



Basic Training Of The Two-Year-Old

"He being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time." Wisdom of Solomon 4:13

This section will form the main body of this offering, and it may be as well to preface it with a quotation from Keene Daingerfield: "There is no legerdemain connected with training horses, no sleight of hand, no magic words to change a bad horse into a good one. Anyone with ordinary common sense can win races with good horses; no one can win them with bad ones. There is however a proving ground; the great body of ordinary animals. The trainer who gets maximum results from average material is the good trainer. Luck, too plays a prominent part; but luck, as a substitute for brains, does not last forever."

This sentiment can be adopted as our theme in what will be necessarily a rather long-winded section as unfortunately many of the basic rules we wish to discuss here have definite exceptions to them. If there is a trick, then it may be said to be knowing when those exceptions should be applied. If there is one rule that should never alter it is that every horse in the yard is for sale, as long as the price is right. To keep the show on the road it is essential to generate cash flow by selling horses continually and replacing them with fresh ones. To be able to do this we must keep our horses as sound as possible, and preserving soundness should be considered just as important as winning prize money.

Once the yearlings have been broken and ridden away they are ready to commence their training proper. It is as well if we can get them all going within four or five weeks, so as initially to train them as a group. As long as

there is a relatively short time lapse the problem can be overcome by taking it easy with the first ones ridden for two or three weeks, allowing the stragglers to catch up. Yearlings will always learn to handle themselves better and to be more competitive in a group.

The exception is the very flighty horse that requires much more time to accept every new idea. This type of horse can prove very disruptive to the group as a whole and he can for a time be left to a more long and steady exercise routine, probably with the pony to accompany him. He must not, however, be allowed to get too fresh, even though we are not in a hurry with him, as fresh horses rarely learn anything except bad habits. After a while these erratic ones settle down and can gradually be introduced into the string, perhaps at first joining the others to walk home after they have done their work and are more amenable. Hay and water is the only diet a horse like this requires until he accepts the normal routine.

The main body of yearlings will follow a programme of steadily increasing work that they can normally all cope with at this stage, although as the pressure increases it will be obvious which ones do need a little more time. This training plan was formulated on the assumption that the weather remains reasonable and that the horses remain healthy. Unfortunately that is most unlikely always to be true, and various different scenarios will develop which necessitate minor improvisations. The other qualification to be made is that it is far from easy to find the riders to guarantee the successful

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application of these formulae, although we will expect to some degree to train our own riders as well as our horses. The basic plan is not particularly complicated.

The exercise regime does depend to some degree on the weather, which is obviously out of our control, and common sense should always be used regarding underfoot conditions when working with young horses. Slippery surfaces should be avoided, and also very rough and frozen ones. Yearlings should not be cantered on ground that is very heavy, nor on ground with frost in it. However they should actually miss as few days as possible, and it should normally be possible for them to have trotting exercise even in bad weather. Running racehorses should never trot fast for fear of pulled shoes and of damaged knees after stumbles. We should always remember, when tempted to miss a day in marginal conditions, that the next day the weather may well be even worse and that all youngsters soon learn bad habits when fresh. This is even more true once they start being fed a little more hard food. If any one day is particularly cold or wet there is no need to subject horses or lads to their full exercise; however, this cannot become a regular occurrence.

At this age there is no real need for most yearlings to be out more than 45 or 50 minutes, certainly not if they are behaving themselves well. We should also keep the exercise fairly near to home at this stage because many babies still walk very slowly and these slower walkers should not be constantly chivvied to keep up. Over the next few weeks they will all learn to walk at the pace of the older horses.

By now we assume that the yearlings are capable of going straight onto the gallops in a string. They should have a sensible older horse to lead them and if necessary his hard food ration can be slightly reduced to ensure his better behaviour. This will be a fairly relaxing task for a horse that has been hard trained and we should be able to find one that enjoys it.

However, he is doing a job and too much *joie de vivre* will not be constructive. In fact, leading yearlings can sometimes prove a dramatic revival process for any horse feeling the effects of a long campaign, but giving the young ones a good example is always the primary objective. A horse that misbehaves going on to the exercise ground should never be used to lead yearlings.

At this stage, yearlings should always have a good trot when they first get to the exercise ground in order to get any freshness out of their system before the serious business starts. They can do some circling and figures of eight to practise their steering skills, and for this they should split up rather than blindly follow the leader. The lads will need constant reminding to go their separate ways. They must also be warned not to turn sharply on those horses that have been reshod in front for fear of getting their shoes off, particularly if the ground is soft. It is a good idea for the horses to trot in and out of the string, crossing each other's path as if it were a musical ride, to trot tight upsides each other, and generally to simulate the bunching and interference of a race. This practice is very helpful in making horses accept that they need not worry about their classmates and it must therefore enable them to concentrate on the job in hand. There seems a widely held but erroneous opinion amongst racing people that upsides work implies purely speed work; this should not be so and in fact the majority of a racehorse's education should be complete before he ever does formal fast work. We may need to reiterate this fact constantly to the lads. Care should obviously be taken to identify any persistent kicker and therefore avoid unnecessary accidents; however, with care those animals that do initially kick at their workmates soon learn to relax and behave themselves in company.

