

Foals represent a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to instill trust, acceptance and cooperation at a tender age

TAKE TRICKS TO THE TRAIL



At a very early age the foal is learning to mimic his dam's every move. Here are Sombra and Tabajara posing on the agility platform.

Buying (or raising) a weanling or even a nursing foal can be a great option to give you a lifelong equine partner. Getting a foal off to a great start will not only give you a sense of accomplishment but will give the young horse skills that will help to ensure a bright future. There are many fine breeders (all breeds) who are happy to work with prospective owners, even when the foal is in-utero. Although we raise most of our own horses for exhibition and trail careers, we have purchased very fine youngsters that were easy to educate and very rewarding to have as our partners.

STORY BY Suzanne De Laurentis and Allen Pogue

PHOTOS BY Kate Austin

## ENHANCED FOAL TRAINING: LEARNING THAT LASTS A LIFETIME

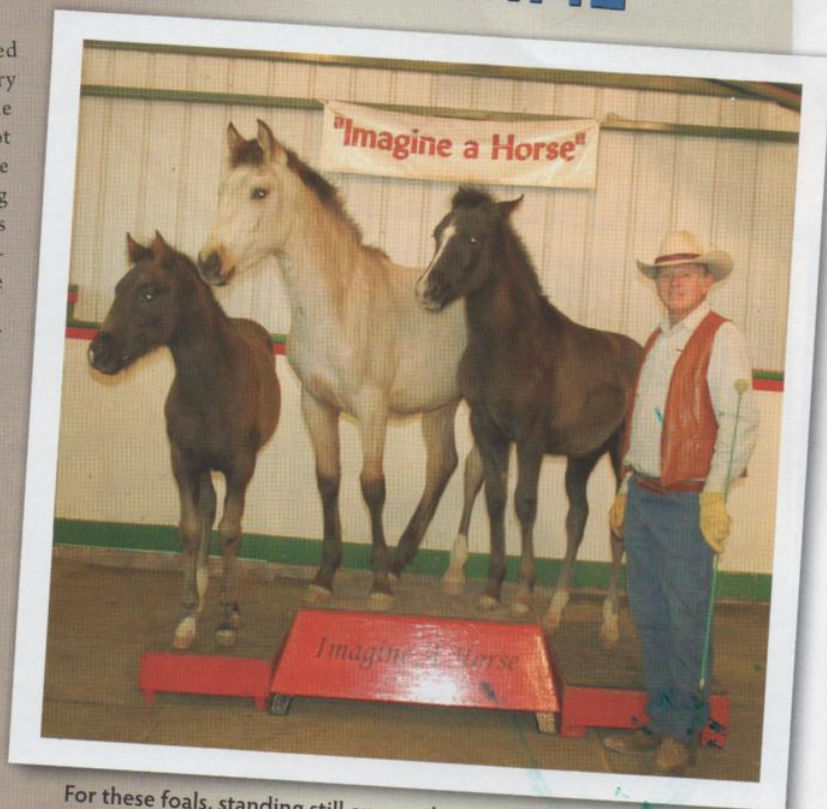
**R**obert M. Miller, DVM, forever changed the horse industry with his revolutionary Imprint Training methods that made early handling and training of foals not only acceptable but standard practice. He has shown our Enhanced Foal Training DVDs in his lectures for over five years to demonstrate that imaginative new training strategies are emerging around the world, building on the foundation that he codified.

Training can begin soon after initial imprinting of the newborn foal. This is possible because horses are a precocial species, which means they are born with a high degree of mobility and neurologically complete. Of course their memory bank is not yet filled but they are ready and able to learn. The rapidity at which a foal learns can be seen as he mimics and matches the stride of his dam on their first walk or even gallop side by side.

Enhanced Foal Training's unique concepts lay the foundation for most other aspects of a horse's future and higher education upon physical maturity. This segment will outline some of the elements but is not necessarily a full set of instructions. Certainly all early training is dependent on the health of both mare and foal.

Lessons learned as a small foal or even a weanling will last a lifetime, if reinforced from time to

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For these foals, standing still on a pedestal is a reward. The two younger foals, two and three months, also learn from the confidence of the weanling in the middle.

# IMPRINT TRAINING:

## SETTING THE STAGE FOR A LIFETIME OF LEARNING

BY SUZANNE DE LAURENTIS

*"Horses are born knowing how to be horses. What will benefit a horse the most is maturing into a productive member of our human world, where he will live."—Allen Pogue*

Classical imprinting can be defined as a learning process occurring soon after birth in which a behavior pattern is established. Everything that happens with the foal after the initial Imprinting falls into the realm of follow-up training and can be considered part of a lifelong training process.

