

Renate Ettl

Training Your Foal

Raising a foal
from birth to backing



CADMOS

TRAINING YOUR FOAL





TRAINING YOUR FOAL

Raising a foal from birth to backing

by Renate Ettl



 CADMOS

Training your Foal

Raising a foal from birth to backing

by Renate Ettl



For my parents, who taught me to regard animals
as fellow creatures and to respect their ways.

Copyright © 2011 Cadmos Publishing Limited, Richmond,
UK

Copyright of original edition © 2000 Cadmos Verlag GmbH,
Schwarzenbek, Germany

Print edition designed by: Ravenstein + Partner, Verden

Setting: Anke Werner

Cover photograph: Christiane Slawik

Content photos: Renate Ettl

Translation: Konstanze Allsopp

E-Book: Satzweiss.com Print Web Software GmbH

All rights reserved: No part of this book may be reprinted or
reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic,
mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter
invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any
information storage or retrieval system, without permission
in writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record of this book is available from the British
Library.

ISBN 978-0-85788-002-4

eISBN: 978-0-85788-600-2

www.cadmos.co.uk



Inhalt

THOUGHTS ON BREEDING A FOAL

HANDLING THE NEWLY BORN FOAL

A Foal is born

Signs of the Imminent Birth

The Birth

Medical Care of the Foal

Imprinting

What is Imprinting and Imprint Training?

The Techniques of Imprint Training

Justified Manipulation?

First Learning Steps for the Foal

Touching and Being Groomed

Fitting the Headcollar

Picking up its Feet

The First attempts at Leading

Learning with Mother

Walking on the Lead-Rope attached to a surcingle

Experiences “out and about”

Travelling in the Horse Box

The First Independent Adventures

Going It Alone

Remaining Alone

Weaning the Foal

When is the Right Time?

Abrupt Weaning, or Step by Step?

After Weaning

WEANED FOALS AND YEARLINGS

Lessons in the First and Second Year

Pre-Requisites and Problems

Refreshing the Lessons Learned So Far

Frequently Executed Tasks

Remaining Alone

Excursion on the Lead Rein
Leading the Youngster From another Mount
Tethering and Standing Still
Games and Tricks
Foals Grown Up Wild and Problem Cases
First Public Appearances
Preparation for Horse Shows
Taking Foals to Horse Shows
Processions and Charity Rides
THE TWO-YEAR-OLD HORSE
Reaching Sexual Maturity
Castration of Stallions
Should Two-Year-Old Mares be covered?
Problems of "Adolescence"
Rank Order Struggles Among the Young Teenagers
"I mean it!"
Intensifying Obedience and Discipline
Transferring to Verbal Instructions
Stopping
Ground Tying
Moving Backwards
Sacking Out Training
Gymnastic Exercises
Pole Work
The Labyrinth
Developing Side-Tracking Movements
The Horse Develops Through the Exercises
Expanding the Training of the Lead-rein Horse
Circus Lessons
"FIRST BACKING" AT THE AGE OF THREE
The Performance of the Young Horse
Conformation Assessment
Early and Late Development
The Significance of the Growth Plates
Systematic Muscle Building
Round Pen and Lungeing Work

Passive Bending and Stretching Exercises
Backing
Getting Used to the Saddle and Bridle
Long Reining and Riding from the Ground
Mounting for the First Time
THE MEASURE OF TRAINING SUCCESS
Further Reading

THOUGHTS ON BREEDING A FOAL



There can be no greater pleasure for any horse lover than to raise your own foal. Watching the young horse grow, building up an intimate relationship with it, and training it yourself is a matter of much enjoyment. The advantages of raising and schooling a young horse are obvious. The animal does not have an uncertain past, has not passed through many other hands and has thus been spared any bad experiences. Most horse lovers know only too well that correcting a horse is always dangerous and far more time-consuming than training a young, unspoilt horse. A horse's memories of bad experiences can never really be completely erased. Once a horse has been spoilt, it will in the future almost always react with mistrust and panic.