The harness racing world is much more aware of the importance of teaching racing technique and racing manners to their horses. In a time-oriented sport they have concrete evidence of the difference total training can

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make. This approach should be more widely adopted in the Thoroughbred sport for best results. The fact that many Thoroughbred trainers, especially most of the more fashionable ones who tend to train the better horses, have had little or no experience of even riding work on young racehorses must explain this difference in philosophies.

After trotting for 15 minutes or so, and practising the two verbal commands once or twice, the yearlings can walk to the cantering ground. Although we do not want any horses to become too fresh, great care should be taken for the first few days that the latest recruits are allowed to get their breath back between stages. They are less fit than the first wave, and if overtired at first they may become resentful. These later arrivals catch up in a few days.

Initially the yearlings canter three or four furlongs. They have been used to hack cantering a furlong or two in the past weeks but it is important that they do go far enough to settle down and pay attention now that they are in a string. Even with the old horse in front there will be a certain amount of swerving and running about for the first day or two, but the yearlings will soon get the idea. It is a good idea to make them all walk along the cantering ground and allow them to trot and then canter away only when the back markers are ready, rather than set them off individually as soon as they get there.

The old horse should go up the middle of the cantering ground for the first few times to allow a clear passage between the discs or markers, as the yearlings will initially show a tendency to swerve away from these. This greenness will soon pass and the lads can gradually get closer to the discs over a few days, in fact the sooner the better because they will then be able to use the fresh ground opened by the markers' moving over one horse's width each day. To use the best ground is another subject for daily reminder to all lads on all horses, especially any older animals with leg problems.

The point at which the string are to pull up must be made clear before it sets off, but the lead rider must still loudly signal his intentions a furlong earlier in the hope of avoiding a pile-up. All yearlings (and in fact all racehorses) should always trot out for a few strides when they pull up. The all too common method of stopping dead from a canter to a walk with the attendant jarring and stumbling probably causes the start of many injuries, and we should absolutely not allow it. To make the pull-up smoother it should never, if this can possibly be avoided, be on a downhill section. Many yearlings, although otherwise well-mannered, do have a tendency to kick when pulling up on the first few occasions, but they soon grow out of it but initially great care should be taken not to get any horses, or riders, hurt.

Basically the yearlings will now do two canters on most days, with a short walk between, as long as the ground is suitable. After the first few days they will hopefully be cantering in a recognisable string and in an orderly fashion. They should be going just fast enough that they are not playing about and the lead horse should be careful to control the speed. As a rule they are not to pass the leader. There will be the odd yearling that drops himself out and falls well behind, and this trick must be quickly stopped before it becomes a habit. These horses must set off near the front of the string so that the others are chasing them up, or helping them along. The longer this habit of dropping out is tolerated, the harder it is to break.

As a general rule it is advisable for all young horses to be encouraged to conduct themselves as soberly as possible. Bad habits are all too easily formed, and resentment is very often caused in trying to resolve them if they are allowed to become confirmed. We might occasionally give a little leeway to an older horse, particularly a more able member of the team, as long as matters do not get out of hand. Knowing just what degree of tomfoolery is

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acceptable in order to keep an old horse happy in his work is one of the most important aspects of training; unfortunately, it has to be learnt by bitter experience.

Some of the colts may show a tendency to be either aggressive or amorous with their classmates when at close quarters, but as long as these horses are always ridden by fairly strong characters they normally realise quite quickly that this is unacceptable behaviour. We should remember that they have been used to establishing a pecking order when running out in the paddocks, and that some may now wish to declare their superiority. In most cases this does not seem to imply that these coltish individuals will be superior runners and their bad habits should certainly be corrected as soon as possible. Particular care should be taken not to allow them to jump up on another horse when they, for instance, may find themselves behind a very slow walker, or if the string stops for traffic. If by any chance a horse shows every sign of continuing with this cheekiness, or if he shows other distinct signs of having a mind of his own generally, we should give serious consideration to having him gelded straight away. The sooner the cutting is done, the sooner he can start to get over it, and the less confirmed any bad habits will have become. We would far rather have a decent runner, and be sorry to have cut him, than have a wastrel and regret not cutting him.

