

Retraining Off-the-Track Thoroughbreds (OTTB)

Bits & Bytes Farm
Elizabeth Wood



Why get an OTTB?



Why get an OTTB?

You will know more about the horse you are buying when you buy an OTTB . . .

. . . than you will buying a horse from a stranger in your town.



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How Can That Be?

You will know the horse's:

- Pedigree
 - www.pedigreequery.com
- Race Records
 - www.equineline.com – the official Jockey Club Web site
- What the horse is currently doing
 - www.equibase.com Race records

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What background can you confirm on the horse for sale down the street?

Know Who You Buy From

- When buying any horse it is important to know who you are buying from:
 - Only buy from someone you trust
 - Learn as much as possible about the horse you buy
 - Talk with the current rider and groom as well as the trainer and the owner
 - Ask "Why, is the horse being sold?"

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Why is the Horse Being Sold?

The stranger down the street has a reason for selling that horse.

It is up to you to figure out the "REAL" reason the horse is for sale.

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Thoroughbreds For Sale

- OTTBs also have many reasons for being sold:
 - The horse has no talent or is not good enough for the competition at that track
 - The horse is tired of running
 - Owner in financial problems / needs a stall for a paying customer
 - The horse is injured
- This will make a difference in the training approach

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Buy Carefully

The most expensive horse you will ever own is a . . .

FREE HORSE!

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Training OTTBs

- Virtually every horse coming off-the-track is sore
- You must get the horse healthy before putting him to serious work
- **This is why you need to know the reason the horse was sold**
- A sound horse can begin training almost immediately – an injured horse cannot

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What to Expect When Your OTTB Arrives . . .

- He may be nervous, worried or scared
 - Horses are creatures of habit
 - You have put him into a totally foreign environment
- He is tired and sore from racing
- He may be depleted of vitamins or filled with steroids



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You Need to Get Your OTTB Healthy

- When a horse arrives at Bits & Bytes Farm the horse is:
 - Evaluated for health and soreness
 - Gets teeth checked, shots and worming
 - Racing plates get pulled – new steel shoes
 - Chiropractic evaluation and adjustments
 - Gets a good diet of high quality feed – introduced gradually


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Turn Out in a Paddock

- Your horse may or may not know what it is like to be free in a paddock
- Many horses come from good trainers who take the horse home to the farm for a rest
- Many trainers have no farm and the horse lives for years at the track – never being turned out
- Ask about this when purchasing your horse

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Turn Out in a Paddock




Turn Out in a Paddock

- Get your camera ready!
 - This is the time you will get THE Best Photos!
- Use a small paddock for the first turn out
 - You do not want the horse getting hurt
 - Make sure he is alone – especially if he still has his racing plates on




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Turn Out in a Paddock

- Gradually introduce him to a larger paddock/pasture with grass
 - Don't allow your horse to eat too much grass!!!!
 - He is not used to it and can founder
- Introduce other horses one at a time – but not until the racing plates have been removed


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Turn Out in a Paddock



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Rest vs Training

- Many people will tell you to put your horse out to pasture for six weeks or months
- I do not agree unless the horse is injured

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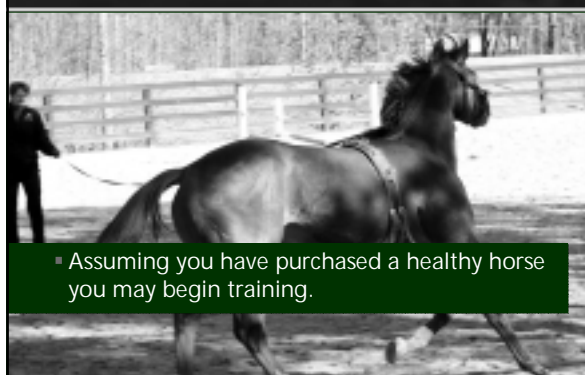
Rest vs Training

- These horses are used to working and may be sore from racing but they like having a job
- If the horse is sore and favoring a minor injury, he may get worse by being turned out. He will start favoring that injury which will cause soreness in other areas from compensation.
- It is better to evaluate the soreness and fix it with chiropractic, laser, magnets or physical therapy or prescription drugs

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The First Week of Training



- Assuming you have purchased a healthy horse you may begin training.

