

Circle Savvy

Trainer and exhibitor Bear Smith explains how to prepare a youngster for the yearling longe line class.

By JENNIFER NICE

Bear Smith's yearling jogs steadily around the 50-foot circle. The longe line is neither taut nor dragging the ground. Rather, it is suspended between horse and handler in a natural arc. The yearling's eyes are soft yet bright, and its body is relaxed. Bear raises her line hand and the yearling picks up the lope with perfect cadence.

Smith, of Eustis, Florida, has been training and showing yearlings in longe line for more than a decade. According to her, achieving success in this class has very little to do with working the horse in a circle. Rather, success comes from first recognizing a good yearling longe line prospect and then developing its potential by applying the fundamentals of training and communication.

In this installment of *Riding to the Rulebook*, Smith explains why she likes the yearling longe line class, how she chooses a prospect and what training techniques she uses. She also provides insight into avoiding mistakes in the show ring and improving the horse's performance.

PHJ: Why are you attracted to this particular class?

BS: Yearling longe line really showcases the horse's potential as a future pleasure horse. The horse needs to be a good, natural mover because it's out there on its own. I also think it's opened up the market for performance-bred yearlings. For so many years, if a yearling wasn't a halter horse, then it sat in the field until it was 2. Yearling longe



Diversified Elegance works on a loose line with the happy, relaxed look that Bear Smith strives for in training. The filly carries herself comfortably, with her ears up, while Bear remains stationary in the center of the circle.



The purpose of the yearling longe line class is to demonstrate a horse's potential to be a pleasure horse. Here, Diversified Options, owned by Ashley Brown, exhibits the attributes that will make him a suitable Western pleasure horse. (Editor's note: leg protection was removed for the photo session.)



Left: Bear uses both the longe line and body language to cue her horse. Here, she asks for the walk. Note the lack of tension in the line and her open hand. Middle: Bear asks for the jog by opening both hands. Right: Bear asks for the lope by raising the line. This is the horse's cue to lift its shoulder and pick up the correct lead.

line has opened up a market for babies that would have otherwise just stood out in the field until they were old enough to ride.

PHJ: What do you look for in a longe line prospect?

BS: I start watching my horses as foals. I look for a foal that is a people horse and is not herd-bound. If a horse is herd-bound, it's very hard to get that horse to focus on me. In the longe line class, it has to leave the other horses and go out and perform on its own. Therefore, I watch for babies that don't mind leaving mama to go investigate or play with the other foals. When I watch my foals out in the field, I look for the horse that moves like a pleasure horse on its own.

I want to see that the horse is built to ride. The length of its back should be complementary to the length of its belly, and the length of its neck should be complementary to the length of its croup. The tail should be carried naturally in the correct position. The horse should have a nice jog, a canter that is deep in the hocks and it should stop naturally with its hip underneath itself.

When I start training a yearling, if it wants to bolt and flee when it sees something it doesn't like, that doesn't please me too much. I don't mind if the horse stops to take a good look at something, because it's trying to process what it's seeing. But a horse that has a strong flight response is difficult to turn into a good longe line horse.

PHJ: Yearling longe line is a performance class. How much can you realistically expect from a yearling?

BS: A yearling is like a kindergarten-age child. It has a short attention span. Because it is a young horse, I do not believe in using any mechanical training aids, such as headsets, tie-downs or riggings. They're babies. You don't want to trap them.

When I'm training at home, I never take a yearling out and immediately longe it. I'll turn it out and let it play first, so that it gets its beans out. I would never try to tire

it out on the longe line. It's not a good idea. You're going to tear its legs up if you do that.

PHJ: At what age do you start training?

BS: It takes about 90 days of training to prepare a yearling to show, but I don't work a yearling for 90 days straight. If I plan on taking the horse to the World Show, I'll give it about 20 days in January, and then I'll give it a month off. Then I'll start up again, then I'll give it another month or two off.

During the first 30 days, I teach the horse to walk and jog on the longe line, to stop and to stand without turning toward me. I also teach it to ground drive in a straight line and in a turn.

