

**J**AMES P. McCall, Ph.D., from the animal science department of Louisiana Tech University, and his wife and co-trainer, Lynda, were among the nation's top equestrian specialists invited to speak at this year's California Livestock Symposium. Four days before their demonstration, a quarter horse mare that had no training other than halter breaking was brought to them for training under saddle. Before an audience of 4,000 horse enthusiasts, they explained and demonstrated the proper techniques of breaking and training young horses without force.

Using a round pen, in one hour's time the mare was free-longed, ridden bareback, saddled, and then ridden under saddle. Dr. McCall explains their unique methods that enable them to make such fast progress in training a green horse, "A horse will respond and will do what you ask just because you ask if he respects your position. So when we train horses, one of the first things we try to do is communicate to them by a means that is natural to them.

"Body position in relation to the horse's body position is a natural method of communication to the horse. That is how herds are banded, how stallions keep mares in line, and how mares keep other mares in line. You've all seen how an old mare acts when she comes near a feed trough. She doesn't have to do a lot of kicking and biting, she just twitches an ear and looks at a subordinate and she has 30 feet clear of a tub she wants to eat out of.

"Having watched this through the years I couldn't see any reason why we couldn't use the same sort of thing if we tuned a horse to the body position and the body tones of a human in relation to the horse, with some adaptation."

Lynda McCall entered the round pen with a young mare and released her. The mare paid close attention to Lynda as she began to do what appeared to be a modern dance. She moved toward the horse then away, walked fast, then slowed the pace, tilted her head and pirouetted, shifted her weight forward on one foot then back on the other. The dance partner was the mare with Lynda leading the steps, maneuvering the mare around the pen without halter or longeline.

Lynda used a crop as an extension of her arm and used her body language. The mare walked, trotted, halted, spun into the rail, turned away from the rail, slowed down and speeded up in tune with Lynda's movements.

As Lynda and the mare worked, Dr. McCall explained the dance routine,

"Lynda uses her body and stays behind the shoulder of this mare. Lynda can make her go faster by giving her impulsion, and then she might plant a foot in front of that horse or stick a shoulder in front of her to bring the speed down. Lynda chooses any gait she wants. She can even do more artificial maneuvers like an extended trot and a collected trot.

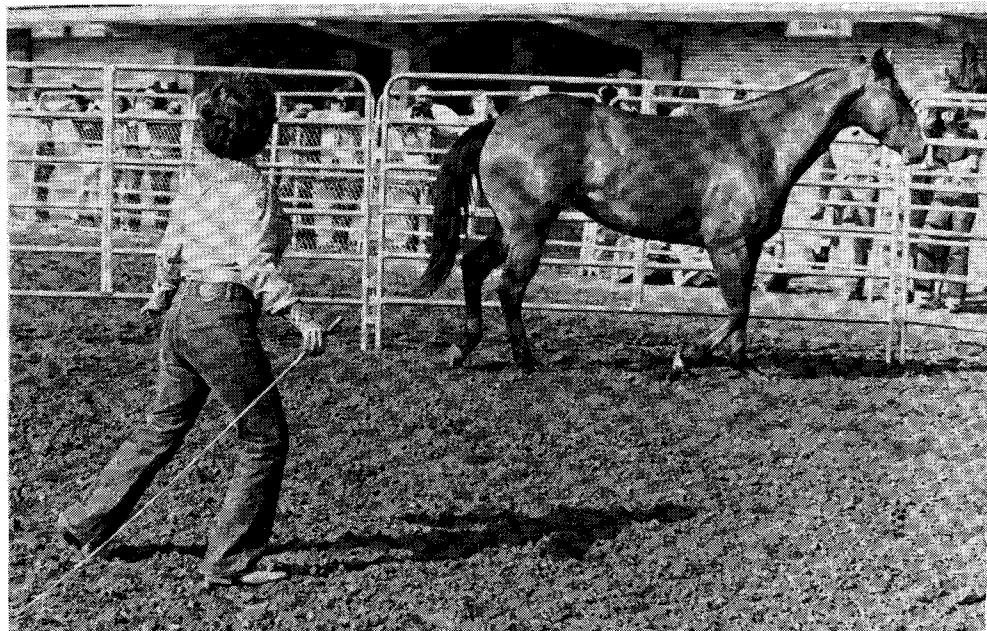
"The reverse into the rail is an easy maneuver. Lynda just steps in front of the horse and twists her body, which moves the horse in the opposite direction.