Yearlings in most cases recover very quickly from this operation, although all horses that have been cut should normally go out twice daily until the swelling subsides. Trotting exercise is normal for the first ten days or so, with a 30 minute lunge at evening stable time. Twenty minutes of hosing the wound is also helpful, as long as the weather is not too cold.

The insurance company must be informed of the operation. The decision of whether or not to insure racehorses needs some consideration, and is a matter of personal choice. The premiums are fairly high, and cover is normally

limited to death or humane destruction, but when things are going wrong they often seem to go very wrong, and recovery of at least the capital value of the horse is very welcome. If we should buy any American yearlings, none should be put into quarantine on an aeroplane without being insured as we are then assuming additional risks outside of our direct control.

Castration should not be expected to act as if we had simply switched off a light and it may take some time to see any dramatic improvement. In fact, particularly in the case of older animals that are more set in their ways, the improvement may take so long and be so gradual as to be imperceptible. With a very rebellious old horse it is often advisable to give him a complete break once the wound has healed, and eventually start afresh with an established gelding, which may have a more relaxed attitude, rather than to battle on with his old attitudes still fresh in his mind. Some cases that do appear to have demonstrated fairly instant rehabilitation may involve the misbehaviour having been due to an illness which responded to the accompanying antibiotic therapy. The removal of physical discomfort involving one or both testicles could also be an explanation for an instant change of attitude.

We would hope to have all the yearlings cantering in the string by Christmas so as to be able to up the tempo, weather permitting, after the holidays. The old-time trainers would try their yearlings before Christmas to see what they had. The famed 19th century yearling races were probably actually early two-year-old contests as the birthday in those days was 1 May.

It is often possible to predict the better prospects amongst the team even at this early stage simply by observing the way in which they use their hind legs in comparison with their companions. Those horses whose hind legs reach up furthest under their girth even in their slower paces are likely to prove the superior runners.

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Mac's Imp (USA), Champion 2-year-old in Ireland, in full cry alongside the Devil's Ditch at Newmarket. Alan Munro up. Compare his action with that of Superpower (p 87). (Photo courtesy of Paul Edwards)

The Christmas and New Year period is normally fairly shambolic in the racing environment due to absenteeism but we should resign ourselves to that fact. We can console ourselves by thinking that any injured horse might well miss much more time than this seasonal upheaval will cost him without suffering any long-term ill effects. After the disruption of the holiday it may take a day or two to get the stable back on an even keel, and we must take extra care to avoid accidents with very fresh horses, particularly as conditions underfoot may be bad.

By about 4 January, weather permitting, the schedule should be back to where we left off.

We can now gradually begin to step up the exercise a little. All increases in pace in a racehorse's workload must be made gradually. It must be made plain to all riders that any unanticipated showings of speed will always be regarded as quite the opposite of a pleasant surprise. Although two-year-olds will not be required to race round a turn for some time, and some indeed may never do so, it is a good idea to include some cantering that does involve turning a well-defined corner as part of the racing education before the serious speed work commences.

Once the holiday period is over we will start to increase the hard food ration. As with

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everything else, this increase should be gradual. Over two or three weeks the now two-year-olds' intake will gradually increase, as long as they continue in full work, towards the normal allowance for a horse in training. This comprises a fairly dry ration made up of Canadian oats, racehorse cubes and pre-mix fed 3 pounds, 3 pounds, and 6–8 pounds at 6 am, 12 noon and 6 pm, respectively. In fact this will be found to be an optimistic expectation for very many two-year-olds, particularly as they start to work harder. As a general rule, racehorses do not eat as well whilst they are in hard work as they do when their regime is easier.

There is no longer any need for more than a token trot to check that all are sound and the cantering can be increased to three canters of around five furlongs each for all except those that look as if that workload might be too much for them. The second and third canters should be either upsides in twos, or in a larger bunch. We may need to be very insistent to make some lads go close enough to the other horses; however, we really do want them to be banging their irons against their partner's. There is no earthly use in horses merely going parallel to each other. Just because there are rules against rough riding and interference in races does not mean it doesn't regularly take place, and we want our soldiers to be experienced in combat conditions. The old horse should continue to lead so as to control the speed. In the event of any of the juveniles getting a little keen they should be relegated to the rear where they will normally settle down again. We do not want to encourage any overenthusiastic behaviour at this stage.

The two-year-olds should be ready for the first minimal injection of speed by the last week of January. The quietest way to introduce this is by telling the lad on the old horse just to go on a bit once he can see everyone is present and correct. He need not signify his intentions beforehand so as to avoid too much excitability amongst the other riders at the prospect of

having a little feel of their mounts' ability. Of course, the old horse must be easy to rate and the lad on him must know what he is doing. They should go about three furlongs at about 17 or 18 seconds to the furlong, in fact a normal canter for the old horse.