By the time I get to the second 30 days of training, it's strong enough to do a bit of cantering. I'll also teach the horse to jog slow and fast. You don't want the horse to always go slow, because then it learns to short-stride. I don't let my longe liners go as slow at home as I let them when I show. I'm always moving them up and I'm always driving them, asking for a bigger, better, bolder stride.

I'll ask the horse to trot or canter, and then I'll ask it to stop and stand for as long as five minutes. I don't want the horse to think about always moving forward, and I don't want it anticipating what I will ask for next.

By the 60- to 90-day period, I teach the horse the fineness of picking up the canter when I lift my line hand. It is during this period that I polish the horse's performance.

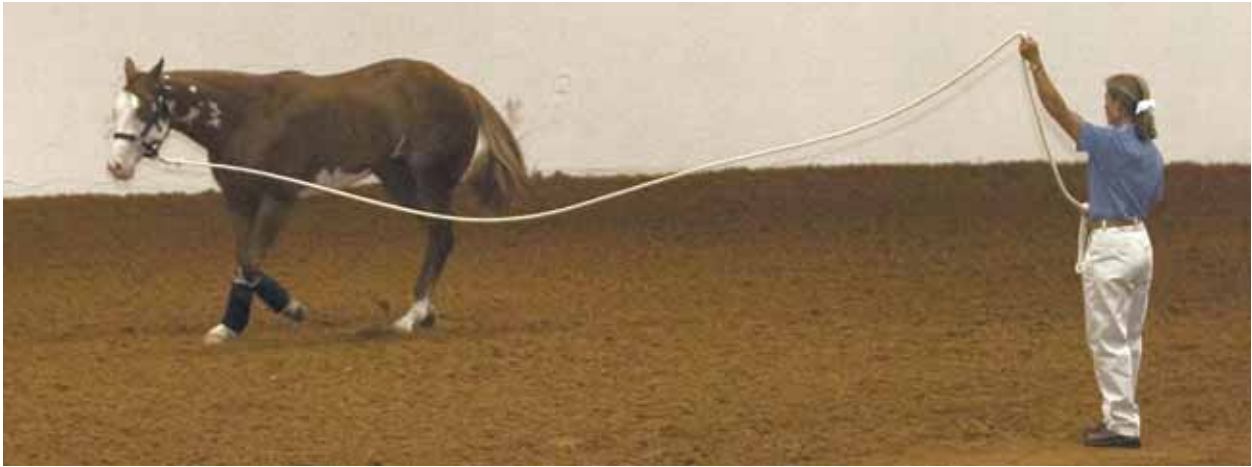
PHJ: How extensively can you expect to show a yearling?

BS: I don't think it's good to show a yearling from January to December. I think that's too hard on a baby. If I have a baby born later in the year, I won't bring it out until the futurity season. You can show a horse all year if you select your shows carefully and don't longe the wheels off the horse.

PHJ: What purpose does the longe whip serve, and why don't you use one?



Ground driving is the foundation of Bear's training program. Top: She begins to ask the horse to yield away from her by closing in on the horse with her body and the line. Middle: Bear stops the horse's forward motion and asks her to sidepass. Bottom: Ground driving teaches the horse to move forward on its own with confidence.



Bear asks for the lope or canter by raising the longe line. This is the horse's cue to lift the shoulder and pick up the gait. It is important, notes Bear, that the horse's attention be fully focused on the handler at all times.

BS: I did a lot of work years ago with Standardbreds, and I apply my driving knowledge to training longe line yearlings. That's why I'm able to longe horses without ever using a whip. They're trained off the longe line, not just pushed around the circle. However, if I have a horse that keeps caving in, then I will use a whip as an extension of my arm to push the horse out.

If you use the longe whip as your only means to get forward impulsion, then you teach the horse to hang on the longe line and to turn its head to the inside, because any horse is going to want to see what's coming at him.

PHJ: How do you incorporate ground driving into your training?

BS: I do the ground driving with my longe line horse differently than I ground drive a carthorse. I drive the yearling using just one line, not two. I teach the horse to travel straight in front of me using just one line. I teach them to step forward, yield, pivot away from me and change direction, all using one line.

I teach the horse to change direction through ground driving. I begin by asking it to two-track away from me. Once they understand the coordination of crossing their front legs and they understand that whoa means to settle and to wait for the next command, I ask for a directional change.

