

COLT STARTING

By Howard Powers, longtime Marion horseman

Few people have the desire, knowledge and patience to start colts in their training to be riding or driving horses, and therefore miss out on one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences associated with our equine friends.

I recently interviewed two local trainers who make it their specialty to give colts the first phase of training and both of them have very thorough and successful systems. It should go without saying that the first 30 days of training are the most important 30 days of the colt's life and set the stage for all later training.

Donna Simmons lives near Viola, and after years of competing in pleasure classes and speed events, is concentrating on starting colts. At one time, she bought horses with 'people-caused problems' and worked to rehab the animals into trusting, useful companions. After four years of this work, she claims that only one horse was beyond redemption, which seems like a pretty good record.

She is in the process of rebuilding and adding to her setup which will include a round pen, refurbished stalls and new fencing. Her facility is close to trails and the river and colts that she is working will be exposed to a wide variety of environments.

Her program includes extensive ground work, introduction to the saddle and bridle, and much work in flexing and softening to light pressure. Shoulder and hip yielding and leg and rein cues are part of the process. Two hours minimum of riding each day, three days of five-hour trail rides, and an eight-hour trail ride, all add up to nearly 80 hours of hands-on work. The colts are exposed to traffic, farm machinery, and dogs. They learn to accept a wide variety of situations. A colt that goes through a program of this intensity is ready to go on to whatever area of riding you plan to pursue.

Board fees are included in the cost of the program but you can furnish your own grain if you prefer and there will be an appropriate adjustment.

You will never go wrong in having your colt started in a program such as this.

Another trainer with whom I am familiar, is Casey McMahon (pronounced McMan), who trains at Lewis Bottoms Stable near Palo. In fact, McMahon has worked with one of my colts. Casey has trained for seven years and prefers the classes of hunt seat, saddle seat and western pleasure. She has personally learned from John Lyons, Buck Brannamann, Jeff Griffith, and Rick Cornwell, all popular clinicians. She enrolled at Kirkwood CC in the horse program, taking her own horse. Through hard work there, she qualified for the William Shatner Western Pleasure Class.

McMahon has also worked with spoiled horses.

Although Casey has studied the works of many clinicians and uses parts of several of their methods, she stresses desensitizing ground work with plastic bags, milk jugs, tarps or any items that a colt has not been exposed to. She states that if she can't do it from the ground, there is no reason to try it from the horse's back. Thus, colts learn to respond to pressure and cues before they are ridden so they accept that first ride as a small *Next Step* in the learning process.

Casey has two round pens, an outdoor arena and will have an indoor arena for use in bad weather. Lewis Bottoms Stable is close to Pleasant Creek Park where there are twelve miles of trails to ride.

Board fees at Lewis Bottoms Stables are very reasonable and there are different levels of care that you can choose from for your horse. There is a display ad in this issue with one of the nicest websites I have seen, so check it out if you want a colt started or if you are looking for a place to board your horse.

If you or someone you know deserves attention in this column, please contact Lauri Struve, who will continue with Howard's review. You can reach Lauri via email, at LauriStruve@clearchannel.com, or at 319-651-8363.