

Over Groeischijven en het belang van geduld!

Do you think that in horses, growth plates mature into bone from the bottom up?

Many people in the equine world believe that horses mature at different rates depending on breed and that the knees plates are all important and signal when a horse can be ridden.

In fact, on all horses, regardless of breed, the last growth plates to convert to bone are on the spinal column, on the vertebrae that span from the back of the head to the tail. These do not close until the horse is at least five and 1/2 for a very small horse and much older for a larger, longer horse - as late as 8, 9, 10 years old.

See the comments section for mention by Martina Neidhart a veterinarian specialized in rehabilitation and back issues of several recent research studies backing these numbers- we are looking into this newer research which confirms Dr Bennett's work and the absolute importance of not starting horses too early, taking the time to to prepare them for being ridden carefully and developing them slowly once under saddle.

And where are the last growth plates to close?

The answer is the last growth plates to close belong to the vertebrae at the base of the neck where the cervical portion of the spine meets the thoracic portion of the spine. A junction that is subjected to a lot of work and stress as we ask the horse to raise the base of his neck to come round and work in a good posture.

These vertebrae are important because raising the base of the neck is how proper collection is obtained - and by base, we mean the bottom of the neck where it attaches to the chest. As you know, the cervical spine is not located under the mane bed, it can be found on a descending S curve "inside" the neck as seen on the Equinology Painted Horse image we are sharing with you.

What are the repercussion of skeleton maturation on riding?

According to Dr. Bennett whose research Manolo's experience agrees with, a young horse's immature back is going to brace when it has to carry a weight it is not ready for. In anticipation of the effort, a young horse will stiffen the muscles of his topline, and may also brace his legs and hold his breath - "brace the diaphragm". The more the young horse experiences bracing his back, the less he will know how to use his it properly.

This initial bracing is extremely hard to correct and perhaps it is a part of how leg movers are developed and why we see so many today when horses are started so young and often ridden in detrimental deep postures.

One way to condition the young horse for riding and reduce the likelihood of issues is slow and steady work-in hand.

In Manolo's training approach, only after working without a rider and developing his body's strenght and balance is a horse introduced to carrying a rider - bareback for a few walk steps to the left and then to the right while on the lunge line.

It is only when the quality of the walk steps show a balanced, comfortable and confident horse with carrying power that the saddle and in-the saddle work is introduced, slowly, with a light and balance rider.

At first, the handler is 100% in charge and the rider's job is simply to "carry" themselves and seat lightly and in balance on the horse's back. The horse is introduced in-hand, on the lunge to the same work, patterns, figures, movements he did without a rider, and slowly a transfer takes place with the rider taking more and more of the guiding responsibilities until it is 100% in charge.

There is no rush. The question is not can we get this horse under saddle in 30 days or 2 or 1 or 60. Instead, the questions are:

- ◆ Is this horse's body and mind physically ready?
- ◆ How do we help him be ready and make it easy for him to work with us and not only stay healthy but become even healthier?
- ◆ How do we preserve his soundness as we ask for things that his body was not built for?

Back to Dr. Bennett who is a world renown bone specialist. She states:

"Any horse that does not know how to move with its back muscles in release cannot round up" .

Manolo finds this also to be true as in his experience, a horse with a tense, rigid, unswinging or dropped back cannot work in true self carriage and collection.

In any case, this is a good read for anyone interested in the inner working of horses with some advice on when and how to start a young horse and how to increase their working life, potential for soundness and longevity. This is still a good read if one plans on starting a young horse early as it can help a trainer adapt their program to minimize risks as much as possible.

http://www.equinestudies.org/ran.../ranger_piece_2008_pdf1.pdf

To learn more about Manolo's training approach and his in-hand dvd visit: www.manolomendezdressage.com