PHJ: How do you cue your horse for the various gaits?

BS: I teach my horse its cues from the longe line. When I hold my line hand out from my body, that means to speed up. When I lift my line hand up toward the top of my head, that means to pick up the canter. When they are in the canter, I'll keep my other hand out to keep them moving at the canter. When I bring my hand down, they know they are going to stop.

For downward transitions, I use only verbal commands. I never pull on the line, because I don't want the horse to turn toward me.

PHJ: How much tension do you maintain on the longe line?

BS: None. I know that my horse is a finished product when I can walk, jog or lope the horse out on the end of the longe line, lay my hand open and that line does not pull out of my hand.

PHJ: What are some of the more difficult cues to teach?

BS: A smooth departure into the canter is the most difficult command to teach a yearling. You will often see a horse bolt into the canter, take six or seven fast strides, and then slow down. The reason this happens is because the horse is being asked to canter before it has learned how to smoothly depart at the walk and the trot.

PHJ: Because you are working a horse that is still growing, what are your concerns regarding soundness?

BS: Most unsoundness results from excessive cantering, because only one leg is on the ground at the time. When I'm training, I canter them very little. I get them completely broke to all the commands at the walk and the jog before I canter them. Overworking the horse in a circle may also cause soundness problems, because horses carry three-quarters of their weight on the front end.

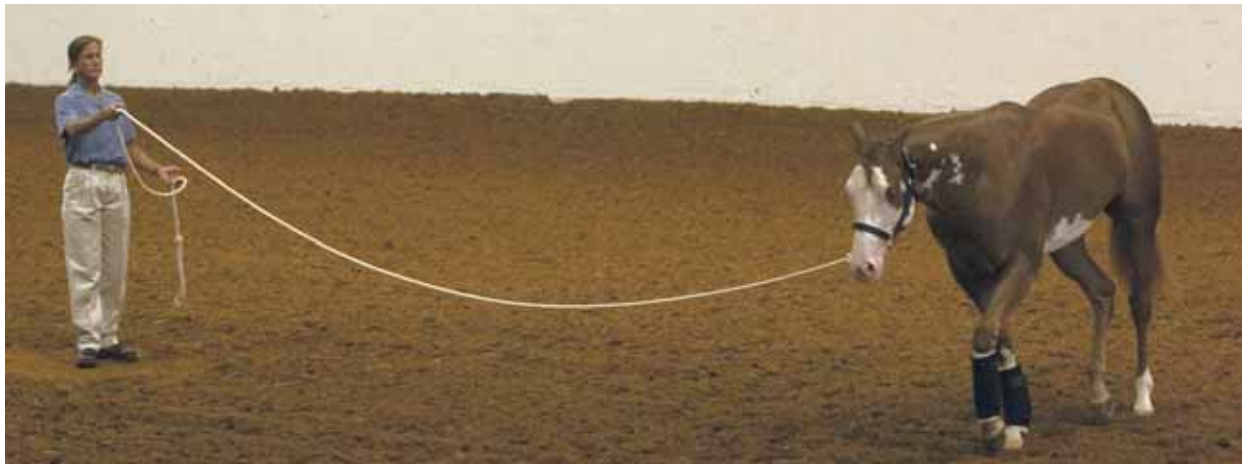
Leg protection is also very important. I always wrap the front legs, but if I have a horse that is long in the cannon bone and a little sloppy behind, I'll wrap the back legs, as well.

PHJ: Do you shoe your yearlings?

BS: If the horse has good feet, I don't shoe them while I'm training, because we have good, soft terrain in Florida. But I never haul a horse in a trailer without at least putting shoes on the front. If a horse has softer, white feet, I'll shoe them all the way around. It's entirely to protect their feet.

PHJ: The rulebook explains that the class is intended to demonstrate the horse's suitability to be a future performance horse. Are there any significant differences between a future Western pleasure and hunter under saddle horse at this age?

BS: There is quite a bit of difference, particularly in body type. The hunter under saddle prospect will have nice height to it, be more refined, be longer in the neck and



The handler should remain stationary in the center of the 50-foot circle, and the horse should work around the handler in a soft, natural arc. The horse should neither cut into the circle nor pull against the line.

show more extension in its movement. The Western pleasure prospect will have a stock horse look.