Dr. Robert M. Miller's *Imprint Training of the Newborn Foal* covers the complete process. In his latest book, *The Passion for Horses and Artistic Talent: The Unrecognized Connection*, Dr. Miller states that he can think of no other

trainer who has more vividly demonstrated the benefits of early training than Allen Pogue (my husband and partner). He says Allen "has his foals so bonded to him, so compliant, so obedient, and (are) such willing performers" that he would never have thought it possible.

Our foals are imprinted in our laps on a beanbag, which allows us to hold them firmly yet gently. The beanbag is comfortable for the handler, and with the foal's legs folded in the fetal position, he remains upright and alert. While they soon outgrow our laps, the association between the object (beanbag) and the act of sitting remains strong. This can be a constant source of comfort and security to the foal and a very useful tool for the handler.

time. While we cannot rewrite all of the inherent behaviors of the horse, we can certainly influence them with early training. The purpose of Enhanced Foal Training is not so much about raising a trick horse as it is about raising a horse that has "learned how to learn" at an early age. In other words, a thinking horse!

### IF YOU CHOOSE A WEANLING

All EFT methods are effective with a weanling after five to six months of age, except that separation from the mare will already be accomplished. In addition to platform (pedestal) training, he may be taught to "walk with" the handler in the same way we have outlined for foals and if he is compliant he may even be placed in the sit down position on either a (Horse Tuff) beanbag or two bales of hay covered with a piece of soft carpet.

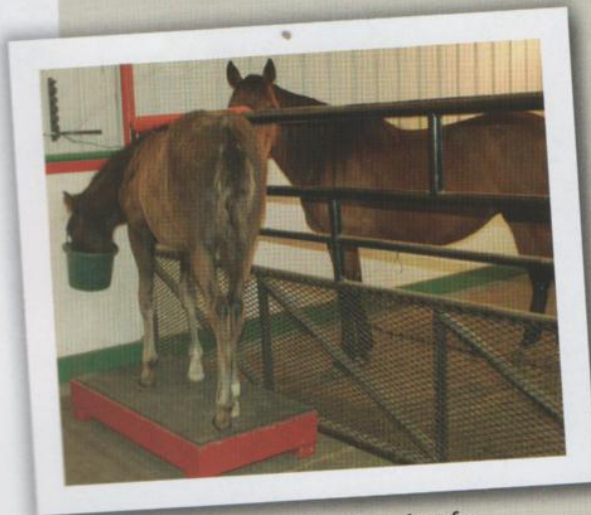
### SIDE BY SIDE TRAINING

During the Imprinting process the foal will begin to bond with the human handler as well as his dam, and this is the beginning of a *lifelong trust bond*. We designed a training stall that has a see-through gate so the foal can be separated briefly from the dam yet can still see her and touch noses. While the dam is having her morning meal, the foal is gently guided through the separating gate for a short solitary lesson.

During these brief separations we begin to teach him to "walk with" us, using the



Cortes clearly enjoys his withers-scratching from Allen as he learns that being on the pedestal has special rewards.



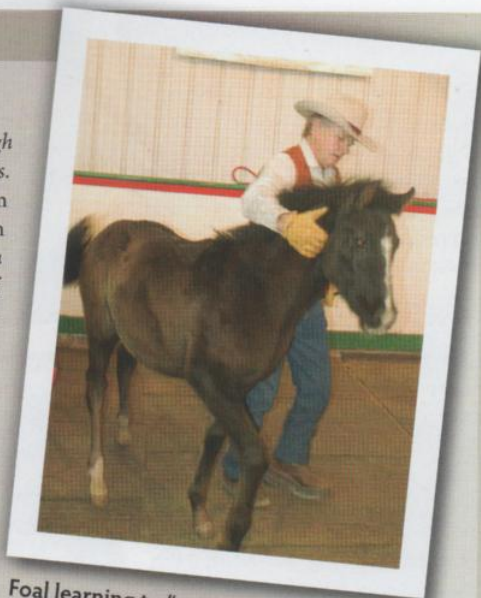
Short separations from the dam for training build confidence and individuality. We make sure that they can still see their mamas.

corners of the stall as natural barriers at which we halt and also make an inward turn. When the foal learns to go with us in this way, he grows up understanding the concept of "walk with." We use our hands, core of the body, contours of the stall and foal wands to help guide him. This method makes halter training a non-issue as the young horse becomes habituated to walking with the handler. The reward for the brief walk is to return to the pedestal next to mom. The foal can be taught to yield his

Redirecting the flight mechanism through pedestal training is one of our primary goals. Learning to stand on the foal platform once again creates an association between an *object*—the pedestal—and the *action* of standing still on a safe place or mark of their very own. The foal gains confidence to stand still and face a variety of situations in stillness rather than flight.