It is not difficult to determine an approximate relationship between stride pattern and speed for some of the older horses that can lead this type of work. We are only attempting to ensure that there is a fairly regular progression in the work times, and it is not realistic to expect the clock-in-the-head racetrack system to be any more accurate than this one. Once we have some idea how fast the old horse is going at a given stride rate anyone numerate can be instructed how fast to go on him. In fact it will be easier to implement this method by using half-furlongs in our instructions because the markers should be so placed; riders charged with the task of setting the pace must continue to monitor their speed throughout as the discs may have been displaced by earlier traffic and not precisely reset, which over only two sections might be misleading. The overall distance will be correct and it is unusual to get three consecutive widely differing sections. It is easier for the average work rider to count off each physical stride than to assess accurately the perception of seconds passing in time.

Most two-year-olds (that is, most horses that are going to be capable of racing competitively at two years) will improve steadily under this regime and by mid-February the normal speed for cantering every day will have advanced to the 17 or 18 second per furlong rate. The third canter can now be dropped and the routine cantering should now revert to one behind the other in order to guard against any horses or lads becoming too keen. Two or three times a week they should work a little more seriously and continue to reduce their times on those occasions. Any signs of excitability, either equine or human, must be

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carefully monitored. The times or the stride pattern of the old horse should be dropping steadily so that by early March the second daily canter should be at around a 15 second per furlong rate and a three furlong work is completed comfortably in around 42 seconds. This rate can be regarded as a 'half-speed' and they should do it with the last furlong slightly the fastest.

All these times are taken whilst the horse is already moving, not from a standstill, so are not particularly onerous. An early-season two-year-old race, in Britain, might be run in 25 or 26 seconds for the first two furlongs and finish in 1.03 minutes from a standing start, although there can be tremendous variation due to the differing tracks and the state of the surfaces. The standing start costs almost two seconds, and this should always be borne in mind when comparing race times between Britain and America. If two-year-olds win in the same time as the older horses over course and distance on the same day during the first weeks of the season they are potentially quite smart. Unfortunately, some of these early fliers will have been so cranked up by their connections for an early campaign that they will soon fizzle out.

It is not constructive to have two-year-olds working the last furlongs slower than the first, due to having overdone the early pace. Horses definitely do not get the same fitness benefit from this work and they can also become disillusioned very easily at this age if they are finishing tired. This should not imply that all that is required is a flying final furlong, as to get improvement we must see a regular reduction in the overall time; however, to sustain that improvement there must be no falling off in speed at the end. Obviously on raceday most sprints are run at a fast early pace which then slows, but there is no sense in actually teaching horses to slow up at the end. Early speed can easily be introduced at a later date, if necessary, simply by two or three very sharp dashes, which will however be over only

two or three furlongs, allowing the horse to be pulled up before he gets tired.

We are now well into March and as we drop our workday times steadily and in an organised fashion towards the 12 second furlongs which are the standard requirement of a Thoroughbred racehorse we should be anticipating either of two widely differing situations.

The first is that some of the team will not be as comfortable with the increased workload as others, which is only to be expected, and is easily remedied by backing off them a little. We don't need to stop with them altogether, but we may allow them a week or two doing routine canters. We might then quietly have another try, perhaps in company with any others that have lagged behind the main group for various reasons.

The other thing we should be watching very carefully for at this time is the horse that gets a little speed crazy. Even though this one has no problem physically handling the work, his brain is starting to overheat. This too will probably be resolved by our backing off him a little and reducing the speed of his work, but this might not be the right thing to do. This horse might easily be a precocious sprinter, pure and simple; if such is the case, we may well miss the boat with him if we do stop now. This type of horse needs careful consideration, and an experienced lad to ride him and preferably to do him in the box. Lads are naturally more patient with their own horses. The best remedy to give us a chance of covering all eventualities is to move him to first lot with the old horses, and see how he gets on cantering in that string. Very often this will do the trick, as the old ones tend to be going a little faster and also a little further. This in itself may well be enough to prevent him from trying to overdo things, and the more strenuous canters will also benefit his fitness without him needing to work more seriously for a week or two. If he does continue to be headstrong but is physically doing well we should press on and let him do his work behind

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an old horse, so that he doesn't get in the habit of running away. Obviously the old horse is not to race him, but merely to go fast enough for the youngster to settle, and the two-year-old should be allowed to come through at the end and to finish in front. The sooner this type of keen juvenile gets to the races now, the better. These horses sometimes turn out fine after they have had a run. As long as he is a healthy horse, we should try to run him regularly instead of working him fast at home once he has made his debut.

