

STARTING COLTS

Oats And Cream gets a lesson

By Joe Wolter

Beginning with this issue, and continuing in this column throughout the rest of the year, I plan to take a 2-year-old filly from her first handling to as far as we are able to progress by the end of the year. The filly is Oats And Cream, by Mr Sun O Lena out of Black Cream, who is a daughter of Peponita. She was bred and raised by the Four Sixes Ranch, but is currently owned by Roy Gene Evans of Dallas. I started Oats And Cream as a demonstration – sponsored by Bayer Corp. and AQHA – at the National Cattlemens Beef Association convention, so the pictures we are using were taken there.

As we go through the year, talking about the various steps I use in starting a young horse, it's very important to remember that horses and circumstances are different. What I will talk about is what happened with this par-

ticular filly on that particular day. It might not have been the same on another day, and I certainly might not have gotten the same reaction from a different horse.

When I start a young horse, the first thing I do is a version of "sacking out." Working in a round pen or similar enclosure, with the horse haltered and the lead rope in my hand, I begin by using a small flag on the end of a 3-foot stick. I rub that flag all over the horse, which prepares her for saddling and riding later.

As I used the flag on Oats And Cream, she did everything she could to get away from it, and when it was on her stomach or lower legs, she kicked at it. I continued to work with her, looking for a spot where she didn't mind that flag. At first I had to move it totally away from her to find that spot, but as I continued to work with her, she accepted it up on her back, near her withers. She could deal with it there. So when she would object to the flag being under her stomach or on her legs, for instance, I would immediately take it back to her withers for a few seconds, let her relax, and then start moving it



Jim Jennings photos

My version of "sacking out" a young horse involves using a small flag on the end of a stick.

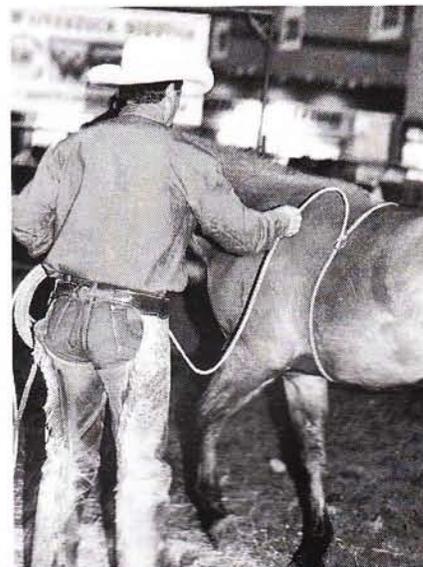
around again. It's important to look for those places, because when you have established that, you have someplace to go back to without taking it totally away from her.

However, as I moved the flag around, I found other places where she didn't mind it. I made notice of those, but I didn't keep going back there. Once they accept something, you don't need to stay there. If you do, sometimes they will get worried about that, and they will go the other way.

As I worked Oats And Cream with



I rub the flag all over the horse until it accepts the flag all over its body.



The rope around her heart girth prepares her for the cinch.

the flag, I was also working on directing her feet. I allowed her to move around, but by picking up on the lead rope I directed where she went, when she went. When she got scared of that flag and needed to move, I let her. But I knew where she was going, so I helped her get there and helped her get back.

At first, I concentrated on getting control of the hind feet. For instance, if I'm standing on her left, and I pick up on the lead rope, if she moves, I want the hind end to go to her right. If I were standing on the other side, it would be the opposite. That is simply self-preservation. When those horses need to get away, you don't try to get them to stand still. But you try to direct the direction the hind end goes. Once they respond to that, when it comes time to saddle them, they are more likely to stand. And if they feel like they have to move, once they feel that lead rope, they'll come back. You are working on that at the same time you are working on getting her to accept the flag.

Once Oats And Cream accepted the flag all over her body, including her head, I put a rope around her stomach and around her heart girth, and took the slack out of it. That let her feel pressure where the cinch would be. Once she accepted that, we moved to the blanket.

The flag prepared her for the blan-

ket, and the blanket prepares her for the saddle. I used the blanket to emulate the saddle, and I placed it on her and dragged it off a number of times, from both sides. It's important that you do this from the off side, too. You have to go over there to undo your cinches, and you want your horse the same on both sides. Sometimes horses really get scared if you stay on one side too long.

When Oats And Cream stood there while I tossed that blanket on like I would toss the saddle on, and she wasn't worried about it, it was time to saddle her.

Up to now, going through the processes I talked about here, I had spent about an hour with the filly. However, they don't all come along as fast as Oats And Cream did, and some may come along even faster. I moved only as fast as she would allow me to.

When you put the saddle on, Ray Hunt describes it as putting the saddle on like you put your hat on. You don't just plop your hat up there and jam it on your head. You put it on to where it fits. You do the saddle the same way. You place it on their back so that it fits.

Also, when you place that saddle up there, be careful that the cinch rings and the stirrup don't hit your horse in the elbow on the off side.

After the saddle was in place, I tight-

ened the cinches, let her stand there a moment, and then took the halter off. At this point, I let her do whatever she needed to do to get comfortable with that saddle. My theory is, if one needs to buck, that's fine; if one needs to run, that's fine. Oats And Cream bucked.

But it doesn't take long most of the time before that saddle is just a part of them, and this is a good opportunity to work your colt in the round pen, letting it go around both ways, going from a walk to a trot to a lope and back. It's good if you can turn them loose in a pen with other horses. That helps them to forget about that saddle even quicker. Also, it gives them a reason to move so that you are not the one pushing on them, trying to make them work through the gaits.

The whole idea is to let them deal with it. After they learn to deal with that saddle, when I ride them, I try to be just like that saddle, sit there right in the middle of their back. ☼

Joe Wolter is a trainer at the Four Sixes Ranch at Guthrie, Texas, where he starts a number of colts each year. In the next issue, Joe gets on Oats And Cream and gives her her first lesson under saddle.



Once she accepted the pressure of the rope around her barrel, I moved to the blanket.



When the saddle is placed on the horse's back, you need to be careful that the cinch rings and the stirrup don't hit the horse in the elbow on the off side.