PHJ: In APHA yearling long line classes, the English and Western pleasure horses show together, while at NSBA shows, the class is split. Is there any disadvantage to having both types of horses showing together?

BS: No, because a pleasure horse is a pleasure horse. If you have a Western horse that jogs okay and lopes well, and a hunt seat horse that both trots and canters well, the hunt horse should place above the Western horse. But if you have a hunter under saddle prospect that is unusually small, it's probably not going to do well. The differences in body type between an English and Western pleasure prospect are evident at this age.

Also, horses are judged individually on their walk, jog or trot, and canter or lope, so a score is a score, regardless of what type of horse it is.

PHJ: The rulebook states, "This class should be looked upon as a class that defines what it means to be a pleasure prospect or hunter prospect suitable to become a future performer under saddle. Therefore, attitudes and attrib-

utes that contribute to becoming a future performer will be rewarded within the gait scores." Please describe these attitudes and attributes.

BS: In terms of attitude, you want a horse that has a pleasant expression and a kind, soft eye. The horse should look like everything it does is easy and effortless. Its whole aura seems pleasant. In terms of attributes, the hunter horse should exhibit a flowing shoulder and considerable reach, while the Western horse should be deep in the hocks and have an easy, natural lope.

PHJ: Do you typically see more Western pleasure or hunter under saddle prospects in the yearling long line class?

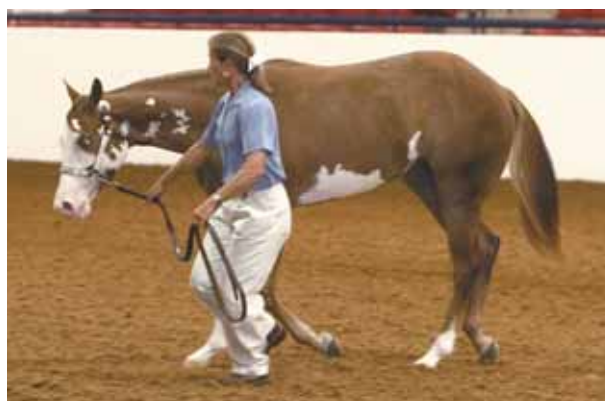
BS: At the breed shows, there seems to be more Western than English horses, but at NSBA shows, where the class is divided between English and Western horses, it's pretty much an even split.

PHJ: What is the appropriate attire and turnout for showing in this class?

BS: Western horses should be banded and English horses should be braided. The exhibitor of an English horse should wear English attire, except for the helmet, and the exhibitor



The horse should be stood for inspection in a way that is complementary to its conformation. It should exhibit a soft expression and sufficient body weight.



A Western horse should be jogged for the inspection, while an English horse should be trotted. The gait should be appropriate for the horse's type.

of a Western horse will wear Western attire. I typically will wear boots, slacks, a blouse, blazer and Western hat.

PHJ: What type of halter and longe line do you prefer to show with?

BS: With the halter, it depends on the horse's head. I always use a show halter, but if I have a horse that is what I call heavy-headed—not sensitive to the shank—I'll use a wider, heavier halter. If I have a horse that is extremely sensitive to the line, I'll use a lighter halter.

The longe line I use varies, depending on the horse's stride. I usually use a leather longe line because my horses are steady in their backs. But if I have a horse that has an extra spring to its stride, I will change to a horsehair or nylon rope so that I don't get as much swing in the line.

While you can use a chain to present the horse for the inspection and trot-out, you cannot use a chain when longeing. The longe line must be attached directly to the halter.

PHJ: The rules state that the horse will be shown in a circle having a 25-foot radius. How do you ensure that you are working in a 50-foot circle?

BS: I have my longe lines and ropes made 30 feet long. That way, I know when I'm in the arena and I've got both hands on the rope with three feet hanging down, that I'm right at 25 feet. That's the best way to gauge it.

PHJ: The rulebook does not state that a performance should begin in a certain direction. Therefore, does it matter if you start clockwise or counter-clockwise?

BS: I always start to the left, as do most others. This isn't a rule; it's more of a tradition.

