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ASK TEAM H&R

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I WANT TO DO YEARLING LONGE LINE!

Robin Gollehon explains the fundamentals of the yearling longe-line event and how to get started in it.

Q *I'm interested in competing in yearling longe line, but I don't know much about it. I've heard that showing a yearling in longe line can create problems later in a horse's training. Should I be concerned about this? Can you explain the basics of the class, and give me some tips on getting started?*

LINDSAY WATERFIELD, ALABAMA

A Lindsay, I'm glad to hear you're interested in yearling longe line. This event can be helpful in transitioning yearlings to their eventual work under saddle. It serves as "kindergarten" for young horses, providing them with basic skills and confidence, plus the beginnings of the stamina they'll need to be show horses. If done properly, it can accomplish all this without taking a toll on a young horse's mind or body. It can also help you evaluate your horse's potential in the show ring by allowing you to observe his natural way of moving and head carriage in competition with other horses of his own age.

Yes, some trainers warn that competing in longe line will create problems in a yearling's future training. And that can happen if the longe-line training is improper and/or rushed, allowing the youngster to learn to travel on his forehead, drop his shoulder to the inside of the circle, and hold his head and neck to the outside. Plus, too much circling at too fast a pace can put wear and tear on a young horse's legs. Trainers that put a young horse in a round pen and chase him around to tire him out are asking for problems.

These concerns are why my program initiates much of the essential training



Before you begin training your yearling for longe-line competition, he must be comfortable with your moving around various parts of his body. Here, I'm standing quietly at his hip, resting my hand on his hindquarters. Once he's at ease with me here, I'll do the same on his other hip.

at a standstill or walk, then builds very gradually—adding on a jog, then a trot, then a lope over time—to teach the yearling about balance and proper carriage on the longe line.

In this article, I'm going to explain what's involved in yearling longe-line competition and how you can get started. I'll also tell you what equipment and attire you'll need, and give you some exercises you can use with your yearling.

Longe-Line Basics

The yearling longe-line class is divided

into two parts: evaluation of conformation (where you present your yearling much as you would in a halter class) and evaluation of movement on the longe line. We'll look at each of these in turn.

Conformation. In this part of the class, the judge looks for the structural correctness that will contribute to quality of movement in your youngster. You walk your horse toward the judge, stop, and stand him up squarely for inspection. (*Note: You are allowed to use your hands to adjust your horse's position.*)

Next, you jog your yearling toward the judge, then turn so the judge can view your horse's movement from the side. For the best score, you and your yearling should demonstrate good leading skills with minimal cueing.

Movement on the longe line. In this part of the class, you show off your yearling's quality of movement at all gaits—as well as his responsiveness, respectfulness, and good manners, which also contribute to his score. One challenge here is the time restriction: You have just 1½ minutes to demonstrate a walk, jog, and lope (or walk, trot, and canter if you're competing for hunter under saddle) in both directions. That breaks down to only 45 seconds per direction—leaving little time for mistakes!

There is, however, some leniency. The judge will not penalize you if your horse "plays" on the line a bit, as long as he does in fact eventually make a correct circle. Still, any major upsets will likely prevent you from demonstrating your yearling's gaits in both directions within the time limit.

Once you've demonstrated the three gaits in both directions, and the allotted time is up, you've completed the longe-line segment of the class.

Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Let's talk about how to get started.

Finding a Yearling, a Trainer

If you don't already have a yearling to work with and need to purchase one, find a good trainer first; he or she can provide invaluable assistance in acquiring a prospect to meet your needs and up your chances of winning. Select a pleasure horse trainer who's knowledgeable about preparing a youngster for longe-line competition. There are also some trainers who specialize exclusively in yearling longe line. To find a competent trainer in your area, contact your local breed affiliate or national breed organization and ask for recommendations.

Once you've found a trainer to help you, look for that special yearling. The good news is yearlings are typically less expensive than a horse of similar quality at 2 or 3 years of age. Look for a youngster with good Western pleasure or hunter-under-saddle bloodlines, as appropriate.

Your trainer will know of breeders in your area, and/or you can search online for information. Once baby's in hand, you'll also need...



TOP: Yearling longe line is a great way to break into the horse-show scene, or get back into it—without spending a lot of money on equipment or apparel. **ABOVE:** While you're not permitted to use a stud chain during the longe line part of competition, one can be helpful in your yearling's early training.

