stallions for breeding and showing who are well behaved in social settings. However, generally speaking, only one out of about a hundred stallions has the right mind and personality to be a breeding stallion.

Even though you might choose an even-tempered, good-minded horse, remember that you are still working with a baby and that babies do baby things like striking, kicking, rearing, and biting. Like young children, they are unpredictable, and that's just what they do, which can make your training job challenging. Last year I held a clinic called "Walking with Babies" and nine clients attended with their 6-month- to 2-year-old babies. One year later only two people still had their babies because of all the training work involved. The positive side of raising a baby is that you are starting with a clean slate. But the horse is a mirror reflection of your understanding and capabilities of training. It is like raising kids. They will become well-behaved adults if you set standards early on and are willing to enforce those standards as necessary.

In addition to the great mind and temperament, which we can also think of as the mental and emotional aspects of the horse, the physical aspect is of course a vital element. Yes, a horse can be trained for any discipline, but conformation is critical to *excel* in a particular event. Just as athletes in various sporting events will have very different body types, so too should horses. So depending on your goals, you need to select the correct body type with the

available best conformation, especially if you have dreams of competing at top levels.

No matter what discipline you want to do, the horse you choose should be medium- to short-backed for performance (even for trail), and have nice sloping shoulders and a balanced top line, which means the neck, shoulders, and hips are level. Also for any breed, whether Arab, Warmblood, or Appaloosa, choose a horse with the biggest-diameter feet, so that the horse's weight is supported properly. For example, a 1,000-pound horse should have approximately 6-inch-diameter feet. Just think of an 800- to 1,000-pound horse balanced on four small pins. This can lead to conformation problems later on. For example, a client's 1,000-pound 5-year-old horse has small hooves (only about 4 inches in diameter), which causes him to travel poorly and has caused arthritis in his hocks or navicular bone. The horse was bred for looks and not function.

That being said, there are of course many exceptional breeders out there who do focus on disposition and trainability in addition to physical attributes. Their horses are likely to be more expensive, but I believe it can be well worth



Jaz's sire, Little Steel Dust, photographed as a 20-year-old. This magnificent stallion passed away in 2003 at 29 years of age. Jaz is one of his final foals.



Jaz's lovely dam.

the extra money. You can either invest up front in a horse who takes to training and partnership easily, or you can buy a horse on whom you may have to spend far more for training because she is resistant, doesn't want to be with you, and is not naturally compliant. And you may still end up with a horse who is very likely to require higher maintenance for her whole life.

I prefer the lower-maintenance model, especially since that type often delivers higher performance at the same time. Gail and Brent at Jaz Ranch selected Jaz Poco Salsa from their available stock because they felt she was a horse they would want to keep. *I want this horse to be a lifetime partner for me.* So I did what I think everyone should do when looking to buy or breed a youngster—be very selective and buy for the traits that are likely to give you the horse with whom you will want to spend a lifetime.

Now I happened to select a foundation-bred Quarter horse, since this was a good candidate for the type of performance work and riding that I wanted to do with her. But please do not think I am saying that everyone should get this breed of horse—far from it. The point I am trying to make is that within every breed, there are exceptional, good, mediocre, and poor breeding programs. Some breeds have bad reputations because breeders have changed characteristics that

they were breeding for. For example, in the 1950s and '60s, Arabs excelled in stock horse classes. Then some breeders wanted to make Arabs appear hotter for halter classes so they bred for this characteristic. Regardless of breed, responsible foundation breeders want to preserve traits such as a good temperament or disposition, trainability, compliancy, and a quiet mind, and some produce horses who excel in particular events or sports, such as reining or jumping.