To stop the horse Lynda puts a block in front of her by stepping out

*A Session Of Free Longeing  
Looks More Like A Modern  
Dance Lesson When The Simple  
Theory Of Horse Mimicry Is  
Applied During Training!*

By LAURIE GUIDERO

## *Dancing In Space*

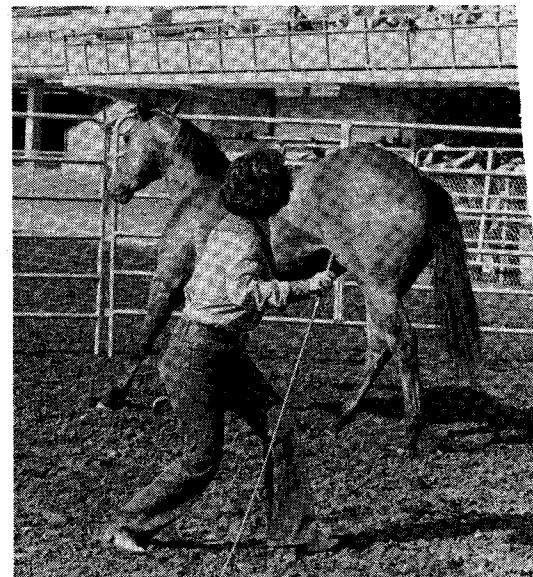


in front. She faces the horse, doesn't twist her body, and holds the horse in position to ask for a sit-down stop.

"The back is another maneuver. She stops the horse first in the front-on position, or hold position, facing against the horse. Then she just steps in toward the shoulder and asks the horse to back up.

"Lynda moves this horse around the ring just like a dominant horse would move her around the ring. She tries to get this horse tuned into the body positions, the body tone, the body tension, and tuned into the energy projected through the human body."

Lynda performed each maneuver as Dr. McCall continued to explain their training technique: "We start putting some handle on a horse while we're on the ground. We teach the horse how to





use himself in tight quarters, but most important, we teach the horse how to relate to the human body.

"People ask me how long it takes a horse to learn these body cues from a human. My answer to that question is that horses already know how to do these things. This is how they survive in a herd situation. They're used to reading these maneuvers, these posi-

tions. They have their personal space according to their dominance in the herd. If they've been out with other horses, and a herd is two horses in my book, they've already learned these things. It's not a question of how long it takes the horse to learn how to do it, but rather, how long it takes the handler to tell the horse that he knows how to mimic a horse.



*Lynda controls the speed and position of the horse, just as a dominant horse would, to teach the horse to respect the personal space of humans.*

"The better you get and the more experience you have, then the more you can tune to these things, and then the better you can control the horse. The horse has nothing to learn besides how to transfer what he already knows from other horses to relating it to humans.

"There are a couple of more difficult maneuvers that do involve this relationship. One is to teach the horse to turn in off of the rail rather than turning away into the rail. It's easy to turn a horse into the rail just by jumping in front of him and running at him so he'll jump away from you and try to flee. But it is more difficult to tune that horse to body language so that he will turn to face you, and it must not be a charge or a threat. As you see a horse performing these more difficult maneuvers you know he is getting a little more sensitive and starting to read what you want.

"Another cue that is fairly difficult; the first day anyway, is the cue to ask the horse to come in. If the horse





comes in, this is a little unnatural to him because most of the horses that have chased him around using their look or their body position, don't ask a horse to come to them. We say horses nicker and call one another but we don't nicker real good as humans and we don't have quite the same sound of come-hitherence that a stallion has to a mare in heat. We don't have some of these natural quirks so we have to teach the horse a cue that will allow the horse to come into our personal space and be caught. I've always said that when I train horses one of the things I'm always going to do is teach the horse to come to me, because I've chased enough of them

*"... we teach the horse how to relate to the human body."*

how to develop this special relationship: "I must emphasize that we do have to tune these horses to human maneuvers. We don't have all the same equipment to talk to a horse that another horse has. We can't glare at



*Lynda raises her hand and fades back in a submissive gesture to invite the horse to come into her personal space for haltering.*

around 900-acre pastures to know that I don't like to spend half the day out running around trying to catch horses. We teach them that when the hand comes up in the air and we fade back, which is a submissive gesture, they will know that there is no threat involved if they come into our personal space or close to our body."