Weanlings and adult horses are receptive to the same concepts that we use on foals although the methods are adapted slightly. Adult horses generally require more repetitions as inherent responses are already deeply developed. The goals of redirecting the flight mechanism and creating confidence remain the same.

Foal learning to "come along" with his handler



*"A foal can understand direction and tolerate correction but punishment only frightens him. Just as with people, a foal's positive attitude makes for confident learning experiences."*

head, neck shoulders, rib cage and hindquarters in this way with just the slightest amount of pressure applied.

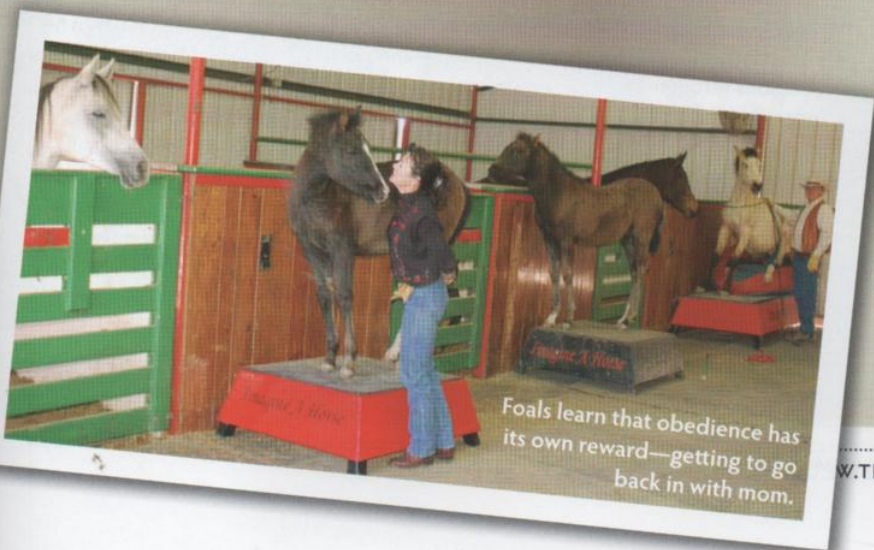
### PEDESTAL OR FOAL PLATFORM

As a species, the horse has relied upon the flight mechanism for survival; a foal is born with this instinct fully intact. But horses don't have a place of their own to *run to!* The pedestal, or in this case the *foal platform* gives the foal a safe place—a place call their own. The low platform is placed next to the

separating gate with the mare eating her meal on the other side.

As we walk the foal around the stall, we carefully guide it to step on the pedestal where he is next to Mom. We help him to balance and stay on the platform for just a minute or so at first and gradually increase the time, always with a reward. Walking away with the handler in this manner and then back towards mom teaches him that obedience has a reward. In time, all foals will become so enamored with

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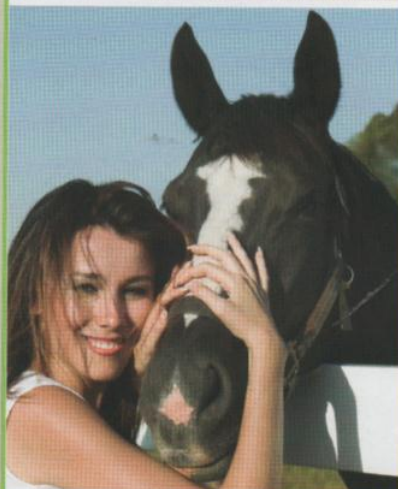


Foals learn that obedience has its own reward—getting to go back in with mom.

# Moody Mare?

**"Wow, this stuff really works, and promptly!"**

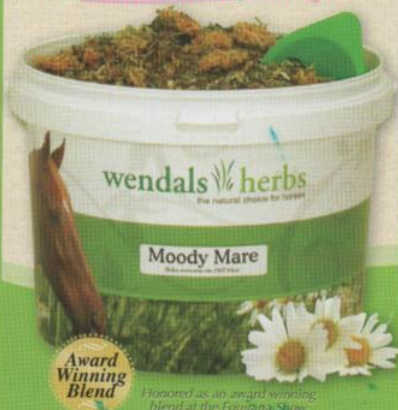
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the pedestal that you will have to be creative in getting them to step off "their place."

## HOW TO REWARD A FOAL

In the first few weeks, scratching



The foal learns early to accept this position that puts his flight mechanism in neutral. The beanbag is comfortable and protects his body.

on the withers and returning to mom is the best way to teach a foal about rewards. Most baby horses love a good wither scratching session and will make all sorts of facial expressions that demonstrate their pleasure.