Whether you love Arabs, Thoroughbreds, Paints, Morgans, Appaloosas, or any of the other dozens of horse breeds and their crosses, simply recognize that there are significant differences in the animals you will get from a conscientious, selective, and highly knowledgeable breeder, compared to just buying at random. And realize that these differences can and do have an enormous impact on how easy the horse will be to train, how well she will perform, and how good your relationship with the horse will be. So don't think I am trying to sell everyone on getting a Quarter horse. I am simply trying to convince you to take the time, do the research, and invest the money to get a well-bred horse—meaning the horse is very sound mentally, physically, and emotionally.

Different breeds of horse really can offer different benefits and challenges. There are no good or bad breeds; they are just different. Which is exactly how it should be, since we have different goals for what we want to do with our horses.

I want a horse who is powerful, versatile, and super-responsive. I want a working partner capable of training to respond to the subtlest shifts in my seat, one I will be able to use to demonstrate excellence in reining, cutting, cowboy



Jaz at 3 months at Jaz Ranch.

dressage, and many other different disciplines. That versatility requires a horse of a certain mind and body type, and well-bred Quarter horses are often excellent candidates.

So don't pick a breed and then decide what you want to do with the horse. Instead, identify what your goals really are for having a horse, and then pick a breed (or cross) that is appropriate for helping you achieve those goals. For example, Jaz was bred not only for performance but also for all around versatility, like trail riding. I cannot say strongly enough how important I believe it is to get a well-bred horse. (See appendix A, "Selecting and Caring for a Young Horse," for information on researching reputable breeders.)

FIRST TRAINING EXERCISE: HALTERING

The first week with Jaz was a perfect example of why that good mind matters so much. The initial training exercise in my plan was to teach her to accept a halter. You really should start with haltering no matter what your initial training goals are, since it's pretty tough to do much with any horse who can't be haltered.

I had all the usual tricks up my sleeve to get her to accept the halter. I have met plenty of babies who initially wanted no part of me or any piece of equipment, and even in a confined area were a bit of work the first few times to get haltered. But Jaz pretty much just let me walk up to her and put a halter on, and has ever since. Jaz seems to be just naturally complacent around people and could not have made it easier for me. I'd love to tell you that I'm just "that good" with horses, that I can simply walk up to any untrained horse and halter her right up, but I've had my fair share who wanted only to be far away from me at first. But Jaz had the opposite reaction, and her favorite place to be was in my back pocket. Most people might think this is cute, but actually it can be dangerous. For example, if you were leading your baby and she got distracted and turned her head, she could step on you. Because of this tendency, it took me a while to teach her to stand away from me.

Now while this has certainly been a pleasant experience for me, it doesn't help anyone learn with a more typical colt or filly, who can be very tough to get haltered at first. So let's review what I *expected* I would be doing with Jaz to teach her to accept a halter, and some of the techniques we often use at the ranch.

As I mentioned earlier, the first thing you can do to really make this easier on yourself is to get the horse into a small space. If the horse is in a stall or a paddock, you can often even use the gate to create a smaller triangular area where the horse is more easily confined and therefore accessible for you. This will speed up the first part of the training.

However, if the horse is in a pasture or a larger paddock, you will likely have to start by creating a connection with that horse just to be able to get near her, a connection in which she trusts you and also looks to you as her leader. So where does that start? *With moving her feet.*

In this first lesson, you will teach your baby that you will put pressure on her (the go-forward cue) until she stops in a *safe spot* you have chosen, where you then let her relax. The purpose is to show her you won't eat her lunch. Your distance from your horse in this lesson may be more or less depending on how comfortable she is with you. Start at about 30 feet. The progress you make in this exercise will depend on the mind of your baby. Each youngster will have very different fear levels. You can walk right up to some babies, like Jaz; others may take a while.

This technique is successful for me the vast majority of the time. I personally do not like to train horses by luring them with food, but certainly some people also have good success in getting the animals more comfortable around them by feeding hay or other treats right near themselves. If you do try this as a backup, please do *not* ever feed the horse from your hands; always feed in a bucket or on the ground. Hand-feeding is a terrible habit to start because it encourages the horse to nuzzle your hand looking for food and unintentionally bite your fingers because they got in the way. (One of my clients was hand-feeding her horse, which she had always done, but this time she had her fingers curled up. Unintentionally the horse took the top of a finger with the grain.)