Equipment, Attire

Longe line requires less (and less expensive) equipment than do many other events. Plus, this equipment is also useful for other types of training and riding. The basics:

Show halter: Typically leather with silver plating (the amount depending on your budget) for Western longe line; for hunt seat—plain leather halter with brass fittings or a conservative silver buckle.

Longe line: I prefer the ones made of mountain-climbing rope rather than flat leather; the rope provides more "feel" of the horse in my hands.

Longe whip: I prefer one about 5 feet long as opposed to anything longer. The whip is only to serve as an extension of your arm; you shouldn't touch your yearling with it or crack it for sound effects. Carrying a longe whip is optional, but most exhibitors do.

Stud chain: Though you're not permitted to use a chain while your yearling's on the longe line, you may use one during the conformation component of the class—and should if your yearling responds better with one. I also recommend using a chain while training your yearling on the line.

LOOK FOR ROBIN...

...at the National Snaffle Bit Association World Championship Show August 20 to 24 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she'll be presenting the Longe-Line Clinic. For details, go to Gollehon.com.

Protective boots: These are optional. Correct longe-line training begins slowly, progresses gradually, and is never over-done, so protective leg-wear isn't a "must." But, if you or your trainer determine your horse needs them, be sure the fit and adjustment are correct.

Your show attire. For Western longe line, you can wear starched jeans (or slacks), pressed Western blouse or short jacket (for women), Western shirt (for men), Western hat, and boots. It's perfectly acceptable to wear this attire for hunter longe line, as well; hunt seat attire is also worn, typically by women—men tend to stick to Western attire.

(Note: I like to wear gloves to protect my hands while training, but I typically don't in the show ring. However, you can wear them in competition if you prefer.)

Exercises to Try

Your trainer will provide specifics on the teaching/conditioning program for your youngster. But here are some basics you can start with to prepare for his formal schooling.

Calm, respectful. Your yearling must be comfortable with someone moving all around him. So, while holding him on a lead (in a barn alley or in the open), stand quietly at his shoulder for a few minutes. If he's at ease with you there, do the same at his other shoulder. Then, move toward his hindquarters, stopping at his hip. Continue to hold the lead rope, but don't pull on it. Once he's comfortable with this, repeat at his other hip.

Gradually step farther and farther away, to the full length of your lead rope. As you work with him, make it clear that although you can enter his space, he cannot enter yours without a direct invitation. I tell my students to pretend they're wearing white, and if they end up with dirt or horse slobber on their clothing, they need to improve their horses' ground manners before moving on.



Robin and her husband, Roger, operate a "Yearling Head Start Program" at their Gollehon Show Horses in Versailles, Kentucky. The program is divided into two parts: one to teach longe-line basics; the other to prepare yearlings for under-saddle training. For more information, go to YearlingHeadStart.com.

Whoa 'n' go. With your youngster still on the lead, teach or reinforce basic stop-and-go cues. Make sure he associates the verbal command "whoa" with stopping, and a cluck with "walk," and again for "trot". (Many trainers like to reserve a "kiss" as a cue for loping.) During the "go" part of the work, your yearling should willingly move his body wherever you ask him to go.

Visualizing circles. Once you're closer to show time, a great technique is to memorize your longe-line routine in advance, and practice it in your head. Visualize the longe-line circle in terms of where you'll ask your horse to walk, jog, and lope. Think of the circle in terms of "ground covered" and the pace your horse should be doing at each section of that area; for example: ¼-circle at a walk; ½-circle at a jog; at least one full circle at a lope. Then, reverse and repeat.

Go For It!

Why give longe lining a try? It's a great way to break into the horse-show world—or get back into it. Because it

doesn't require riding skills, you don't have to be in top physical shape, so you can ease into showing while working toward other riding goals. Again, it's relatively inexpensive compared to "regular" events, and you can compete in longe line at a big show without having to qualify first. I definitely encourage you to give it a try! ■

Robin Gollehon has been training professionally for 30 years and has more than 75 ApHC world and national championships to her credit in yearling longe line, Western pleasure, and hunter under saddle. She was an AQHA Congress reserve champion in 2005, and was previously named World High-Point Lady Exhibitor and the Appaloosa Pleasure Horse Association Trainer of the Year.

Robin and her husband, Roger, offer a "Yearling Head Start Program" at Gollehon Show Horses, their brand-new training and breeding facility in Versailles, Kentucky. Divided into two classes, the program helps breeders prepare their yearlings for show careers. Part one teaches the basics of longe line; part two prepares the youngsters for under-saddle training. (For more information, go to YearlingHeadStart.com.)