

# Young Horse Development

Linda Allen and Julie Winkel

Jump Canada Symposium, Thunderbird, 2011

*Linda Allen is one of the top hunter jumper trainers in the US; Julie Winkel, likewise, is a top h/j trainer based in Nevada. She writes a conformation column for 'Practical Horseman' and was instrumental in some of the recent positive changes that are being seen in the hunter show rings.*

Jose... (Natural horsemanship trainer used by Winkel)

“When we ride a horse, we become one energy bubble instead of two.”

“I’m a horseman, this is a horse. Groundwork is good, but he’s meant to be ridden.”

Julie Winkel and Linda Allen

- Longeing: Is good, if done for the right reason and in the right way
- Walk on a long rein: relaxes the mind, allows the older horse to physically relax. Lets the horse be in front of you, and go forward
- **The more times it takes for a horse to figure it out, the better he understands it** when he does
- We’re smarter than horses, they’re stronger than us
- **Expect a horse to be its age and treat it as so.** When we get glimpses of them acting older/more mature than they are, and then commence to train them that way – that’s when we get in trouble.
- When training:
  - o Linda:
    - 1. Forward – the horse has to be going out the front door
    - 2. Straight
    - 3. Consistent – have self-carriage
    - 4. Balanced
  - o Julie:
    - 1. Forward
    - 2. Must have steering:
      - Has to go where you want
      - Follow directions
      - This leads to straightness eventually
    - 3. Rhythm and relaxation (harder at the canter)
    - 4. Balance

- **Don't try and fix everything at the same time.** Fix the weakest link in the chain first.
- Draw reins: the horse only learns to get away from pressure and drop behind the bit, get away from the hands. **Never use draw reins to train a horse.** Take them off – the horse is evading.
- If a horse is TOO elastic: it's difficult now, when green – but will be a great advantage to you later.
- **If you change tack (rather than change tactics),** your horse will just learn a different resistance later.
- **Take the time to work through the problem in a snaffle.** Don't go to a twist.
- **Give the young ones a break** – *they don't have a long attention span, get bored easily,* so let them have **success, and some reward.** Don't get a horse sour.
- **Don't do a lot of transitions in the early stages, but do change direction a lot.** This gives the horse rhythm and self-carriage.
- **Spurs:** *don't use them on 3 and 4 year olds.*
  - o They don't understand the leg, and will back up into the leg.
  - o *Use a stick to educate the horse to the leg.*
  - o The rider can't be afraid to use the leg; *you must be able to thump on them.*
- It's easy to make a horse more sensitive; *if they start off sensitive, that is more difficult.*
- Trot poles:
  - o Don't make the obstacle the whole thing
  - o Make the obstacle part of the job in addition to the obstacle
  - o Vary it
- **The rider's job: pace and track**
- **The horse's job: the jump**
  - o When you get to a jump, completely give and let the horse do his job
- **Let horses make mistakes**
  - o They can correct them, deal with their own problems
  - o They must learn this so they know how to get out of trouble
  - o Good riders often help green horses too much, they over think; the horse does not learn how to deal with situations
- **Take your time.** *Don't try and change it all at once.*
- *Scratch the horse on the withers:* this is what the horse does in nature, it has meaning to him
- **How to train a horse/rider:**
  - o **Give them high self esteem**
  - o **Confidence is everything in the horse/rider**
- A horse that hurries: sink in, sit with a light seat. Support with a soft leg, seat and arms.
- **Know when to quit**
- ***If the horse is struggling with a concept, make sure he's not also struggling with you.***
- **Let the last thing they do be easy:** *they'll remember the last thing.*
- A sensitive horse might bump the first rail – then bump all the rest. It's because they get frustrated/rattled and can't/don't try to figure it out

- The more sensitive a horse is, the more important the horse is used to the leg; otherwise, you put the leg on the horse and it's electric
- Exercise:
  - Pole, (9') Pole (one stride) pole
  - Pole (9') cross (one stride) pole
  - Pole (9') cross (one stride) vertical
    - **Horses learn through repetition**
    - Keep a space between the cross rails, in case the horse bumps it
    - If the horse is rushing – trot forward out of the corner, then slow down on the approach
    - Julie Winkel doesn't canter with young horses; will jump them first, this helps with canter
    - **Riders often act too much with the upper body;** the horse reacts, then the rider has to use the hands
    - **Allow:** *the more we can allow the horse to do his job, the better he becomes*
- Exercise: pole (9') cross (one stride) ascending oxer; loop around, jump angled ascending oxer
  - **Control the corner,** keep the horse's nose to the centre of the jump
  - The important part is to come around the corner and get to the centre of the fence; **If they stop, no big deal** – but DON'T let them look down at the jump. The horse **MUST** look beyond the jump.
  - The horse should come around the corner **and listen 50% to the rider and focus 50% on the jump.**
    - *The rider needs to be still*
    - If the horse is focussing more on the rider (looking back) – *soften the hands.*
    - **ALLOW** the horse to jump rather than **TELL** it to jump.
  - *It's better to LET a horse learn,* rather than trying to teach them something.
    - Correction is better on the landing side
      - Give him something to do: circle, transition, focus on that
- *Every perfect horse at home is a waste of time:* school the horse, challenge it.
- Green horses: always give them ground lines (NOTE: loose ground rails are not allowed in Pony Club)
- Don't canter single fences a lot – do it as a test every so often.
- If you jump a three year old, **he can do it – but he won't last**
  - *Slow it down*
  - Older green horses can be pushed faster than younger green ones
  - Some horses/breeds mature earlier, some later
    - QH/TB mature at 3
    - Warmbloods might not mature until 8
  - *Quality is better than quantity.*
    - The longer it takes to make a horse, the better its basics are.