In addition, the raising of a foal strengthens the relationship between man and animal considerably. Most horse owners have a more intimate relationship with the foals they have raised themselves than with those horses which they bought as fully trained mounts. It is true, of course, that such a special relationship can also develop in cases where horse and owner have been through hard times together – be it illness, injury, behavioural problems or other problems to do with care or training. However, the trainer is hardly likely to deliberately bring about such occurrences in order to achieve a closer relationship. It is simpler, more pleasurable and certainly recommended to raise a young horse if your aim is to have a special relationship with it. But building a satisfactory relationship of mutual trust with a young horse is, however, dependent on requirements which not every horse lover can fulfil. The young horse's living conditions must be such that it can develop its character naturally and is able to act on its impulses. This point alone is one where many horse lovers fail. Shabby compromises do not, in the long term, lead to the much desired enjoyment, but rather condemn to failure the attempt to raise and school a foal in a horse-friendly way. Anyone who toys with the idea of raising their own foal, or of buying a weanling or yearling, must realise that optimum breeding conditions provide the basis for a happy and healthy horse. In particular, this means breeding within a group of horses where all playmates are of the same age and where there is plenty of light, air and space to run around. Of course the medical care of the foal must also be ensured. Regular worming, vaccinations and hoof care are high on the list of breeding priorities. If all these requirements are fulfilled, then the adventure of raising and schooling a foal can begin. No horse owner need fear that the period between birth and backing is ever boring. There is a multitude of practical activities with which to occupy the foal. All of these

exercises contribute towards the animal's adult life. The better the preparation, the easier it will be for the horse to find its way into its role as a riding horse. Backing will be accomplished with the greatest of ease - with the correct preparation, saddling the horse for the first time will come naturally and the first hack will not be a traumatic event but rather a natural progression following on from the handling of the previous two to three years.

It goes without saying that the pleasure of raising one's own foal will be even greater if not only the rearing conditions are perfect but if the correct choice of dam and sire are taken into account in advance, ensuring the best pre-requisites for a healthy and capable foal. The choice of sire and dam should aim to bring together similar types, as this will increase the chance of passing on desirable qualities and minimise the risk of nasty surprises and disappointments. Parents which do not match well often produce foals which are in disharmony and which ultimately nobody wants. The health of sire and dam should also be ensured, since many illnesses, or at the very least the predisposition to them, are hereditary. The probability that a foal will suffer from allergies, eczema, or navicular disease for example is greater if the transmitter (or worse still both parents) is already prone to those types of complaint.

It is never possible to know, despite an optimum mating, which character, weaknesses and conformation faults the foal will inherit nor which gender, size and colour it will be. Therefore, the purchase of a yearling or a two-year-old can, under certain circumstances, be a more practical solution, compared to breeding from your own mare or buying an as yet unborn foal. It is important to realise that it is almost impossible to breed the ideal horse. Breeding your own dream horse is a matter of luck, despite the optimum choice of parents.

Whether you decide to breed your own foal or purchase a yearling or two-year-old, early education always forms the

foundation for any riding discipline the horse will be used for in adult life. This book aims to accompany the owner of a young horse from the newly born foal's first hours through to the time when the saddle is placed on its back for the first time and then to the backing of the horse at approximately three years old. At the same time the owners of two- and three-year-olds may still make use of the lessons of the weanling. The exercises can even be repeated with older horses which have been ridden, and may also be used as lessons for horses which were unaccustomed to them in the past. In the horse's education it is never too late for an exercise, but it can be too early. There are so many types of exercises specifically for young horses that it is not necessary to subject them to lessons aimed at more mature animals. To do so would risk long-term damage, and the handler would not be demonstrating how much his horse can do, but rather how little he understands his horse.

The most difficult aspect of horse training and education is applying the correct amount. The horse owner must be able to make demands of the young horse which are appropriate for its age, but not to overface it.

Proceeding too hastily with the education of the horse can cause lasting damage through psychological or physical overfacing and demonstrates not how much the young animal has learned to do, but how little expertise the horse owner has.

