

# **THE FIRST THIRTY DAYS**

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Everyone who owns a young horse will need to make some decisions about training. The first decision is whether you will train the horse yourself, or send him to a professional. If you lack the time, facilities, or the knowledge to start your horse under saddle, the logical answer is to send your horse to a professional trainer. The next decision is who to hire. This can pose problems because there are many trainers who consider themselves "professionals", but lack the knowledge and experience to properly train your horse. To overcome this, talk to as many trainers as you can, and collect information from them regarding costs, past experience, and recommendations. Also, ask around to check exactly what kind of reputation they have. After accomplishing this, the next step is to give careful consideration to your goals and to have realistic ideas of what to expect when you send your horse to a trainer. It seems that when a horse goes into training, most owners have no clear idea of what to expect for results. Many owners lack experience with training in general and this causes the owner to expect too much, too soon. By following a typical horse through the first month of a training program, you, as an owner, can establish a realistic scale to use in evaluating your horse's progress under a trainer.

The first month is the most important time period of a horse's training because it lays the very important foundation that will set the horse up for the rest of his life. The first month is also the start of evaluating your horse's ability and potential.

The trainer will first evaluate the horse's potential for training. Due to breeding, intelligence, conformation, maturity, or temperament, some horses may take longer to train than the norm, and a small number of these horses may be impossible or too dangerous to train. It would be a waste of time and money and the trainer should inform you of this.

You must be aware that what a horse learns depends on his disposition, athletic ability, maturity level, and intelligence. If the horse is gentle, quiet, has normal athletic ability, is mature enough to handle a training program, and has a willing attitude, you can expect definite results in the first thirty days. If the young horse is high-strung, sullen, or full of fight, the training process will take longer to achieve the same results. In the first ten days to two weeks, the horse must adjust to his new surroundings, nutritional intake, and handler. The trainer will use this time to familiarize himself with the horse, evaluate his training potential, and begin the ground work. This ground work sets the foundation of the horse's training, and though not all trainers use exactly the same methods, the ground work should consist of basic handling; sacking out; carrying the saddle; becoming familiar with the snaffle bit; giving his head to the left, right, and to the pressure of the bit; and learning the meaning of the word WHOA. Some trainers, depending on the horse, will also include longeing or ground driving in the ground work. During this time, the horse begins to learn confidence, his attitude towards work is developed, and the horse begins to trust his handler.

After this adjustment period, the horse learns to carry a rider and respond to basic commands. This process begins with mounting and dismounting until the horse feels comfortable and will stand still. For a typical young horse, this process usually only takes a day or two.

After the mounting and dismounting steps are completed, the horse is then asked to carry a rider and move out at a walk, progressing to a trot, and eventually the lope on both leads. During this time, the trainer also asks the horse to change direction with the direct rein pressure, respond to the verbal command WHOA and bit pressure to stop, and back a few steps. The trainer accomplishes all this through his training techniques, which are used while just riding the horse. Each time the trainer rides, he begins with basic ground work, then proceeds to ride the horse. Every time the horse is ridden, he learns something. The trainer is also consistent and uses repetition to set the foundation of basic commands in the horse. At the end of the first month, you will see that your horse will carry a rider at the walk, trot, and lope. He stands quietly while being mounted and

dismounted, he moves out easily at all three gaits, and he responds quickly and properly to commands. Your horse will give his head well to each side and to the pressure of the bit by flexing at the poll. He has learned to stop in a smooth, balanced manner, and will readily back a few steps. With all of this, it is evident that your horse has learned to trust and has confidence in the trainer.

After the first thirty days, you will notice that your horse has progressed quickly, but do not think, under any circumstances, that he is a finished horse. Your horse is now started under saddle, but he is only a green-broke horse. Although the foundation has been laid, that is all it is, a foundation. The basic commands have just been learned by your horse. He is still unsure about it all and certainly lacks experience. Without proper continuing training techniques, your horse could easily lose all he has learned in a very short time period or develop bad habits, leaving you with an uncontrollable, green-broke colt who has cost you your hard-earned dollars and could be dangerous if you did not know how to control him.

After the first thirty days, you should be prepared to spend time with the trainer to learn the cues and how your horse works and responds. There is also a transition period where your horse must become acquainted with you as his rider and respond to your commands, not the trainer's. Although most horses can be handled by anyone, they will still respond better to one particular person. After this transition period, your young horse needs steady riding to set the foundation that he has learned and to gain experience.

Now that your horse is started under saddle, is green-broke, and comfortable with his basic foundation training, a decision must be made about his future. Horses, like people, are best suited for a certain area, for example, western pleasure, trail riding, cutting, dressage, or jumping; and the trainer can determine the horse's ability and which area the horse would excel in. This will help you decide what discipline to consider, and if continuing the horse's training would be a worthwhile investment.

As the owner of a young horse, you can clearly see what is involved with the training of your horse. At any stage, training is a complicated and complex process, but knowing what to expect in those first thirty days will allow you to evaluate your horse's progress in a realistic manner. If you have not bought your horse yet, but are considering purchasing a young horse, keep it in perspective. There appears to be glamour in having a young horse and training it just for you, but you may be better off buying an older, well-broke horse because it may save you headaches, heartaches, and money. If you choose to buy a young horse, be conscientious of your horse's attitude, maturity, athletic ability, conformation, and the trainer's ability so your expectations will be met. The first thirty days are vital and you want to give your young horse a good start in life.