Lynda raised her hand and stepped back away from the mare. The mare read her submissive gesture, turned off the rail, and walked toward her with a relaxed attitude. As they stood together for a few moments, the mare affectionately nuzzled and lipped Lynda, inviting her to play a game of nip. The mare showed no signs of fear or resentment and appeared to approach her as if she were another horse. It would be interesting to see what the horse's attitude would be toward Lynda if someone brought them a flake of alfalfa.

Dr. McCall continued to explain

them and wrinkle our brow. It's awfully hard for us to lay our ears back when we're angry, but horses can learn to read anger just as well from human expression as they do from the expression of another horse. When Lynda threatens a horse she acts the same way a mare would if that mare were put in with another horse that was trying to chase her out of the pen.

"After we work these horses on the ground and get them used to reading our body and after they become responsive to the idea that we're deserving of respect and attention and after they become submissive to our will, then it's time to ride the horse. When this happens we have to go through a series of introductions to transfer onto the back of the horse the type of attitude we have had and the respect of the body position that we

have had on the ground. If you're good — and by good I mean have confidence in yourself — it's not that difficult to do.

"When we ride these horses for the first time we don't normally put any restraints on them at all — no bridle, no halter, no lead line and no saddle. The idea behind this technique is that, if you put a saddle on a horse, then the rider can stay on long enough to get hurt. Without the saddle and without the bridle they don't stay on that long. I've had a few riders that could stay on four or five jumps but most of these people, if the horse makes one quick jump, will lose their seat and tumble off. It's not very far to the ground off of a 15-hand horse at the first jump so they just roll off. If they stay up there and hang on to the horn and pull on the reins, the horse gets to jumping three or four feet off the ground and then somebody gets hurt. I've seen a few students go up and never even come down, so it's better to get off quick.

"Now, people tell me that they were taught that when you get on the idea is to stay on, and that's what I was taught when I was growing up. And if you get thrown off, the horse gets the idea that he can get rid of you, and from then on all he wants to do is dump you every time you get on his back. I've heard a lot of good cowboys say that, and that's what I was told when I was breaking horses. But that's not altogether true. If you get dumped off without dragging at the horse or spooking the horse, most of the time he'll just stop. If you get right back on and do it again and again he'll finally decide it's not worth all that extra energy it took to get you on the ground if you just keep springing back up and getting back on. Before long the horse becomes very submissive about it.

"I'm not here to tell you that there aren't any bugs in this system. We occasionally get a horse that shoots out from under a student or even humps up and dumps him on the ground. But 90 percent of the time when you get on these horses for the first time without any tack and they're not afraid and they've learned that you're not going to hurt them, they're going to stand there and let you get on."