In rare cases, you may need to go to the extreme route of roping the horse to be able to approach and halter her safely. I generally do not recommend people try this themselves unless they are trainers (or are very good with a lariat), but some animals are so initially disinterested (or fearful) of being with people that they are resistant to the point of being dangerous. So even if you managed to get the animal into a small space, she may present you with her hindquarters and try to kick, or even to rear up at you. In this case, if other attempts to make her comfortable around you fail, consider roping her around the neck so that you have equipment in place that gives you some physical control (and safety) while you teach her to be haltered and to relax in your presence.

The ultimate goal is to get her to stop and relax in the safe spot with her eyes on you so that you can approach her and halter her. Getting her to this point can take from one day up to two weeks. Stop the lesson when you get some kind of change or improvement, the bigger the better. When you are ready to continue the lesson, restart where you left off.

Stand in the center of your horse's paddock and position yourself at an angle behind her withers. Behind the withers asks the horse to go forward and in front of the withers will slow or stop the horse. Mentally chose a spot along the fence that you want to be the safe spot. During this exercise, you should be

displaying low-key body language: walking slowly, arms at your sides, with relaxed posture.

Drive her forward at the hip. If she overshoots the spot, change your position so you're now in front of her withers to change her direction back toward the spot. If you eventually get her close to the spot and she stops, immediately step back to take the pressure off. Even if she is not facing you, you want to reward her because your goal is to teach her to stop in the chosen spot. This is basic "Pressure and Release 101." Reward the filly for the behavior you want by releasing the pressure the second she performs that behavior. If you continue to do this, releasing the "pressure of your presence" as the youngster stops and allows you to become closer without moving, you will be able to approach her. This also ties in with natural herd behavior. The lead horse keeps the others moving. If you are moving their feet and controlling their direction, they will start to look to you as their leader, even with this very basic introductory work. It starts a foundation for the relationship, even though the horse is primarily fearful of you at this point.

Now your next goal is to get her to stop in the spot and turn her eyes on you. To do this, drive her forward and repeat the exercise until she stops one time and turns her eyes on you. When she has stopped in the spot and is standing relaxed with her attention on you, you can go to the next step. The next step in haltering will require some assessment on your part. Again, I was able to put a halter right on Jaz, but with most babies you will need to first get them used to having their face, head, and ears touched with a cane. (It is safer for you if you touch her first with an inanimate object.) This is a de-spooking exercise to establish better emotional control.

Yes, you could force it by just putting a halter on a scared horse right away to start to work with them. But why would you want to rush? Your goal should be building a relationship of trust with you as the leader. With more nervous horses, and especially with young horses, this should be done very patiently. I would much rather spend a few days teaching a baby to quietly accept a halter than to risk losing her trust.

Once you determine how slowly you need to progress, introducing yourself, physical contact around the face, and the equipment around the head, it's all done with the same pressure and release pattern. Only release the pressure if the horse quiets, even if just for a second.

If you need to start with the cane, here's what you do. Take the cane and roll the string up around so it is not dangling or moving. (During the first part of this exercise you don't want the string flapping around.) Approach your baby with the cane at your side and stand parallel to her withers. Let her see the cane and sniff it. Then gently touch and rub her on the shoulder with the cane. If she moves, stay with her until she quiets or stops resisting, and then immediately

pull the cane away. If your baby takes off, repeat the process of getting her to the safe spot and start again touching her with the cane. She will soon learn it is too much work to run off each time. Now the tricky thing with young horses is recognizing those subtle “baby-gives.” It’s the tiny tries they offer and hard-to-recognize small tries that you need to reward so they can start putting two and two together to see what you are asking. This is another reason for you to take the training slow yourself. It’s much easier to recognize their small attempts to comply if you are only asking for small behaviors.