Establish Yourself as Herd Leader

- This is not the time to make a pet out of your OTTB
- He is used to working and has a good work ethic – don't change that
- Make sure he respects you and your space.
- Always be "Firm but Gentle"
- NEVER DO ANYTHING THAT WILL SCARE YOUR HORSE!!!!

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Rope Halter

- Use a rope halter to help control your horse
- It applies pressure to the poll and will give you more control without hurting the horse

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Lead Rope Training

- Make your horse stand and face you as you drop the lead rope
- Do not allow him to look away or move his feet. If he does, redirect his attention back to you and tell him to "STAND".
- Do this every day for 10 minutes and in a week or less you will have a horse that respects you and will ground tie

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An OTTB May Not Know . . .

- How to tie
- How to cross tie
- How to lunge



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An OTTB Will Know . . .

- How to be ridden
 - They are ridden every day. You are not starting with a baby.
- How to load in a trailer
- How to stand for the farrier
- How to be clipped (usually)

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What to Expect From an OTTB

- He will . . .
 - know how to walk, trot and canter
 - usually have a good mouth
 - not be spooky (some exceptions)
 - be very willing to please
 - bond with you like no other breed

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Thoroughbreds Want to Please

- OTTBs are like Golden Retrievers
 - They want to please
- Use this to your advantage
 - Always praise
 - Never yell or bully
- Other horse breeds are more like cats
 - "Pet me if you like, or don't. I don't really need you."

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Lunging



- Teach your OTTB to lunge ASAP
- Get a good book on lunging if you don't know how

Advantages to Lunging . . .

- It builds up the muscles without your weight on the horse.
 - The hind quarters are weak when the horse comes off-the-track
- It teaches obedience
- It takes the edge off the horse before riding him for the first time
- Lunging with side reins teaches the horse to give to pressure and bend

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The First Ride – Safety First

- Have a helper
- Wear helmet and a vest
- Be on a lunge line



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The First Ride – Safety First



- Make sure the horse is familiar with the arena and anything in it that might be scary – i.e. jumps
- Remove jumps if possible so you do not get tossed into them if there is a problem

Step One: Lunge the Horse

- Do not get on a horse fresh out of his stall
- Let him be turned out the day you are going to ride him

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Step One: Lunge the Horse



- Lunge him with a saddle and stirrups hanging down BEFORE you get on

Step Two: Get on the Horse

- Get on with a helper holding the lunge line
- Play lead line class and walk around
- Does the horse feel tense – are you tense?
- Try to sit totally relaxed
- If the horse is relaxed you can move to a larger circle with your helper holding the lunge line

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Step Three: Take the Lunge Line Off

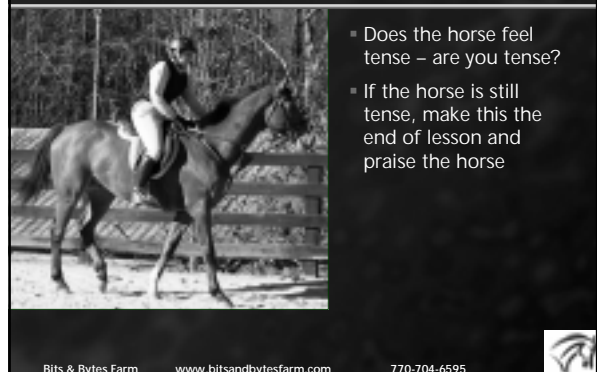


- Remove the lunge line only after you feel the horse is quiet and safe
- Walk in the same circle a few times before expanding to the rest of the arena

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Step Three: Take the Lunge Line Off



- Does the horse feel tense – are you tense?
- If the horse is still tense, make this the end of lesson and praise the horse

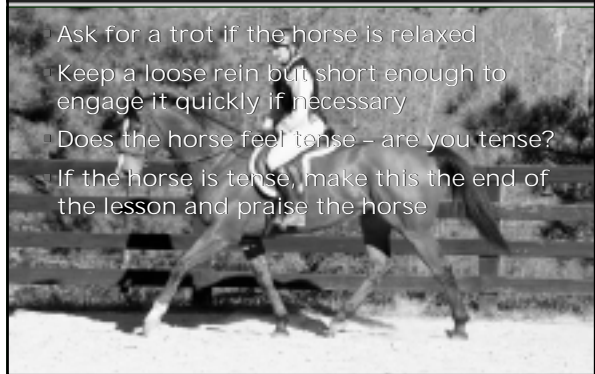
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Step Four: Ask For More



