

## SHOWING PONIES IN-HAND

Showing ponies in-hand is an art. Unfortunately, many young ponies are ruined every year by being over-shown and incorrectly shown in-hand.

The pony must look well, having done well the previous winter and before the show it must be stabled, rugged and strapped. You can show ponies at local shows from the field, provided they look well and if they are brought in and trimmed, and their manes and tails washed the day before. But I do not think you can travel mares or youngstock all over the country and expect them to look their best off grass.

For travelling and serious in-hand showing, the animal must be stabled for a period, together with a time out in the field every day for a mare and youngster, or road exercise if it is a stallion.

The old coats must be rubbed out and only rugging, strapping and feeding will shift a stubborn coat in the Spring. It is hopeless trying to compete with a rough looking youngster against well-produced ones in show condition.

On the other hand, there is a growing danger, and that is the great tendency among some people to show pony youngsters far too fat. This coarsens the pony and spoils its action; ponies in the wild state are not meant to look like prize bullocks and only the correct, happy medium should be carried out.

The first and most important thing with all youngstock is to keep them as free as possible from parasites. When they are healthy, the condition comes easily, but no amount of good feeding is of any use to a 'wormy' pony, so you must start at least every Spring and Autumn with a three-week course of treatment, or you will be doomed to disappointment, and will see condition pouring off the pony as the summer goes on, particularly if you are travelling.

The actual training is important. The first thing is to teach the pony to lead well and freely, with the showman walking by the shoulder and not dragging it along. Moving off freely and quietly, after the early lessons with a helper behind, use a long whip in the left hand and tap the pony behind your back.

Everything should be done calmly and quietly; foolish flicking and hitting of the ponies merely spoils and upsets them and does no good. Try and run in step when running a pony out in-hand and try to move well yourself. It is not helpful to have

someone panting along with the pony with scarves and garments flying – turn yourself out well, any old thing will NOT do. Have a smart pony, well presented and look smart yourself when showing it.

It is also most important to teach any pony being shown to stand well. Nothing is more hopeless than struggling with a pony that will stand all in a heap. Pull the head and neck forward and engage your pony's attention. Foals can equally be taught to stand and the discipline of a few minutes' practice every day does them no harm. The late Miss Broderick's old stud groom, Mr John Jones, always had a tin of pebbles which he used to shake to get the ponies on their toes and moving well; it is a splendid idea, and far better than chasing and hitting them when you are practising at home.

One of the worst things in the pony youngstock classes is the damage done to the ponies' mouths by too early biting and by rough handling and 'jobbing' in the mouth, which so many youngsters get when shown in-hand. If you must use a bit on a yearling, have a thick egg-butt snaffle or a rubber bit and have it correctly adjusted so that your pony does not learn the bad trick of putting his tongue over the bit, and do use it gently. Personally I will not show yearlings in bits, and have never had any trouble.

The other day I saw a two-year-old 13hh pony gelding being shown in a single curb bit, complete with curb chain – what hope had the pony of having a good mouth later. Even so, it is the banging of the bit on the bars of the mouth to make the pony stand and look alive, that is the most damaging thing.

I am certain it is this damage to the mouth, making a pony mouth-shy and behind the bit, that is responsible for the dearth of really good ponies at the moment. One sees many good ponies in the youngstock classes, but they seldom appear in the performance classes a year or two later. Bad management, bad handling and lastly, bad breaking are responsible for this annual loss.

Many people are afraid of stallions, and many gay colts are certainly to be pitied when one sees the ignorant way in which they are handled. Stallions and colts are more intelligent than geldings and therefore, from an early age, need discipline and firm handling, otherwise they will soon get out of hand and become a real danger.

It must be remembered that Man only controls an animal through superior intelligence and not by superior strength. Many young colts are quick and full of

natural mischief and if they are taught early to tie up, to lead and to behave quietly, they will be no trouble, but to teach this, it is not necessary to knock them about and job them in the mouth.

We break in and ride all our pony stallions, and they are intelligent enough to behave perfectly, even when ridden by children in the middle of the stud season. This is easy to accomplish, but it must be remembered that stallions are very quick, and will slip out through doors and get away from stupid, slow-witted grooms and children, and it is useless in these cases to blame the pony.

It is more difficult to teach young stallions to show in-hand well if they are being used at stud, as being led out on a rein is apt to confuse them about the required behaviour. This discipline must be taught firmly to a colt and a stick should be carried by the groom, and a quick and smart smack admonished at once, if he really behaves badly. Often a smack has only to be given once – you mean it – and the lesson is learnt and a growl of warning is enough afterwards. What I cannot bear to see is a stallion, or any pony, being punished by being hit over the head or jobbed in the mouth, often with the chain behind the chin, because a useless groom is either frightened or has lost his temper.

The Welsh Cobs and Mountain pony stallions are usually very well shown in-hand and though we may not want all our animals to trot at their pace, the discipline and action is splendid.

Tack is useful for schooling a stallion in-hand; it balances him and controls him, and it is also a great help when schooling colts, even if they are not shown in tack.

Be sparing of tit-bits to ponies, particularly to young ones; they tend to spoil the pony, which instantly gets bad-tempered and inclined to nibble at everyone and is furious if the usual tit-bit is forgotten.

One last word on the subject of showing ponies – Yourself. Unfortunately, such lovely animals as horses can have a sad effect on people, particularly on women. They become tough, loud mouthed, and very unattractive, if they are too 'horsey'. This is a great pity, as womanliness, charm, a sense of humour and unfailing good temper are as important when dealing with horses as they are when coping with homes and children.

**ANNE BULLEN 1972**

**Extract from Chapter 8 of her booklet: SHOWING PONIES**