When your baby is comfortable about being touched on the shoulder, touch and rub her on the neck, using the same pressure and release technique you used before. Next rub her nose and face. Do not touch her legs with the cane, since at this early stage it is too confronting. When your horse appears comfortable and relaxed with this last exercise, unwind the string on the cane and drape the string over her neck, near and around her poll. Once she is relaxed and accepting of this, drape the string around her neck again. Hold the cane in one hand and the string in the other and pull gently toward you. When the front foot nearest you moves toward you, release the pressure.

When you think she is ready for a halter, stand parallel to her neck on the left side. Open up the halter so you will be able to slip it on her nose from below. Holding the halter in one hand, put your right arm around her neck (try not to make much contact) and then grasp the halter with both hands and bring it up on her nose from underneath and then tighten and clasp it over her poll. Sounds easy, but you may find it takes practice.

Let me assure you that while teaching a horse to accept wearing a halter may seem mundane, it is absolutely the most critical building block for everything you will be doing with your youngster. Halter-breaking, or giving to the halter, is a very important method for teaching horses to give to pressure, and one that carries over directly into saddle and bridle work. Plus, for the rest of your life with your horse you will be haltering her every time you want to do something together. And there are few chores less inviting than fighting with an adult horse to get a halter on her head day after day. People ask me all the time, “How do you get your horses to lower their heads to be haltered?”

I don’t teach horses to lower their heads to be haltered; *instead, they lower their heads because they have learned it’s the most comfortable way for them to be haltered.* By lowering the head, little to no pressure is put on the poll during haltering. So when we are consistent, employing the immediate releases of pressure to reward them while training them to accept a halter, the horse then learns to avoid the pressure altogether by lowering her head for you. And certainly, using methods that communicate with horses in a way they understand also increases their trust of you and makes them want

to be with you—additional reasons they will come to you and stand quietly for haltering.

Once you can get the halter on the horse, frequently practice putting it on and taking it off. Start with asking her to wear it for a very short time, and then build up to longer intervals. Additionally, over time you can expect the horse to stand more quietly for having it put on as well as for the removal.

Now, about leaving it on: I know a lot of people just keep halters on young horses, especially out in pasture. They experience difficulty in initially haltering a baby, and rather than investing the time and patience in training the horse, they just leave the halter on. I will say simply that I do not believe this is a safe practice for any horse. It is far too easy for the halter to get caught on a fence or a variety of objects, and for the horse to panic and become injured. It is not a good practice to leave a halter on a young horse anytime when you cannot see the horse. Also, forcing a horse to wear a halter twenty-four hours a day is not more likely to acclimatize her to the equipment. If anything, it may teach a horse to want to avoid wearing it if she associates the equipment with having it on all the time. After all, the halter is not the most comfortable thing in the world. Instead, take the time and the patience to train your youngster to accept a halter quietly and with ease. It is the absolute best thing you can do to start any young horse and will give you a lifetime reward.



Jaz makes teaching a horse to accept a halter look easy.

LEADING

Because Jaz accepted the halter right away, I moved into the basics of teaching her to lead as our next exercise. Teaching a young horse to lead seems like it would be pretty easy, and sometimes it is. But more often than not, people start tugging forward on a lead rope, and the young horse has not yet learned that there is supposed to be a connection between that lead rope and her feet. And she does what most babies do—she resists what she does not understand. There you stand, pulling on the lead rope with all your might, trying to get that baby to go forward, and unknowingly, you have helped her get into a great position to lock up at her knees and resist you.