Obviously it is important to use the best available riders, and we should hope to develop some of our own along with the horses. It is increasingly difficult to find competent lightweights but, for the purpose of argument, we must assume that riders of the two-year-olds following this method are under 9 st, and we must remember that the weights allotted for serious work should reflect the age and the capabilities of the horses involved. Weight for age between two and three over five furlongs early in the year is about 30lb, which gradually reduces to reflect the increasing maturity of the youngsters. The full scale is easily available, and we should instinctively take it into account in all calculations that involve horses of different ages working or racing together.

At this point another golden rule can be recorded, which is that when working a two-year-old with an old horse, the old horse always works for the two-year-old. That is to say he does not try to beat the two-year-old either at the start, where he has the greater experience, or at the finish, where he will probably show more stamina. The rare exceptions are when we are fairly sure that the two-year-old is really smart and are considering how much to bet, but such all-out trials should only be over four furlongs early in the year, as the full five is too severe for the two-year-old. After the work is over, the old horse should be slowed in order to allow the youngster the encouragement of getting to the front even if he was not there at

the winning post. Our lads should always be aware of the damage which can be done to a two-year-old's confidence, and they should realise that offences in this area of operations are regarded as very serious. Unfortunately, it is always easier to turn any young horse into a loser than into a winner.

To return to those two-year-olds that are making normal progress, by the end of March we should find that most of those that have kept up so far can work a half-mile in a little above 50 seconds, with the last two furlongs in 24 seconds. We might refer to this rate as 'three-parts speed'. This stage of the training is quite enjoyable to all concerned in as much as it takes the form of what we call 'farmer's races' and there is for the first time some element of competition, although this must be controlled. The pace of the daily second canter will remain a two minute rate of 15 seconds per furlong, although obviously the distance remains around five or six furlongs. This was traditionally referred to in Newmarket as a 'swinging canter'. As a general rule, the more strong cantering work any racehorse receives, the smaller amount of formal fast work he will require. A regime involving 15 seconds per furlong canters most days is definitely beneficial in establishing and maintaining the degree of fitness required to complete an arduous season, but it must be introduced gradually. By now most of the two-year-olds are interchangeable with the old horses in the string, so allowing the light lads to ride more of them than when all the young ones were second lot. The two-year-olds need not canter quite as far as the old ones at this stage, although they will by now be cantering at similar speeds.

Unfortunately, the speed crazy type is not uncommon amongst sprinters and this can cause problems amongst the older horses too. Once they are fit, many of these horses are well suited to doing just one good strong canter and then going home. Doing two canters with the

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string often fires them up needlessly. If these animals can be regularly raced, so much the better, as the need to go fast at home will then be lessened. In many cases a normal programme has the same reaction on these animals as pouring petrol on a fire. The widespread perception that they need no work is quite illogical and we should continue to train them, but with some tact and diplomacy. The frequent examples of horses that win having reportedly done no work at all are difficult to explain, but those animals would almost certainly do even better were it possible to put them into a regular work schedule. These cases tend to occur in older, lower-grade animals that very rarely change stables into more formally run establishments which might enable the theory to be tested.

At this stage we will have some idea of the real potential of the two-year-olds based on how easily they seem to do their work. Reasonably precocious types will nearly all progress smoothly up to this point but one or two more may now be coming towards the limit of what they can do comfortably, and again we should back off these ones for a short time. As long as they remain in good health we should never stop on them altogether, but they may resume routine cantering without any fast work for a time.

The next couple of weeks will see further increases in speed and these should always be steady rather than dramatic. Some thought should now be given to sending horses of apparently similar capabilities together. We can easily spoil any horse at this stage by working him with one that is far superior, which is merely an endorsement of what we have previously noted about working with an older horse. Two-year-olds must never be worked fast in heavy ground, although they may occasionally be forced to race in it. If the final stages of the gallop being used are severe, such as Across The Flat at Newmarket, two-year-olds should not be required to work as far up

the hill as the old horses, so as to avoid disillusioning them. They will however derive great benefit from cantering uphill, as long as the increased strain is gradually introduced.

Once a two-year-old delivers a sub-50 second half-mile at the beginning of April we can be fairly sure of him winning something, especially should the last two furlongs of the work be appreciably faster, such as in a 26 second and 23 second split. The reverse split is not nearly as good and may well indicate what we call 'cheap' speed. However, even cheap speed is better than no speed, and with care this type of horse should be able to scramble through some sort of a contest, even if only because of the weakness of the early season opposition. He can then be sold, probably to Italy.

When two-year-olds reach this level and are still finishing strongly we can feel optimistic as to their prospects and begin to consider where we should run. If they have followed these recommendations they should have a sound base of fitness and will be ready to compete after only three or four more works. Of course, if we intend to bet heavily on one we may prefer to spend a little more time to ensure his complete fitness, but as a general rule betting should never be considered a major factor in any realistic plan to survive in the racing game.