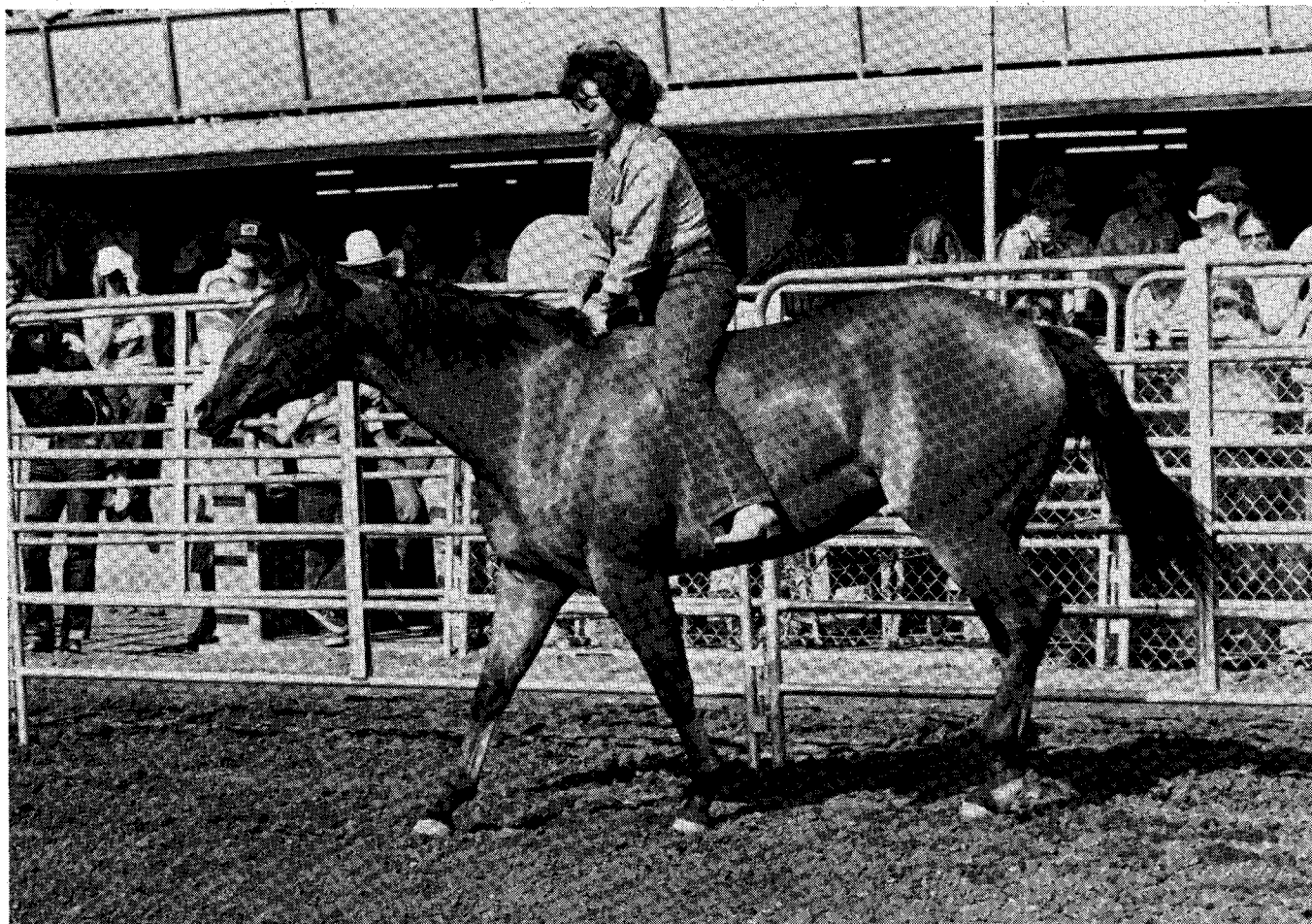
Dr. McCall proceeded to give Lynda a leg up. Did the mare hump up and dump her on the ground? The answer to that question and an explanation of how to prevent "eating dirt" will be in next month's issue of H&R. Dr. McCall will also explain the principles of cueing the horse while riding without tack, how to add more lines of communication, and how to use the free-longeing dance routine for retraining spoiled horses. ★

# Dancing In Space

Dr. James And Lynda McCall  
Use Horse Mimicry That  
Resembles A Modern Dance  
Routine To Gain Respect  
From Their Trainees!

By LAURIE GUIDERO

*In last month's issue Dr. McCall explained how to free long the horse to teach respect for a human's personal space. This respect for human body position in relation to the horse's body position is carried over into the phases of mounting, bare-back riding, saddling and riding under saddle.*



**T**HE mare stood quietly while Dr. McCall gave Lynda a leg up. He explained that he prefers that his students learn how to mount unassisted simply because there isn't always someone available to help. "But," he jokingly added, "Lynda and some of the other gals need a helping hand due to their lower center of gravity."

Dr. McCall continues to explain the mounting process: "The first thing you must do is accustom the horse to the jump you're going to make on his back. The jump up scares the horse more than someone sitting on the back. Make a few preliminary hops up so that this quick burst of energy from the spring, resembling a cougar getting ready to pounce, doesn't scare the living daylights out of him. The first

jump or two, a horse will usually move aside or even shy a little bit.

"After he gets used to the spring, then just belly up and hang there for a minute, because if something happens it's easy to just slide off. Once he gets used to that, then just get on up there. Move around so the horse knows you're up there, then you can walk off to a side. We usually untrack to one side. That way the horse doesn't get that surge of energy forward where he plants both front feet, and drops his head down between his legs.