PHJ: The rulebook explains that the exhibitor is given 90 seconds to present the horse, and that show management has the option of adding a "half-way" signal. How do you time your performance so that you demonstrate all three gaits in both directions within the time allotted, even if a halfway signal is not given?

BS: Exhibitors need to learn how to time the horse, and this should be done at home. They also need to learn how to factor terrain into the timing. If you're in a deep arena, a horse is going to go faster to pull itself through the footing, and the number of laps will be cut down.

Normally, I ask the horse to go three-quarters of a circle at the walk so the judge can see that the horse is in a flat, comfortable walk, that its head is springy, that it's not intimidated and it's not anticipating the next gait. If it's a Western horse, then I'm probably going to make less than two laps at the jog, but if it's a hunt-seat horse, I might get five or six laps at the trot. The same is true of the lope or canter.

If I have a horse that is better going one direction than the other, I incorporate my reverse into the direction that it is not as comfortable with, because the reverse takes up some time. For example, if I have a horse that moves better to the left, I'm going to work that horse that direction for 45 seconds. Then I reverse and go the other way. But if I have a horse that moves better to the right, I'm going to stop that horse and reverse before the steward gives the



A lead with a shank (left) can be used for the inspection phase of the class, but during the longe line phase, the line must be attached directly to the halter (right). The halter should fit the horse properly, with the buckles positioned behind the horse's ears. The cheek pieces should be long enough to allow the noseband to clear the horse's facial bones.

SC-191. Yearling Longe Line

- A. Class is limited to yearlings. Points in this class will be applied toward an ROM. Points in this class will not count toward an APHA Championship or any other APHA awards.
- B. The purpose of showing a yearling on a longe line is to demonstrate that the horse has the movement, manners/expression/attitude, and conformation to become competitive under saddle. Therefore, the purpose of this class is to reward:
1. Quality of movement
 2. Manners/Expression/Attitude
 3. Conformation suitable to future performance, and the horse should be judged with its suitability as a future performer under saddle in mind. This class should define what it means to be a “western pleasure prospect” or “hunter under saddle prospect.” Because these are yearlings, they are not expected to demonstrate the behavior or quality of a finished show horse, but only that performance necessary for a reasonable presentation to the judge.
- C. Equipment. Horses are to be shown in a halter. Either a regular or a show type halter is acceptable. For the longeing demonstration, the only attachment allowed to the halter is a longe line. The longe line may not exceed 30 feet with a snap attached to the halter. The longe line must hang free from the halter without touching any part of the horse. It is permissible to use a longe whip however, disqualification will occur if the exhibitor blatantly strikes the horse with the whip to cause forward or lateral movement at any time during the longeing demonstration. No other equipment is allowed on the horse during longeing demonstration portion of the class. Mechanical or retractable longe lines are not allowed. For the conformation inspection, a lead shank, such as used in halter or showmanship classes may be exchanged for the longe line prior to the longeing demonstration. Exhibitors are not to be penalized for using regular halters and plain longe lines, nor are they to be rewarded for using show halters and show longe lines. Only movement, manners/expression/way of going, and conformation are being judged. The type of equipment used is not to be a consideration in placing the horse as long as the equipment meets the requirements stated above.
- D. Attire. Conventional Western attire is mandatory according to SC-235 except if a prospect is considered to be a Hunter prospect, the mane may be braided and conventional English attire is suggested according to SC-195. The type of attire worn by the exhibitor is not to be a consideration in placing the horse as long as the attire meets the requirements stated above.
- E. Gaits to be judged according to APHA rules for gaits for western pleasure (SC-245.E.) and hunter under saddle (SC-205.F).
- F. The conformation inspection will occur as the horse is walked into the arena prior to the longeing demonstration at which time the judge will also evaluate the horse for conformation suitable for future under saddle performance. The judges may not discriminate for or against muscling, but rather look for a total picture, emphasizing balance, structural correctness, and athletic capability. Each entry will be walked into the arena to the judge and pause for evaluation individually. They will then trot off straight and around a cone and take a place on the wall inside the arena. All entries will be inspected in this fashion and as the “trot-off” is administered, horses showing evidence of lameness should be excused from the class at that time.
- G. Judge(s) will be outside the longeing circle. The exhibitor will enter the longeing area and await the audible start signal. When the signal is given, the exhibitor will be allowed 1½ minutes (90 seconds) to present the horse. At the end of 1½ minutes, a signal will be given again to signify the end of the demonstration. Show management has the option of adding a “halfway” signal if they choose. (The signal may be a bell, whistle or announcement.)
- H. The horse will be scored at the walk, jog or long trot, and lope or canter in both directions. Any horse that does not exhibit these gaits in each direction will be disqualified from the class. Additionally, the judge shall immediately excuse any horse who exhibits obvious lameness at any time during the class. Exhibitors may begin work in the direction of their choice (counter or clockwise).
- I. At the end of the 1 and ½ minutes, a signal will be given and the exhibitor shall at the request of show management, retire from the longeing area and retire to the far end of the ring. The horses are to stand quietly on the rail while the other exhibitors are being judged.
- J. The horses are judged on movement (80%) according to APHA rules for gaits (SC-205.F. and SC-245.E.). Manners/Expression/Attitude (10 points) and conformation suitable to purpose (20 points). Judges may not discriminate for or against bulk, but rather look for a total picture, emphasizing balance and athletic capability.
- K. If the horse plays on the longe line, it shall not count against the horse. The judge will, however, penalize the horse for excessive bucking or running off, stumbling or displaying attitudes that are uncomplimentary to pleasure horses. Falling down will constitute disqualification. Credit is to be given to the horse that, under light control and without intimidation, goes softly and quietly while performing the required gaits. The overall picture of a good mover is a horse that goes forward with comfort, confidence and willingness, a fluid stride with a full extension of the limbs, and a head and neck carriage that is naturally comfortable and compatible with the horses' conformation. Transitions will be smooth, without interruption of forward motion. The horse will exhibit a pleasant look, with clear, bright