The remaining works should be at a similar rate, although they might be slightly longer so that they come close to the distance of the race. To be fair to them, all two-year-olds should have at least six works at something approaching racing pace before they run, although those works need not all be over the full five furlongs. Strong canters should continue on nonwork days as long as the animals are thriving on their work.

As previously mentioned, it may be advisable to really send our horse along over two or three furlongs, say a quarter of a mile from a standstill in 23 seconds or so, once or twice, in order to prevent the possibility of

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being badly outpaced in the early part of their first race. This is combat training, not fitness work, and he should always be pulled up while still full of running. These dashes are essential, however good we may think he is, if we intend betting seriously on him. If, however the result of the first race is felt to be incidental to a likely successful career, we should not bother.

The weather will probably play some part in the completion of this schedule, and it may often be necessary to use all-weather surfaces if they are available. On these occasions we should take care to school the young horses in brushing against the rail and in entering narrow gaps and racing in tight quarters next to it. If the horses are to leave any railed gallop through a gap in the rail after working they must always be made to pass the gap and then turn back to it.

In the event that we do wish to bet, or even just for interest, we may want to work the two-year-old formally with an old horse in order to try him. This can be extremely informative if properly conducted, and in the old days, when it was normal practice, it was said to have two purposes. First, to discover a good horse but second, and equally important, to uncover a bad one! If we do decide to try a two-year-old it is usually a good idea to have a semi-serious dress rehearsal about a week before the real trial. If we really like this horse he should fairly easily go three and a half furlongs with a reasonable three-year-old, say a 70-rated handicapper, in receipt of a stone from the older one. If he can't, we may have overestimated him. If he can do this easily enough then he should come on enough in a week to repeat the work in receipt of only 7lbs. This does not make him a good horse, but it should be enough to win the majority of early-season maiden races. It is not recommended, or necessary, to go any further than this, or at most four furlongs, when working with an older horse at this time of the year. The result of any trial that takes place on a gallop with marked undulations can prove

misleading, as the old horse will normally be seen to greater advantage, and to guard against this happening such ground should only be used to try horses after they have had previous experience of its irregularities. We should bear in mind that the same caution should be exercised in expecting great things from inexperienced horses racing on very sharp tracks, even if their home work has been good. Animals that have already had racecourse experience will normally have a distinct advantage.

Many years ago it was the practice to try the yearlings before Christmas, although they then had much lighter lads to ride them. It was said then that the best horse at Christmas would in fact turn out to be the best at the end of the day. This would seem to imply that early development need not necessarily predict early decay, contrary to popular belief. A recent survey of the participants in the very early two-year-old dashes in America showed them on average to enjoy longer careers than those that were not started so early in the year.

It might prove interesting to refer to the now indiscriminate use of the word 'good' by racing enthusiasts. When applied to a racehorse this adjective ought to imply an animal of at least Listed race class, although to a purist a stakes horse would only be 'nice', and he would demand Group performance from a 'good' horse! Arguably these terms are generally too vague to be allotted any specific value, however when used by professional horsemen they should imply exceptional racing ability.

Other examples of the bastardisation of the vocabulary are the fact that nowadays a horse with 'a leg' is no longer specifically understood to be suffering from a tendon injury, and that one that 'blows up' in a race is no longer specifically understood to have weakened purely through lack of fitness which, by implication, can and will be remedied. Obviously, the inappropriate use of much originally specific racing terminology by the media tends to further corrupt correct usage.

Basic Training Of The Two-Year-Old

We have covered the actual training schedule of the early-season two-year-old in some detail, but as well as getting him fit it is vitally important to teach him something of the technique of racing. This is widely overlooked and almost certainly leads to many horses not fulfilling their full potential, whether or not they apparently race successfully. Funnily enough, those horses that appear completely natural runners at every stage of their training do surprisingly often get beaten on their first start. Everything has come so easily to them that they have no idea what to do in an actual race when they may not automatically be able to dominate the opposition from the start. Even though they may run quite straight, and apparently do nothing wrong, these horses are actually beaten through greenness. Fayruz was well beaten on his first start through this syndrome, causing a certain amount of financial upheaval in the camp, but he bounced straight back and won his next six starts in less than a month. This horse was already inclined to be headstrong, so had not been subjected to the recommended two or three furlong dashes that would have prevented the initial defeat, but which might easily have left him impossible to train.

In any other discipline we would expect to teach the horse his job gradually, and the better he was taught, as long as he had some natural aptitude, the better results we would expect. There seems little reason to believe that just because a racehorse can run around a field instinctively he can teach himself to run fast or slow on demand, whilst carrying an unnatural burden, without some specific training. We should remember before dismissing this speculation out of hand that in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, and that any advantage we can give our horses will increase our prospects of eventual success. As mentioned elsewhere, top harness-racing trainers, who in many cases are also drivers, attach enormous importance

to what they term 'racing manners' in their much more arduous and tactical sport. As harness racing is completely time orientated the value of sound practices are presumably plainly demonstrated, which is not always true of Thoroughbred racing.