Step Four: Ask For More



- Ask for a trot if the horse is relaxed
- Keep a loose rein but short enough to engage it quickly if necessary
- Does the horse feel tense – are you tense?
- If the horse is tense, make this the end of the lesson and praise the horse

Riding a Race

- Jockeys get in the starting gate and take a hold of the horse's mouth
- The gate opens and the horse breaks from the gate, balancing on the jockey's hands
- The jockey adjusts his hands and gives just a little more rein and the horse makes his move
- They cross the finish line and the jockey **DROPS CONTACT AND SITS UP!**

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Please Don't Race

- Use the training that the horse already has to help him understand what you want.
- The horse is not used to yanking and pulling
 - His mouth is very sensitive
- Do half-halts using your seat to let the horse know you want to slow down



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Please Don't Race

- Stay off the horse's back!!
- Give and take with the reins to control your horse
- Do not take and hold or you may be off-to-the-races!



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Keep Light Contact

- Never take hold of the horse's mouth and lean forward in the protective position
 - This turns you into a jockey and tells the horse it is time to "Get Up and Go"
- Never use equal pressure to pull back on the reins
 - Alternate your hand pressure and drop contact
- **DO NOT** get into a TUG-OF-WAR – the player with the greatest weight will win

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Trotting

- OTTBs will trot as fast as you post
- A common error is to start posting faster as the horse is moving out . . .
 - So the horse move faster. . .
 - The rider then posts faster . . .
 - And the horse moves faster. . .
- SLOW down your posting and sit up
- The horse will immediately match your pace and slow down – right off-the-track!

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Cantering

- Your horse is not used to cantering in a small arena let alone a 20 meter circle
- Do your lunging to build up his muscles before asking for a canter in the arena

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Cantering

- If you feel safe, canter in a pasture
- Most of our horses are cantered on the first or second ride and taken on the trails ASAP



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Basic Dressage

- Use basic dressage training to get your horse to bend and be balanced
- The most difficult thing will be to get a bend to the right
 - Make sure the horse can bend (get a chiropractic check up)
 - Use a crop to tap the shoulder and push with your inside leg into your outside hand and leg which are making a "wall"

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Dressage is French for "Training"

- You do not have to be a dressage queen to take advantage of dressage training
- Get some lessons and you will progress much faster with your horse
- The horse will be light in the bit and responsive if you use basic dressage training techniques



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Dressage for Jumping

- By learning to yield to your legs, you will be able to turn your horse without him dropping his shoulder
 - You will be able to make roll backs and quick turns while jumping
- By adjusting the horse's stride with your body you will be able to lengthen and shorten your stride as needed
 - You will be able to make the distances on combination jumps

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Race Horses Pull with Front End



Hill Work



- Race horses pull with their front end so the back end is weak
- If the track has been "cuffy" the horse may have stifle weakness/soreness from the dirt giving away as he is trying to push forward with his hind end
- Use hill work to build up the back end of your horse

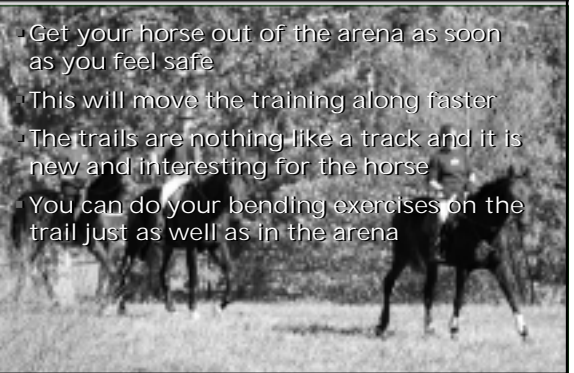
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Trail Riding



Trail Riding



- Get your horse out of the arena as soon as you feel safe
- This will move the training along faster
- The trails are nothing like a track and it is new and interesting for the horse
- You can do your bending exercises on the trail just as well as in the arena