So instead, when we teach a young horse to lead we begin by asking her to move sideways, at an angle of about 45 degrees to begin with. Stand at a 45-degree angle from her head and maybe 4 to 6 feet away, and then make contact with the lead rope. Maintain the contact until she steps over—even a little bit. If you are making contact and she is still not taking a step, increase the angle you are standing at up to maybe 90 degrees as needed. It is more difficult for her to “lock up” sideways, so at some point if you are pulling or maintaining pressure sidewise, she *will* step over. The second she does, release the contact for the reward. Like



It's easiest to teach horses to lead where they are comfortable, so I start basic work in Jaz's paddock.

anything else, horses need a reason to learn or change a behavior. For her to learn to step when you pick up that lead rope, to make that connection in her mind, she needs a reason she can understand. By placing her physically in an uncomfortable position where she almost has to step based on the angle and contact, and then rewarding her every time she does, she will get the lesson much more quickly than trying to pull forward, where you have little opportunity to reward her.

Here's where repetition comes into play. Pick up at your angle, hold, and release upon any small step she takes. Then go to the other side and do the same thing. Keep going back and forth, asking her to step sideways toward you, and as the horse gets more responsive you can decrease the angle at which you are asking, until the horse seems to be taking a step forward on his own. The trick with this is to be looking for the horse to be moving in the direction of the poll, not her nose. The "magic" happens when the horse learns that her feet should be moving in the direction of the poll, rather than the nose.

When the horse starts leading with you, on the left side walk in a circle to the left, keeping her with you as you maintain going left. When she is consistently staying with you at the circle, try going straight. Take a couple of steps forward. If she stops, go back to the circle to encourage the horse's feet to keep moving when yours are moving. It's best to start this work close to the



Remember to start with asking the horse to step sideways toward you as you cue rather than forward.



Once the basics are going well in an area where the horse is comfortable, progress to doing the leading work near but outside of her paddock.

youngster's stall, or better yet in her paddock (if she has one), to increase her comfort. Otherwise, just stay close to where she is normally kept while doing this exercise initially, to help assure her focus is on you and not on her anxiety.

Once she is going with you, work on just leading around her stall or paddock. Slowly go a bit farther out each time, always coming back when you can sense she is getting anxious. As you continue the leading training, you are controlling her feet, which is getting her attention on you and also setting you up to become her leader.

Jaz has been very quick to take to the leading lessons so far. But even with her low emotional level and natural sense of wanting to be with me, I am still taking my time and not rushing her through anything. While she has not seemed anxious during many lessons, I will continue to proceed cautiously and do baby steps in every lesson. There is absolutely no reason to rush with a youngster when you are trying to build a fantastic horse for yourself, and the better you do these basic foundation exercises, the more solid your horse is going to be at every training level.

HOOF HANDLING

Another important training objective to tackle correctly is handling feet safely. You can wait on a lot of training, but not on hoof handling. You need to handle the feet to pick out the hooves, to prepare for handling by the farrier, and also to be able to check them any time you may detect a soundness problem.

For hoof handling, I recommend using a cane for safety reasons. If the horse strikes, I am out of harm's way since I am using a long "extension" of my arm. With this aid, both of you can be safe. A cane (or something like it) is a great tool for the next phase. Our tack store offers a cane with a curved end called a horseman's cane. So if you do not have one, you can either get an inexpensive cane at a local drugstore or contact us at the ranch for one of ours (see appendix B). It is a very effective piece of safety equipment. The curved end of the cane can be used as a hook, again providing you a safe extension of your arm and hand to pick up the hooves.

Using a cane is a type of sacking out exercise. The concept of sacking out comes from the old days when cowboys tied a horse to a strong post, and then used a gunnysack, flapping and slapping the horse with the sack. The idea was to desensitize the horse so that it would not be nervous around the legs and body with objects. The problem with this method was that when you tied them hard and fast like that it usually caused them either to injure or kill themselves. We are doing the same thing with the cane, but the difference is we are not tying them hard and fast but have them in hand.

To begin, stand slightly in front of your baby's withers about two feet away. You will be safe in this position if she strikes or kicks at the cane. *Never* stand in front of your horse. If she bolts forward, she can come over the top of you. Hold the cane in one hand and extend the other out to hold her halter. This way if she bolts, you can block her exit.