Even if we accept this precept, we may initially find it extremely difficult to implement properly, but if we do make the effort we may hope also to develop some riders capable of following this system as a matter of course. In the meantime, any efforts we do make will not be completely wasted. Although this concept may to some sound a little far-fetched it is probably not particularly novel. It has merely, like many sound equine practices, been forgotten in the combustion engine euphoria that has swept the civilised world. What we require is a horse that, although running in a relaxed manner so as to conserve as much energy as possible, can be instantly called upon to quicken or to change direction as the unfolding race may require. Obviously this is easier said than done with a big, long-striding horse which must mean that these particular animals will require even more education. Ironically, in most cases they will be the least likely to receive it as they will often be relegated to the back burner by their trainers and never seen again, at least not until they are too set in their ways to be easily taught how to handle themselves to best advantage.

One aspect of this approach that seems to have little relevance in Europe, although it is regarded as vital in America, is the ability to change legs, or leads, on demand. In Europe all horses are allowed to decide for themselves which leg to use in the closing stages of their race, and we may sometimes consider a race to have been lost by changing at a vital stage. In America it is considered essential that all horses change from their near to their off lead when they enter the straight, and failure to do so is regarded as extremely detrimental to their chance of victory.

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The farmer's race system mentioned above does give some assistance to the learning process in that the young horses tend to be enthused by the crowd, which naturally makes them competitive, but of course they do not suffer the confusing experience of being punished (as they must interpret it) for going faster. It is essential that young horses see racing as almost a game at this stage of their career, although that should not imply that they do not go straight about their business as required. A top-class work rider will constantly be teaching a two-year-old to pick up speed and then slow down smoothly even when cantering routinely in the string. Although this is now very rarely found it may have been more common when wages were so low that a lad was dependent, in the true sense of that word, on what he could win betting. Fortunately, however, this is not brain surgery, and if we are insistent enough we may persuade our lads to make some effort to work with the natural enthusiasm that most two-year-olds do initially possess in the attempt to shape effective racehorses.

Although whips should by this stage be carried they will very rarely be used on two-year-olds other than on the shoulder as a signal to pay attention or to prevent them from hanging away from or onto other horses. Any use of the whip behind the saddle will only be on our express instruction to a lad. A backhander may occasionally be felt necessary as a wake-up call by a jockey riding work, but he is a professional and he will be asked for his opinion of the horse's ability, so this can be said to be a special circumstance. If the whip is used behind the saddle it must be on the hindquarters, not on the flank.

Two points come to mind here following the above. Firstly, the term 'backhander' is another that has lost its original, precise meaning, which was, very specifically, a slap with the whip in the backhand position. Because all jockeys in the pre-Willie Carson era picked

their whip up into the forehand position for their extreme effort the term 'backhander' originally implied little more than a flick, delivered simply as a reminder to pay attention to the rider's instructions. It was quite common for the jockey's instructions, even on fancied horses, to be along the lines of, "You can give him a backhander if you really have to but you are not to knock him about." Nowadays we routinely see animals getting several severe blows even if they are never seen with a chance of winning, and anything up to 20 strokes when the race is a close-run thing. There is no reason to countenance this style of riding as it is obviously needlessly destructive of the horse and simply denotes bad practice; we should aim to have our runners ridden in a manner more in keeping with the old style, if not for humanitarian reasons then as a common sense protection of our investment. Common sense dictates that the problem would be speedily resolved were all those winners that had suffered a breach of the whip rules to be disqualified.

The other point that arises is that the old-time trainers felt any serious trial should involve either all jockeys or all lads in order to avoid the result being confused by any rivalry. Lester Piggott, although definitely one of the truly great jockeys of all time, was notorious for ignoring all prearranged plans when riding work. He had a great tendency to set off before the gallop was even reached and to let his horse run along, whatever the trainer might have preordained. When his mount tired, Lester tended to let it drop right out of the trial, to the fury of the trainer and the delight of the lads who came to beat him. The amazing thing was, however, that Piggott's estimation of the merits of all the horses in the work, not just of his own mount, was extremely accurate. The same powers of observation enabled him to identify countless future winning rides on horses that previously ran in races in which he had ridden.

Starting Stalls Training

Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and gentle as doves.

St. Matthew 10:16

Before any two-year-old can run he must be schooled in the starting stalls. There are several different schools of thought on the best method of doing this, varying from daily practice to virtually no practice at all. The proof of the pudding being in the eating, different trainers will tend to adopt whatever system suits them, and in many cases will practise from the yearling stage. It is never a good idea to allow lads to approach the stalls with their horses in the absence of supervision, as they are likely to encounter difficulties even though these may often not be reported.