## WHY THE BEANBAG?

We are used to strange looks when we travel to the vet's office with a very young foal and a large beanbag slung over our shoulder! Administering medication or other treatment to a foal can easily become a stressful wrestling match that a foal will remember for life. Our foals are held in our laps (starting on day one) as we sit on the beanbag. Gently folding and carefully holding their legs in the fetal position triggers a relaxation mechanism, and the foal will relax and usually fall asleep. *Our vets love to work with our colts because they "sit" quietly!*

## TRAILER LOADING, STOCKS, TYING, BLANKETING, HOBBLING AND MORE

Learning to stand quietly for handling can be taught early; no need to wait until a colt is old enough to be tied. The foal platform be-



Confidence gained from pedestal training carries over to all other educational aspects, such as hoof trimming and blanketing.

comes the place that he learns to **stay**. Routine care such as handling feet and **grooming** is taught while the foal is on the pedestal.

A weanling foal can learn an additional lesson about standing still if placed in **stocks**. Always stay close so that he doesn't feel abandoned and get frightened. We put a halter and lead on and drape, *not tie* the rope around the tie post of the stock. Increase and vary the stock time gradually. The colt will actually **think he is tied** although there will be no

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## LEARNING THE LANGUAGE

Imagine a Horse training is based on old European Circus and modern behavior modification techniques that allow the horse to "learn" the language of clear and specific commands/cues. The goal is to create a safe, happy, cooperative horse.

### BENEFITS

- » The horse learns to control his instinctual inclinations through a process of thinking (within a horse's nature).
- » The horse learns confidence and trust in his ability to deal with the unexpected.
- » The horse learns a language of responses to express himself in an acceptable and positive way.
- » The horse learns to "unlearn" bad habits by replacing them with positive learned responses.
- » The concept of giving a horse a "safe place" works to literally put a horse in a position (pedestal) on which he can control his situation and his emotions.
- » The attention span of the horse is gradually and reliably lengthened.
- » In the learning process, the horse gains confidence by sharing in decisions that affect his well-being.

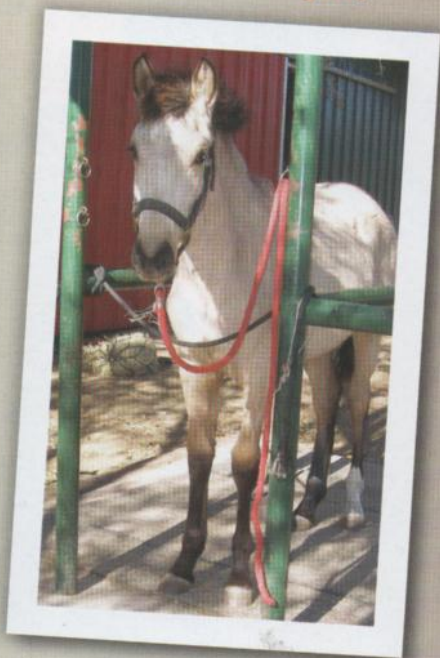
pressure on his lead or halter. The association of standing in the stock in the *pretend* tied position will help to make the transition to being tied easier. Never tie a young horse fast and hard when his bones are still soft and forming.

A **training trailer** is positioned next to our barn and the foals and weanlings are fed inside it. If the doors are left open, they will often step in on their own to stand in the shade or see if there is anything of interest inside. Feeding a horse in a trailer to help him feel comfortable is **NOT** the same as bribing one to get in when the pressure to load is on.

Foals can become accustomed to blanketing, slickers, saddle pads and even the feel of soft rope on his body and legs. Don't leave a foal unattended with any type of equipment on him, no matter how quiet he appears to be. Whatever you anticipate you will want a grown horse to be able to do as an adult, teach it as a foal. The lessons must be age appropriate and not include weight-bearing exercises.

### KEEP SESSIONS SHORT AND SWEET

Foals learn very quickly and have little need for repetition, so keep sessions short although you may repeat them two or three times a day. A foal can understand direction and tolerate correction but punishment only frightens him. Just as with people, a foal's positive attitude makes for confident learning experiences. Although foals can easily be trained, we keep all lessons age appropriate and non-stressful.



At six months of age, the weanling Tabajara stands quietly in the stocks with or without headgear. Never tie a young horse fast and hard when his bones are still soft and forming.



Sue De Laurentis and Allen Pogue live in Dripping Springs, Texas, where they own and operate Imagine a Horse and Red Horse Ranch. They blend modern and classical horsemanship to make Trick Horse Training understandable and fun for the horse and human. Visit online at [www.imagineahorse.com](http://www.imagineahorse.com) and [www.redhorseranch.net](http://www.redhorseranch.net).

For Enhanced Foal Training information or DVDs visit [www.imagineahorse.com](http://www.imagineahorse.com)

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