Learning to Jump



- We introduce the horses to "jumps" on the trails

Learning to Jump


- Solid small logs teach the horse to step over and eventually jump the logs
- They learn to pick up their feet or they will trip
- This is better than teaching on x-rails
- These horses are smart and learn they can pull the x-rails easily with no repercussions

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Learning to Jump

- Larger log jumps are slowly introduced as they are stepped over and later jumped
- Once the horse is jumping 18 inches to two feet in the woods we bring them back to the jumps in the arena



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Pole Work

- Teach the horse to walk over a single pole on the ground
 - This will be easier if you did the logs in the woods



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Pole Work



- Add more poles set at a trot distance of 4' 6"
 - Trot several times

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Pole Work



- Add more poles set at a trot distance of 4' 6"
 - Trot several times
- Add another set of poles set at 5'
 - Trot those several times.
- Add another set of poles set at 4'
 - Trot those

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Results of Pole Work

- At the end of this exercise your horse will have a very nice and even trot
- Stepping over the poles will help to build muscles
- Now teach him about jumping x-rails

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Cross Rails

- Teaching the horse to jump cross-rails will be easier if you did the logs in the woods
- The horse will know to pick up his feet or get tripped
- Slowly raise one side of a x-rail and take the horse over this a few times
- Next raise the other side and trot over the x-rails
- Your horse can now jump!

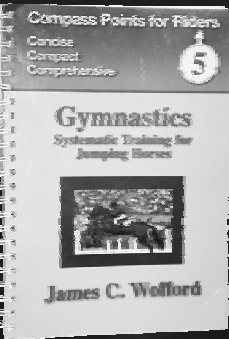
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Gymnastic grids

Compass Points for Riders
Concise
Compact
Comprehensive

5



Gymnastics
Systematic Training for
Jumping Horses
James C. Wofford

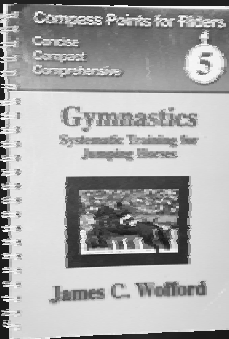
- Do not progress too fast or you will scare your horse
- Slowly move to doing grid exercises
 - "Gymnastics – Systematic Training for Jumping Horses by James C. Wofford"

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Gymnastic grids

Compass Points for Riders
Concise
Compact
Comprehensive

5



Gymnastics
Systematic Training for
Jumping Horses
James C. Wofford

- NEVER SCARE YOUR HORSE!!!
- Push too high, too fast and you will ruin your horse

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What's Next?

- More of the same
- Ask for more precision and quicker response
- Slowly introduce new jumps and positive experiences
- Get the horse off-the-farm to a quiet place to trail ride before going to the busy atmosphere of a horse show

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When to Show

- You horse will tell you he is ready for a new experience
- Bring him along slowly and never scare him and he will trust you with his life – literally.
- OTTBs have been exposed to everything at the track
- A show will remind them of the track


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Show vs. Track

- Things to think about:**
 - The announcer will sound like the track announcer
 - The energy will be like race day
- It would be wise to go to a show and NOT compete the first time or two
 - Do not make your first trip away from the farm to a show!!!!

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Close




These horses are incredibly loyal and loving.

They will give you their heart and soul if you just give them your love.


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Close



Please consider buying or adopting an **Off-the-Track Thoroughbred** for your next sport horse.


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Handouts

- List of training books
- List of rescue groups
- List of chiropractic exercises
- Site map of Bits & Bytes Farm

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Thoroughbred Adoption & Rescue Groups

Like most professional athletes, there comes a time in a Thoroughbred's life when their racing career is over. Good homes are always needed for ex-racers who are ready to retire from the race track and move into their second riding careers with you to guide them along the way.

CANTER

www.canterusa.org

A unique affiliation of 501 (c)(3) non-profit organizations dedicated to providing retiring racehorses with opportunities for new careers after the finish line.

New Vocations

<http://www.horseadoption.com>

Standing in the gap for retired racehorses providing a safety-net through rehabilitation, education, & placement in qualified, caring homes. Over 1,800 have been placed since New Vocations was founded!