(continued on page 86)

(continued from page 85)

eyes and a willing attitude. Credit will be given to fluid movement and correct cadence.

L. Exhibitors are encouraged to exhibit their horse making full use of a longing circle having a 25' radius (7.5m).

M. An exhibitor may only show one horse in each longe line class. The same exhibitor must show in both segments of the class.

N. Scoring: NSBA scoring is recommended.

1. Movement will count for 80 points of the total score.

a. Walk. The walk will be scored on a scale of 0–4 in each direction, with 2 being average. The horse must be walked long enough for the judge to have sufficient time to evaluate and score the walk. The change of direction turn-around at the walk may count for the second walk score on the official score sheet. Lower gait scores should reflect stumbling in the gait.

b. Jog or Trot. The jog/trot will be scored on a scale of 0–16 in each direction, with 8 being average. Using a 25' radius (7.5m), the horse should jog or trot a minimum of ½ circle both directions of the ring. Lower gait scores should reflect stumbling in the gait.

c. Lope or Canter. The lope/canter will be scored on a scale of 0–20 in each direction, with 10 being average. Using a 25' radius, the horse should lope or canter a minimum of one full circle both directions of the ring. Furthermore, any entry that fails to demonstrate the correct lead for one full circle will not place over another entry that has demonstrated the correct lead in its entirety. Lower gait scores should reflect stumbling in the gait.

d. Use of Circle. Scores for all gaits in both directions should reflect positive, consistent use of the 25' radius (7.5m) of the circle. Extra credit will be given for full, extended use of the circle on a slightly loose line. Lower gait scores should reflect lack of full use of the circle.

2. Manners/Expression/Attitude will count for up to 10 points of the total score. The horse will be judged on manners, expression, and attitude on a scale of 0–10, with 5 being average. Horses will be penalized for obvious signs of overwork and sourness such as ear-pinning, head-throwing, striking, tail-wringing, or a dull, lethargic manner of going. They will also be penalized for dangerous behavior such as excessive bucking, cutting into the circle, or running off. Additionally, incidental touching the horse with the whip, cross-cantering, balking, backing up on the longe line and excessive urging from the exhibitor should be penalized accordingly.

3. Conformation will count for up to 20 points of the total score. The horse will be judged on conformation suitable to future performance as a Western

Pleasure or Hunter Under Saddle competitor. The judges should look for a total picture, emphasizing balance, structural correctness, and athletic capability. Performance conformation will be judged on a scale of 0–20, with 10 being average.