Quite a few breeders and horse lovers are of the opinion that the foal should grow up more or less wild. In their view, it will have to obey people's instructions soon enough and work for them as a riding or driving horse. This idea is justified to a certain extent, particularly as it can never be too late to educate the horse. But there are some situations which clearly contradict this opinion. What is to happen if

the foal injures itself in the paddock and needs medical attention? Or what if the blacksmith has to undertake corrective farriery and the foal will not permit anyone to touch it, just because it is unused to human intervention?

These incidents illustrate that a certain amount of schooling and training is practical even for a young suckling. Other lessons (such as “lungeing”) may, on the other hand, be too early for a two-year-old. Only by adhering to a sensible order of events and a correct approach to the various stages of learning, can there be any guarantee of happiness and relationship with the animal. This forms the foundation for a long and healthy life for the horse. The reward for all the troubles of accepting the horse’s nature and complying with the requirements associated with this is contented horses and happy owners.



A certain amount of schooling and training is necessary even at an early stage of a suckling's life, in order to be able to ensure that possible necessary medical procedures can be carried out without any problems.



HANDLING THE NEWLY BORN FOAL



A Foal is born

The birth of a foal is a wonderful experience which no breeder would want to miss. All the same, mares do not like being watched during the birth. They are able to delay the birth for a considerable time if they feel disturbed. Spending the night in the stable in order not to miss the birth could lead to the mare postponing the birth; therefore it may be recommended to continue the usual daily routine, so that the mare feels secure. However, a certain monitoring of the event must be ensured, in order to be able to help if there are any complications at the birth. When a birth is imminent it is possible to check on the mare every one or two hours, but it would be better to have video-surveillance, although

this is an expensive option which is usually only worth the investment for larger breeding establishments. Each horse owner has different pre-requisites and you need to decide from case to case how to monitor the mare with as little disturbance as possible. It is a good idea to have the mare foal in a field, insofar as the surroundings and weather permit, because this enables the owner to keep watch over the mare from a distance without being noticed. During the night the possibilities for observation are limited, so it is better to bring the mare into the stable in the evening.

It is natural to foal within the herd, but this should only be contemplated if the relationships in the herd are harmonious and there has been no friction caused by rank order or the like. In addition, sufficient space must be available so that the foaling mare is able to withdraw a little when the birth starts. In principle, the area where the birth will take place should be kept as clean as possible. However, this does not have to mean that disinfectant is sprayed by the can. The field or stable will never be germ-free, which is why Mother Nature has ensured that the foal receives antibodies from the colostrum milk. Nevertheless, thorough cleaning is necessary to prevent infections affecting the mare and foal. There is no harm in scrubbing the stable thoroughly with soapy water and removing the droppings three times a day. A thick bed of straw should be prepared in the foaling box after cleaning.

Signs of the Imminent Birth

Horses take a relatively long time to foal normally. The pregnancy lasts between 330 and 350 days. The extra 20 days can seem a very long time if the foal is expected with anticipation. But it is still quite normal for horses to carry the foal beyond the expected time by up to 10 days, so

there is no reason to be concerned. However, should this period of time be exceeded the vet should be contacted. Horse owners who know their mare well will notice a “withdrawn” look in the days immediately before the birth. The mare becomes quieter and feels the need to distance herself. Signs of the imminent birth are also drops of resin on the mare’s udder bulging with milk, as well as a “dropping” of the tummy and sharp caving in of the flanks. These signs do not always appear, but they do occur in many cases, so it is worth paying attention to them. Immediately before the birth the mare becomes restless, may walk about nervously, and starts sweating. It is recommended not to feed the mare excessively once you observe signs of the imminent birth, because full intestines can complicate the birth. However, mares often restrict their food intake themselves shortly before birth, which in itself can be a sign. Many stables have a period of quiet after the evening feeds and mares often give birth during this period. However, the majority of foals are born during the night, as this is the time in which the mares have the necessary rest for foaling.