The Equamore Foundation

<http://www.equamore.org>

The Equamore Foundation was established "for the love of horses". It is a non-profit organization supported entirely by donations and volunteers.

Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation

<http://www.trfinc.org>

Founded over two decades ago, the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation's mission is clear and simply stated: To save Thoroughbred horses no longer able to compete on the racetrack from possible neglect, abuse and slaughter.

The Exceller Fund

www.excellerfund.org

The Exceller Fund is an Internet group that raises money to rescue Thoroughbred horses that would otherwise be sent to slaughter. We do this in memory of Exceller - a racing legend on two continents - who died an untimely and undignified death in Sweden.

Thoroughbred Charities of America

www.thoroughbredcharities.org

Thoroughbred Charities of America (TCA), is the largest non-profit organization of the Thoroughbred industry. TCA's sole mission is to raise money for distribution to over 150 organizations in Thoroughbred rescue, retirement, retraining, research, education, backstretch and therapeutic riding programs.

Old Friends

www.oldfriendsequine.com

A Kentucky Facility for Retired Thoroughbreds. The major goal of "Old Friends" is to draw attention to retired Thoroughbred athletes by promoting famous racehorses that are no longer in service. Old Friends provides Thoroughbreds with the dignified retirement they deserve with a space open to the public for tours.

ReRun, Inc.

www.rerun.org

RERUN, Inc. was founded in 1996 in Kentucky as a non-profit Thoroughbred adoption program and currently operates chapters in Kentucky, New York and New Jersey. Our mission is to help ex-race horses find a second career by placing them in adoptive homes.



Daily Stretches as per Dr. Lance Cleveland, Equine Chiropractor

Poll Stretch:

The poll stretch is used for stretching the poll and upper neck. Using a treat if necessary, have your horse pull his chin tight to his chest. You want a “tight” curl, getting him to come as close to touching his chest as possible.

This is not the dressage stretch which reaches the head lower. You want the horse to curl up as high as possible where the neck meets the chest.

Neck Stretch:

The neck stretch is used to stretch the entire neck evenly on both sides. Stand at the shoulder with your back against the horse. Using a treat if necessary, have your horse bring his head around as close to the shoulder as possible, hugging you to him. Keep the motion stretching towards the hip as far back as possible. Try to keep his eyes level with the horizon as he reaches around. If necessary, place a hand up high on the neck just behind the halter to stabilize the head and neck as he reaches around. Try not to let your horse “drop” his head at an angle. The key is keeping the eyes level. Do both sides.

Butt Tucks:

The butt tucks is used to develop suppleness in the rear. Draw an imaginary line from the point of the hip to the dock of the tail. Move away from the tail, back towards the hip approximately 4 inches to the “valley” of the hamstring muscle.

Using your thumbnails placed in this area on both sides of your horse, rub from the rear towards the head using small strokes, almost as if you were revving a motorcycle. It is not necessary to use a great deal of force. Look for your horse to engage his pelvis, drawing upwards. You should notice the pelvis engage separately from the entire back-end. There should be little to no movement in the stifle and lower leg.

This is good to do 2 to 3 times a day on any horse. Dr. Cleveland suggests doing it once before a ride and once after, with an additional time during the course of the day.

Cross Unders:

The cross unders is used to stretch the hamstring muscles. Here’s what you will be doing: Turn your horse in very tight circles, 3 to 4 rotations, looking for the inside hind leg to “crossover” the midline behind. Repeat in opposite direction.

Here’s how to do it: For the first rotation, hold the lead rope in front of the horse and ask him to move in a circle. As you complete the first circle, move the lead rope so that it is at a 90 degree angle to the horse and do another circle. Then, for the third turn, bring the lead rope back towards the horse to make a 45 degree angle. Your hand will be back near his stomach. This will tighten the circle even more causing the horse to really reach under himself. If he cannot do this, then start at the beginning again and do only the steps that keep the horse crossing his legs underneath himself. The exercise does no good if he is not reaching under and crossing over with the back legs.



Bits & Bytes Farm Web Site Map

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Newz

What's new on the site?

See past home pages
Visitors' photos

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