4. Use of the circle. Consideration will be given to how well or how poorly the horse/exhibitor team uses the 25' radius (7.5m) of the longing circle. A separate box on the scorecard is available to indicate an overall score (from 0–3 points) for use of the circle. Circle Scores: As described earlier, a 25' radius (7.5m) is the appropriate size of circle in which to show a longe liner. It is the judge's responsibility to evaluate the circles and incorporate use of the circle in the gait scores based on the following scale:

+3 points (Good to Excellent Use of the Circle). Horse consistently stays on the perimeter of the circle with slight looseness in the line. Horse turns around on the circle perimeter.

+2 points (Average use of the circle). Horse is only slightly inconsistent in using the 25' radius (7.5m) of the circle.

+1 point (Adequate use of the circle) Horse is shown in a circle radius of less than 25' (7.5m).

0 points (General use of the circle) Potentially dangerous slack in the line. Horse pulls exhibitor out of the circle.

5. Other scoring considerations: This class should be looked upon as a class that defines what it means to be a "pleasure prospect" or "hunter prospect" suitable to become a future performer under saddle. Therefore, attitudes and attributes that contribute to becoming a future performer will be rewarded within the gait scores. Higher gait scores will reflect: Above average to exceptional manners, expression, alertness, responsiveness, and pleasant attitude, above average to exceptionally smooth transitions between gaits, above average to excellent cadence and consistency at all three gaits.

6. Penalties and disqualifications.

a. Five (5)-point penalties: Failure to demonstrate the correct lead, jog or trot for an adequate distance to allow for proper evaluation of gait.

b. Disqualification will occur in the following instances: Evidence of lameness—judge will immediately excuse horse from the arena, blatant striking horse with the whip during the longing demonstration that will cause forward or lateral movement, horse falls—A horse is considered to have fallen when it is on its side and all four legs are extended in the same direction, horse steps over or becomes entangled in the longe line, failure to show at all three gaits in both directions, loss of control of the horse to the point that the horse is loose in the arena, exhibitor disrespect towards the judge(s).



The reverse is one of the more difficult maneuvers to teach a yearling. The horse should stop and stand quietly until it is asked to change direction (left). The filly begins the change of direction by pivoting on her hind legs (right).



She continues the turn (left) and then resumes forward motion once she completes the full 180-degree pivot.

halfway signal, or before 45 seconds, so that I get a longer trip the second direction.

PHJ: What are some common mistakes you see people make when showing their longe line horse?

BS: The most common mistake I see exhibitors make is letting the horse cave in on one side of the circle and then pulling the horse on the rope around on the other side of the circle. The circle should be even, with the same, continual light pressure on the line while the horse performs all three gaits in both directions. You can't have the rope dragging on the ground one moment and then pulling you like a ski rope the next.

Another thing I see that I don't like is when people reverse their horse by chasing it around the other direction. I feel you should stand still, ask your horse to stop, and the horse should rotate around on its hind leg and then start in the other direction. The horse should know that it has to change direction. You shouldn't have to force it.

PHJ: What areas can exhibitors focus on to really help their horse's performance?

BS: Often, people spend too much time practicing the routine on the longe line, but they don't practice the fundamentals of training to keep the horse fresh. Once your horse knows its commands, believe in your horse. Don't just drill the show-ring routine day after day after day. If you ride a pleasure horse, you don't just ride it up and down the rail every day. You do gymnastics to keep it supple and soft. The same goes with the longe liners. If you just make them go around and around, you're not teaching them anything, you're just wearing them out. You want

to make sure you are always teaching them something. Once my longe liners are broke, I don't school them any more than twice a week. Instead, I'll pony them, drive them or just turn them out.

For a polished performance, the exhibitor should remain in one spot in the center of the circle and the horse should move around the exhibitor in a circle that remains the same diameter through all the gaits.

Learn to perfect your showmanship pattern in next month's installment of Riding to the Rulebook.



Bear Smith of Eustis, Florida, has been training horses professionally for 16 years. She has been showing in yearling longe line since the class became an APHA-recognized event. She won a reserve world championship in the event in 2001 and has several World Show Top 10s.