The method described here does not advocate regular practice but it has, by and large, been effective over a long career. Most two-year-olds do not take any great exception to the stalls, although funnily enough it is quite impossible to predict which ones will object from their behaviour in other areas. We will not take the young horses to the stalls in most cases until they are near to running and we normally only take three or four at a time in order to avoid rushing if things do go wrong with any of them. It is essential to have a very quiet pony and plenty of helpers when using this method.

The practice gate should have stalls descending in width from wide, through fairly wide, to standard size. All the two-year-olds should be ridden and led through the stall of each width in turn, first behind the stable pony and then alone, until they will enter and leave calmly. When walking through the regulation stall, even with the front gate open, extra care should be taken not to get them caught up on the rear doors due to their not approaching the gate squarely. The pony can now be shut in the first regulation-size stall and left there. His rider should as usual maintain a constant cheerful chat. We now walk the first two-year-old

through the adjacent stall and close the door behind him immediately, even though he may not have halted as he does not yet know that this is what is required. It is preferable that he hurry straight on through the stall and the back gate has to be reopened to reload him than he realise that he can get out backwards, which might be the case were he to panic due to being stopped too sharply and the back gate not to be closed. We can easily reload him as long as he has not become alarmed. His recognition of the commands "Stand" and "Back" will prove invaluable at this point, but the rear gate should always be closed promptly in order to prevent a rearward exit. This method is really only a rerun of the breaking process in that we achieve our aim by gradually pressing forward and building on the previous stage. The maxim "More haste, less speed" still very much applies.

Once the pupil will stand quietly and has felt the back door on his quarters we can carefully close the front. We should make quite a fuss of him and someone can give him some grass to pull out of the mesh on the front gate so that he will have to touch the gate with his nose. Although the pony has not been mentioned much, his role is vital and it is his calm demeanour that will give the young ones the confidence to learn this important lesson properly. As long as the first two-year-old is relaxed standing in the gate we repeat the loading procedure with the others until they are all installed.

After a few moments the front gates can be opened by hand and the horses walked out. If one is reluctant to leave he should initially be led rather than chased out. The pony can normally remain shut in, as the less aggravation he gets the longer he will remain happy in this task; in fact, he should also be made a fuss of by everyone so that he regards this as a pleasant duty. After a couple of repeats we can spring the gate normally to accustom them to the noise, but we still just let them all walk out. We then repeat, gradually increasing the pace until they canter

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about a furlong away from the gate. The two-year-olds should never be allowed to turn back immediately in front of the stalls, even if they are to repeat their lesson. They must always go far enough to impress that they actually leave the gate behind when they come out.

Sometimes the pony may need to be placed a distance in front of the gate to provide a target for a reluctant two-year-old to go to, and this is very effective. Occasionally we will find a two-year-old that just will not come out, usually because of alarm at the noise of the gate springing. Rather than try to chase him out, we should lure him out by means of the pony standing close in front of the stalls, or by having the pony come straight through the next stall, in which case the youngster will often join in. In these cases we may also have to revert to opening the front by hand a few times. When confronted with this type of horse it is necessary to invest extra time to resolve the problem, as bullying often makes things worse.

If this session has gone smoothly, one more visit, involving jumping out smartly two or three times and going a couple of furlongs fairly sharply, will be enough to prepare most two-year-olds to race. Any troublesome horses should, if possible, finish on a positive note, even if they have not advanced as far as we had hoped.

If we do want to bet seriously on any horse on his debut we will be tempted to do a bit more practice with a view to having him very alert. This is not really recommended, as the British

system often involves lengthy delays and the starter may well suspend any horse that misbehaves through being too excited. With a view to his future career it is safer to send him to his first race knowing that he will definitely load quietly, and that he will stand in the gate for some time if necessary waiting for poorly behaved opponents, rather than to have him wound up like a watch spring.

Stalls practice should not take place in bad weather as the wind and rain will upset everyone involved, with unhappy results. Many young horses can be so upset by these conditions as to undo several days' progress, and this should always be borne in mind in all aspects of handling very nervous horses until they have become more confident. Horses often seem to get on edge before thunderstorms and, apparently, seem able to detect imminent earthquakes. Presumably animals can detect changes in atmospheric pressure, and this may have given rise to the old perception in rural Suffolk that pigs can see the wind.

The advantage of our method is ensuring that horses never see the stalls except in circumstances that are specifically intended to resolve any difficulty which might arise. This cannot be the case when lads wander in and out of the gate, often unsupervised, as they do in many stables. The proof of the pudding might be said to be the fact that in 30 years we avoided any horse requiring a stalls rehabilitation certificate.