If you know your horse, you will notice a “withdrawn” expression on her face shortly before the birth. This mare foaled within ten hours of the photograph being taken.

The Birth

The vast majority of foal births occur without complications and the mare giving birth does not require human assistance. Therefore there is no reason to panic or to become nervous when the time of the birth draws closer. Indeed, any display of excitement and nervousness can cause so much unrest that it simply disturbs the mare and may lead to a delay of the birth. If it is possible to oversee the birth almost totally without being observed, this should be the approach, in order to further decrease the chance of complications during birth. In the event that problems do arise, for example, if the foal is lying in the wrong position, rapid help must be available in order not to endanger the

lives of mother and foal. Naturally, the telephone number of the vet should be at hand for this eventuality.

Everyone wants to witness the actual birth of a foal. Of course there is no objection to this, but the possible distractions connected to such an action must not lead to the normal sequence of the birth being endangered.

Consideration for the mare must take priority over personal curiosity.

The actual birth begins with the mare becoming restless, breaking out in sweat and often lying down and standing up again. Finally, the pregnant mare lies down on the straw and begins to press, in order to force out the foetus. First, the foetal membrane bursts, releasing a large quantity of amniotic fluid. The rupturing of the foetal membrane can also take place while the mare is still standing.

Subsequently, both front hooves appear as well as the foal's muzzle, which rests on its front legs. If only one leg appears, or if the two rear legs appear first, the foal is lying incorrectly and the vet needs to assist.



After the birth of the foal the needs of the mare must not be forgotten. Now there are two horses to look after accordingly.

Once the front legs and the head have come out, the mare usually takes a little break to recover her strength before the next stage of labour of pushing the foal's chest through the birth canal. As soon as the foal's trunk is on the straw, the young animal begins to breathe. When the foal has emerged completely, it normally remains attached to the mare by the umbilical cord for a few more minutes. This is a good thing too, as it continues to supply the foal with important nutrients and blood during this phase. Even if the foetal membrane has not yet ruptured, the foal will not suffocate as long as the umbilical cord is intact. Normally the foetal membrane ruptures by itself, or the mare instinctively bites it open. If neither happens, the foetal membrane needs to be torn open by hand in order to expose the foal's nostrils. Once the mother stands up after a short resting period, the umbilical cord will tear off and the foal needs to be able to breathe on its own. At this point, the foetal membrane must have been removed.

The whole birth process normally takes no longer than 30 minutes. After a period of recovery the mare will lick her newly born foal dry. This allows the mare to remove any mucus from the foal's nostrils and eyes. In addition, the licking process stimulates blood circulation. At this point it is possible to assist the mare with a straw wisp which is used to dry off the foal. This first human contact intensifies the foal's trust and facilitates its later education. In addition, you can use this opportunity to disinfect the umbilical stump.

Despite the great desire to care for the foal, the mare should not be forgotten. In her case, particular attention should be paid to see that the afterbirth is discharged completely. This normally happens within 45 minutes. If this process takes longer than two hours, a case of "afterbirth retention" is present. In this case the vet must be called in urgently. Check that the afterbirth is complete. The size, weight and colour of the afterbirth will tell the vet

something about the birth process. At the same time the veterinary surgeon will also gain an idea of possible irregularities. Therefore it is advisable to show the vet the afterbirth for his expert opinion. After a further ten to twenty minutes the foal will make its first attempts to stand up. It may fall flat on its face a few times until it manages the first unsteady steps. Trying to stand up is a strenuous task, so a few breaks lying on the straw will be needed. After an hour at the most, the foal should have found the mare's udder and have its first drink. With the first mouthfuls the foal receives milk which is enriched with important antibodies to guarantee the foal's passive immunity. The foal enters the world without any protection. It is very important for the foal to drink the colostrum milk as soon as possible in order to receive the protective antibodies. It is therefore quite practical to offer assistance, particularly to weak foals, to help them find their mother's source of milk as quickly as possible. After two to three days the supply of antibodies from the colostrum milk ceases and the foal then simply receives "normal" foal milk as nutrition.