- Use subtle *transitions within gaits*.
  - It's *essential that the horse moves forward* from when you ask/where you ask
  - Transitions must be smooth, relaxed, and happy when you ask.
  - Jumper/hunter only needs to go forward/back a few strides (unlike the dressage horse who has to hold a lengthening across the diagonal)
  - *Transitions must be smooth but prompt*
- **If you want a horse to be better, ask more often, don't ask harder.**
  - After 3-4 times, he will start to anticipate = more responsive to the aids
- There are two main things when riding a horse
  - *How fast it is going vs. how fast it wants to be going*
- Use rails for flat work, make them think about their feet, keep their balance/rhythm, make adjustments to the stride
- **Poles are good; they prevent you from jumping them too much.**
  - Jump a maximum of 2 times a week when young
- If shortening the stride, the horse still needs to be in front of the leg
- When the horse catches a rail behind (when trotting over a pole):
  - Typical of the green horse
  - He doesn't know how to shorten behind
  - Harder for the leggy/longer strided horse
  - If they don't learn to shorten, this is when they jump over the shoulder, twist, etc.
- **Chips (short/close distances):**
  - Horse does it because it feels safe
  - If the horse has a scopy, powerful jump, it will choose to go long; this becomes iffy to a wide fence (and can be dangerous on a cross country fence, if long distances turn into a habit)
- Once they figure out trot poles, you can raise the jump
- *A quality trot is key:*
  - Should be marching and straight
  - Maintain to the fence, don't anticipate. Sit still
  - Focus on the middle of the last jump
- Changes:
  - Get yourself and the horse straight, then wait one stride longer to ask for the change.
    - When asking, don't lean
    - Just before wall, sit back with upper body, horse will change under you
- Stopping is harder than jumping
  - **Don't give the horse a reason to stop**
- Riding a horse is like driving a nice car
  - You press on the gas, sit and steer. *Don't row the boat*
- **Jump lower fences of different types:**
  - *This teaches style and technique*

- *The simpler the exercise, the more perfect it should be* (e.g., transitions walk to trot).
  - How a horse does a walk to canter transition will tell you how it jumps
- *Harder is not the same as higher:*
  - A high jump should be easy
  - Don't make low too easy
- The more a horse can think, the better its technique will be
- The less the rider does, the more the horse starts to do.
  - The next step: land, sit still, see if the horse will do it himself
- Horses don't reason, don't think the way we think, but they do have a sense of blame/responsibility
- You need to see HOW LITTLE you need to ride a horse – not how much.
- *Green horses don't think as fast*
- Concentrate more on the quality of the canter in the approach
- Green horses:
  - Jump them off a curve
    - This helps with balance and straightness
    - The rider's job is to keep it smooth (the curve, the canter)
- Free jumping set up:
  - Standard practice in Europe
  - Not a necessity
  - Sometimes it's an impossibility (due to facility, etc.)
- Free jumping:
  - Is a good way to teach a horse to look at things
  - Have a box with grain (raised) in the ring
    - This stops the horse from going too fast; he'll go to grain instead
  - Lead the horse into the shoot:
    - The most experienced horse person is required for this role
  - Use placing rails
    - This allows the horse to learn rhythm and balance without having to jump too high
- Round pen: teaches them what *cluck* and *whoa* means
- Hands take the forward away from a horse, makes them tougher
  - What works for them is to go forward
- If the horse is kicking the wall (when ridden):
  - Take away the reward (ride far enough away from the wall)
  - Gallop him hard: take the edge off him
- **Horses like rules**
  - They live by rules and parameters
- When teaching jumping:
  - *90% should be no issue (easy) in horse's mind*
- Riding on the flat:
  - **Light contact is not the same as a loose rein**

- *Horse should travel on a long fluid stride that is ground covering*
    - Horse should appear **relaxed** and **happy**
- The horse should point his nose to where his feet will be
- Canter is more important than the trot
- Don't ride in a ½ seat (2 point); ride in a light seat, close the hip angle
- When judging Pre/Baby Green classes:
  - Overlook mistakes if corrected quickly
  - Quality – should be lenient
- Amateur: the expectation is that the horse is VERY broke
- Distances:
  - Okay deep vs. bad deep
    - *Bad deep is when the rider gets ahead*
  - Okay deep is acceptable
  - Bad deep is unacceptable
- Trotting on course: deal breaker for a judge
  - Hunter classes are judged out of 100; it is an automatic drop to 40 when trotting
- **Spookiness:**
  - **Will not disappear with schooling**
    - **Make him work**
    - **Make compromises (cut corners)**
- Changes:
  - Use pole on the landing side
  - Land straight, go forward, rider sits up/back just before wall (change at turn)
  - Fix the thing that's preventing the change first (straightness, etc.)
- Handy Hunter:
  - Need efficient turns, brilliant forward pace, inside options, good form
  - After the hand gallop, the next fence at an increased pace (but not increasing to the fence)
  - Pace first, distance second
- Derby
  - more natural, without ground lines, more options