With the cane, I start rubbing the outside of the legs from the top down to the hooves, then the inside of the legs, under the belly on both sides, and last



Safety should be your top priority when you start work with hoof handling. Take your time; be methodical and patient. Rub the leg above the hoof first.



When relaxed, touch the leg above the hoof.



Put pressure on and yield when the horse gives you the foot.



Continue the lesson until the horse picks up the leg and leaves it up and is comfortable. Repeat with the rear legs.



Pick up the foot using your hands.



Gently hold until the horse yields.



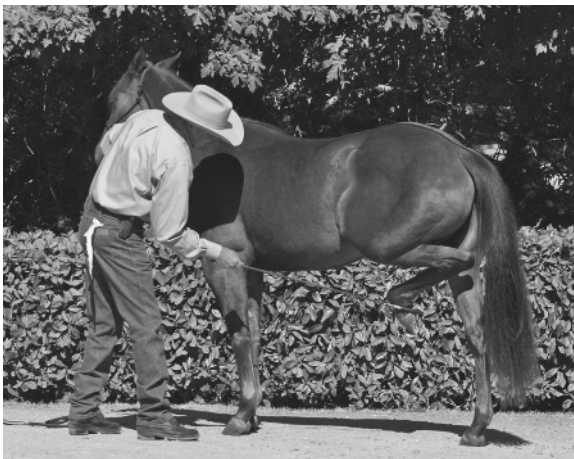
Release when she yields.

the rear legs. If the horse is fidgeting, I keep rubbing until she relaxes. Pressure and release again; reward the horse by removing the contact only when she is being quiet and not moving. When you can make contact with the horse in all of these zones with the cane, and the horse remains standing quietly and is calm, then you can move on to the next step, picking up the feet.

Begin by reaching down with the curved handle of the cane to the front leg just above the pastern. Put some pressure (by lightly lifting or pulling on the cane) on the area and when the horse yields by picking up at all, release immediately. Keep repeating this as needed on the same leg until the horse almost leaves the foot there on her own. Then move on to the other front leg and start over.

Once the horse is comfortable with the pressure of the cane (and this could be anywhere from ten to thirty minutes on each side), try picking up the hooves with your hands rather than the cane. How can you tell the horse is comfortable? Make sure she is not moving away when you add pressure on the contact of the cane, and that her overall body posture seems relaxed and complacent. Note that if you have been inadvertently releasing the contact while the horse was moving away, you have been teaching her to resist. So remember, stay with it until she quiets.

When you are ready to use your hands, stand again in front of her withers and use your arm/hand just like the cane. The second the horse picks up her feet at your contact, release. But if she starts moving away, do not release. Be sure you don't hold the hoof too tightly, which will cause a lot of horses to resist much more and slow the training greatly. Pretend you are holding a baby bird in your hand when you pick up a hoof—gently but firmly enough not to lose it if she moves.



Teach her to lift the leg high and hold up to prepare for the farrier.

Another common mistake people make is to initially try to hold the hoof too high off the ground and/or for too long. Remember, baby steps! Start by holding it just barely off the ground and for only a second. Over time, increase first the amount of time you are holding the hoof just barely off the ground, and then later how high the leg is yielding off the ground. As you slowly acclimate your horse to having any of her four feet picked up (and you should be doing this every single day if you can), then eventually you can also start lightly tapping the hooves with the cane or even a rock, in preparation for the farrier.

We have been working with Jaz's feet every single day, and once she was fairly solid with my handling of her hooves and legs, then I started having the rest of the staff work with her as well to increase her comfort of strangers picking up her feet. She has just had her first trim by my farrier and because we had worked with her regularly, it was very straightforward. If you have a good farrier, keep them happy and safe by spending a lot of time training your horse to be compliant and relaxed for hoof work. Many farriers complain that people seem to expect them to help train their horse for safe hoof handling. Don't fall into that mindset. It is *your* job to train your horse to be safe and quiet for trimming. Hoof health and care is one of the most critical things for a lifetime of use and soundness, so make sure you invest early and often into ensuring your horse can be trimmed as needed without a lot of drama.



