

## "A New Member of The Family"

This time of the year is very exciting for many Horse Owners. Not only is spring a great time for trail riding, it is that special time of the year when baby Horses are coming into the world everywhere. It is during this foaling season that many Horse Owners have conflicting information as to how to interact with their new family members. It always seems that everyone has their own theory as to the "right" way to handle new born foals. You will hear words and phrases such as "Imprinting", & "Herd Bonding", & "Family Unit", & "Join Up", along with many more cute little buzz words. All of which have their own set of do's and don'ts when it comes to spending time with those baby Horses. I am never surprised when a Horse Owner questions me as to which is the "best" way to work with their foals.

There are Books, Videos, DVD's, Clinics, TV shows, Radio Shows, Magazine Articles all covering this very topic. Frankly most of them that I am personally aware of do have some merit and can be used without the foal or person getting hurt. Physical safety is paramount whenever you work with Horses. Yet the physiological effects of some of the above mentioned Horse training techniques are safe for everyone's body, just not everyone's mind. New born foals have an amazing ability to absorb and retain information. Actually their information retention is two to three times as acute and encompassing than humans. Think about the fact that within four to six months this new life will be eating and functioning so well on its own that it will not rely on its mother for very much. Time moves so much faster in the foal's life than most people realize.

It is this unnoticed or unforeseen time schedule that really is the factor of success or failure when working with young Horses. The first few days really belongs to the Mother and her foal. The foal must learn to walk and nurse properly. You can spend small amounts of time with the foal, allowing the foal to become use to your scent and touch. This is "key" in building a mental relationship with the foal. The smaller in physical size and younger in age a Horse is the easier it is to bond and teach the Horse what acceptable behavior in your presence really is. The foal should never think of you as a playmate. Friends or playmates in the world of the Horse are equals and have no respect as an authority figure. A Horses herd instinct is one of the strongest of all mammals. You should be thought of as a loving, teaching, gentle authority figure that is higher in the herd hierarchy than the foal. This can be taught and shown by example in the way the the foals Mother interacts with you.

Whether there are 100 or 3 Horses in a herd, everyone knows their place in the herds social and dominance structure. You will do more, and receive faster results in working with young Horses to focus on this little bit of Horse herd information. Teaching a foal to stand for grooming, walking with a halter and lead rope. Learning to lift up its hooves without feeling like they will fall over, knowing that people are friends not mysteries and possibly something to fear is of importance to everyone concerned. Along with as many people as possible interacting the same way with these babies can only benefit you as the foal grows into a young junior horse. The overwhelming majority of Horse related injuries to the Horse or person, occurs when someone is working with a Horse that is one year of age or older and has had virtually no contact on a regular basis with humans. This type of Horse perceives humans as a risk and foreigner to the Herd. Something that is unknown and certainty cannot be trusted or relied on for guidance and deserves no respect what so ever.

As for what is the best or easiest method of working with new foals, anything is better than nothing at all. Keep in mind that you are dealing with an animal that cannot read your mind or understand what you say to them. Physical contact along with understanding this is about the horse not you will help you gain their

trust. As far as teaching the young Horse anything at all, remember they are very young and have so much to learn about being a Horse in a very short amount of time. You wanting them to learn the social skills to be a horse you can work with are really not part of their schedule. So proceed carefully and respectfully sooner than later and this will gain positive results. These young horses' attention spans are only about 10 to 15 minutes at a time for learning before they are bored and will not retain new information. Always end each session on a positive learning experience. The foal will either remember that it learned to obey you and do what you directed it to do. Or the foal will learn if it holds out long enough and disobeys you, you give up and walk away and leave it alone. Either way the Horse was taught a valuable lesson by you. Someone will eventually be the boss, whether it is you or the horse is up to your love, patience and resolve, not the sound of your voice or the power in your touch.

**By BJ Rickard – The World OF Horses – Stall13.com**  
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