



Resource Review

The First Week with Joe Wolter, Bryan Neubert, and Jim Neubert

review by Cheryl Kimball

In the interest of full disclosure, I have started three colts in clinics with Joe and ridden with Bryan and audited clinics by both of them several times. So I come to reviewing their new video, *The First Week*, done along with Bryan's son Jim, with a certain amount of bias.

Despite my bias, I am the first to admit that *The First Week* is no small commitment. After seven hours and a purchase price of almost \$300, when you push the rewind button you expect not only to have learned something but also to have acquired a resource you will come back to time and again. Did I feel that way? I'll get to my answer in a minute. But first it may help to get a sense of exactly what is on this video (or DVD, however you choose to get it).

In a nutshell, the three cowboys start 20 head of horses under saddle and take them through their first week of riding. The setting is the 6666's Ranch in Texas. The opening scene shows Jim,

Joe, and Bryan horseback, herding a dozen and a half horses across the countryside and into a pen. What you learn about this scene at the end of the video should definitely stack the deck in favor of the price of admission. (Hint: The horses they are riding to gather the herd are not teenaged ranch geldings.)

The videographer (with many hours of editing) does a fine job of capturing the details of haltering and first saddlings and first rides and second rides and roping and trailer loading, gate opening, hobbling, cow work, and simply riding at all three gaits. As issues come up—a mare hooked on some other horses, a horse that isn't interested in being caught—they spend some time showing how they help the horse work through these things. And they share some tips they've discovered along the way that help them in starting horses under saddle.

Each of the men describe some of what they are doing while the events are taking place. There is also some voice-over further explaining the finer points of the process.

Interspersed are personal interviews with each of the three men, who talk about how they came to know each other and work with horses in the way that they do. There are a few humorous moments. And throughout the

video, musician Jesse Ballantyne sets a tone of the humbleness of the cowboy life and the cowboy's honor of the horse, reverence for the land, and gratitude for life.

For those who have attended colt-starting clinics, you will recognize these cowboys' techniques. They use a lariat rope a lot—for everything from roping a hard-to-catch horse to roping a foot, to help a horse learn to stand still for something like saddling—and things get, as the saying goes, a little "western" once in a while.

One of the most common criticisms I hear about this kind of approach to colt starting focuses on the seemingly harsh moments—you will see a colt bawling and bucking around the corral reacting to his first tightened cinch, a roped horse gasping and choking as he braces against the pressure of the rope, a horse stumbling in the soft dirt as he struggles with one new experience or another. Critics need to hang in there 'til the end—the end of the 4-day clinic or the seven-hour video. What *The First Week* shows loud and clear is that, despite these tough moments, with accurate, supportive, and mindful handling and riding where horses are allowed freedom of movement, the group of horses started in this video look more at peace with being ridden after one week under saddle than most saddle horses do after years of riding.

Does all this add up to a recommendation that you pony up almost three hard-earned Ben Franklins to purchase *The First Week*? Let's see.

I envision three potential audiences for this video: professional trainers who start colts for the public, individuals who start their own horses, and your basic equestrians, either those who "just



Jim and Bryan Neubert and Joe Wolter start 20 head of 6666 colts on their new video series, *The First Week*.

ride” or perhaps those who show their horses, but who are always seeking to improve their horsemanship. How does the video hold up to the needs of three very different potential buyers?

For the professional trainer, ranch owner, or riding stable, I think it is a no-brainer. Get out your business check-book and order your copy right now. If you don't get \$300 worth out of *The First Week* in the first week after you watch it, then you might consider doing your own video.

Will the individual who starts a young horse here or there get enough out of *The First Week* to justify the cost? I fall into this category and I certainly think so. In fact, I've watched it twice and I'll watch it again. Will I bring my laptop with the DVD in it out to my round pen and rewind and look at stuff while I am working with my horses? No, probably not. But I will try out some things they show and then come back and watch it closely again and compare my experience with their demonstrations. In fact, I already have used some tips while working with my newly started colt and one of my older horses too.

What about the everyday equestrian who never plans to start a young horse under saddle? You may think \$300 is too much to spend, but consider this: If you are constantly at the tack shop looking for the next gimmick to help “fix” your horse, skip those purchases, and use that money to buy “The First Week.” Make yourself some popcorn, sit in the comfy chair, and pay close attention to how to get together better with your horse with not much more than a snaffle bit and a good saddle. If you really just can't come up with the \$300, split the cost with a friend and share the set or get your lesson barn to buy it for the barn lounge. (But don't plan to copy it; that is illegal and is stealing money out of hardworking people's pockets.)

So, there you go—I highly recommend *The First Week* as a great resource for anyone with horses. But do I

have any criticisms? A couple. There could have been a bit more voice-over or explanation in places. And sometimes a particular bit seems to go on longer than necessary. That said, by the time I had watched the full seven hours, I was ready for seven more.

I would be tempted to say this is like having a clinic with Bryan and Joe right in your living room. But, to be a bit trite, it is really much more than that. A colt-starting clinic typically lasts three to four days. And often the people starting their colts are learning just as much as the colts are. The horses in *The First Week* get way beyond what can be accomplished in the clinic setting. The very least it will do, if you come away from it as I did, is inspire you to get all of your horses, young or old, going as freely and contentedly as these colts are after just their first week under saddle.



The First Week

can be ordered by sending a check or money order in the amount of \$287.97 plus \$8 shipping (outside the US, shipping is \$12) to The First Week, P. O. Box 742, Aspermont, TX 79502 or call 940-989-2799. Be sure to indicate whether you want the DVD set or the VHS tapes.

Safety

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A stirrup or the horse's hip can easily get caught on a protruding latch.

Turn Out

When turning the horse loose in a field or paddock, walk through the gate, close it, walk into the field a short distance, and turn the horse so he faces the gate. This way, he has to turn around before running off, and you will have time and space to get out of his way if he should kick up his heels with enthusiasm after he is turned loose. Have him lower his head and tip his nose toward you, then stand quietly until you allow him to leave.

Do not allow anyone to swing at or hit your horse to encourage him to leave. This encourages dangerous behavior: breaking away before he is released and kicking out when he leaves. (There's a difference between sending him away from you in a training situation where you will ask him to come back and encouraging him to run away from you.)

When turning your horse out at the same time as other riders, communicate with each other. Poor timing can get a less experienced person hurt if they are still trying to remove the halter while your horse is loose and running to join his pasture mates. Be sure you are each standing in a place that is out of the way of the released horses.

Attention

Safety around horses involves knowledge of their possible reactions to any given stimulus, an effort to anticipate these reactions, and an attempt to stay out of harm's way while still being in control of the situation. Thought and attention will help prevent accidents.