Because I took my time and took small steps in asking for “longer and higher” with each hoof, when Jaz finally had her first farrier trim, she was compliant and quiet—something every farrier greatly appreciates.

GROOMING

Another training exercise I started with Jaz this first month, and one that we all tend to enjoy as horse lovers, was grooming and basic body work. Remember that Jaz had really not been handled much prior to coming to me. She has begun to grow a winter coat and needed to be cleaned and de-thatched a bit. Also as part of basic safe handling and groundwork, she needed to learn to be relaxed and trusting so that we could touch her all over and groom her. As with checking feet, you need to be able to safely touch your horse anywhere to determine if she is sore or injured, to apply an ointment, and the like. For health as well as safety, your horse must yield to and relax for your touch.

You may have experienced some horses who really love grooming and others who don't. Sometimes the horses who do not enjoy it had a poor start with grooming techniques. Don't take for granted that even something that seems as basic as brushing your horse will be easy.

Look for nervousness or fear when you approach. You should have already worked on the previous exercises with haltering and handling feet, meaning you have done pressure and release work regarding physical contact and equipment with much of your horse's body. When you approach with a brush or a curry, whatever you are starting with, allow the horse to see and smell it first. You will find that most horses are also more accepting of a brush that you have used on other horses, rather than a brand new one with "store smell." So don't feel like you have to run out and get all new grooming supplies!

Allow the horse to smell the brush, and then begin around the shoulders and withers. These are contact spots where horses often groom and nibble on each other, and so they are more familiar areas for contact. Plus they just seem to feel good to horses. Do not use too much pressure, just medium contact, a consistent hand, and if you see the horse react to the contact by backing away, stay with her until she relaxes and then stop grooming. Let her pause for a moment and then start again.

Because many young horses do not yet safely tie or cross-tie, you can do this while someone is holding the lead rope, or even in the horse's stall or paddock. Pay attention to areas where she really seems to enjoy being rubbed, which can become a good source of reward for you later. After the shoulder, back, and hindquarters can safely be groomed, you can move onto grooming the belly and legs.

Remember always to watch for signs that the horse may react negatively (ears pinned, backing or going forward, leg cocked, and the like). Young horses are extremely unpredictable and you just never know. You need to make sure that safety is your number-one priority when acclimating a horse to being



Grooming is not only good training time, it's good bonding time.

touched in areas she may find very vulnerable. While I do believe that solid foundation training and the right approach makes it much safer to be around horses, they are nonetheless enormous, powerful animals and it is very easy to get careless or just be in a bad position when a horse moves . . . and get hurt as a result.

Here are a few safety tips when grooming your baby:

- Never stand directly in front or behind your horse while grooming. If you stand in front of her she could bolt forward, strike at you, or come over the top of you. If you stand behind her she could kick out at you. Instead, stand off to the side of your horse and be aware of her emotional state.
- Try to stand near her shoulder while grooming.
- Always work close to your horse. Remember basic physics. If you are near her shoulder, you won't be struck as hard by her feet and you will not get the full force of a kick if you stay close to the body when you work about her hind end. You are less likely to be hurt by a kick if you are right next to the horse than if you are within a range of one to several feet away.

- Work on the mane and then the tail last. Before you start pulling on her tail, make sure you have done plenty of grooming and desensitization on her hindquarters first.
- Always make sure your horse knows you are back there. Run your hand from her back to the hip to the haunch so it's not a surprise she reacts to.

Most horses come to love grooming time. It can be a great time for you both to connect and relax, a time when your horse learns to trust you. Once your baby can be safely groomed, start and end every training session with grooming. This will relax her and get her focused on you, and she will begin to associate work with something pleasant as well.