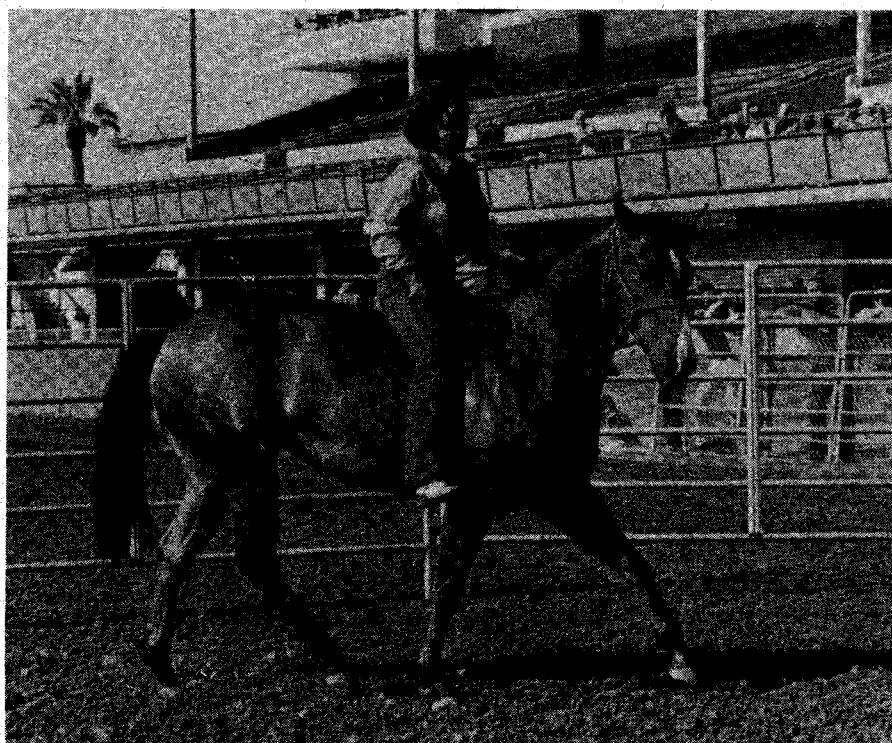
"After you untrack to the side, get good momentum built up at the walk. Don't worry about controlling gait or much of anything else. Just get the horse used to having someone on his back while he walks around and learns

*Lynda cues for a stop by rolling forward. The horse naturally stays in balance with the rider.*

how to handle the weight and movement.

"Then the idea is to get them to read off of body position as their primary cue. The body positions control the movement of the horse. To stop the horse, roll forward and hold down and squeeze with the upper part of the legs. Sometimes a horse will move around a bit. Not every horse responds the first time, but a light-backed horse will usually respond. When the horse stops then relax and reward him.

"We like to do shifts in weight so the horse learns to move into balance



*The rider's body balance is still the major controlling factor when the halter or hackamore is added as another line of communication.*

— shifts to the right to turn right and shifts to the left to turn left.

"I think it's true that horses move away from pressure, but there are all kinds of pressure. They will move away from some kinds of pressure and into other kinds. If you shift your balance slightly they'll move underneath your seat, if you shift the balance and it is exaggerated, they'll step away. Compare it to this facsimile: If you were walking down the street carrying a 100-pound sack on your back and someone came up and pushed the sack a little bit, you would move underneath it to catch the balance. But if someone came up and really hit it so that you were going to fall with it, you would move aside and let it hit the ground. That's how a horse handles your weight on his back.

"The horse also handles pressure in a similar manner. If you put a little pressure on his shoulder with your hand he has to lean back into it to re-establish his balance or stance. But if you give a good, sharp push he'll move away because there isn't anything to lean back into to re-establish balance.

"These are the principles we use in body position on the back of the horse to start getting him to be 'one' with you, to move with you, and to take his primary cues off of your balanced seat.

"Once we've turned the horse on to body position and standing balance with the rider, we go ahead and add a hackamore to start teaching head control, which is another cue used for refining the horse. With the hackamore

we can put a little more stop on her and we get a little more out of her as far as backing her up is concerned. We reinforce what she has already learned.

"Adding a hackamore does desensitize a horse a little when they learn more than one cue. They get to the point where they won't respond as well unless you have all cues present. In the beginning when they're not used to any cues, they respond a lot lighter. But as you add more and more equipment for cues they get to expecting more and more cues for each maneuver. For example, when you ask for a stop they begin to expect a cue from the hackamore as well as the weight shift forward."

Lynda demonstrated the stop by rolling forward and squeezing with her upper legs. Dr. McCall put a halter and lead rope on the mare and explained that he left the hackamore back at the barn, but the halter would work just as well, and added: "One good thing about this technique, you don't have to make a lot of trips to the tack shop." He explained the use of the hackamore: "It is not used to force the horse, it is used as another means of communication so that the horse understands what you want. That's the key to training horses — to have them understand what you want them to do. Then if you are in tune with them and have respect from them, they will do what you want.

"So we have added another line of communication by putting something on the horse's head. It doesn't have to be much at this point, because we're still trying to get the horse to maneu-

ver off of body position and to stay in balance with the rider.

"There are a few things that we ask the horse that are confusing. As we add these more confusing maneuvers, the more lines of communication we have, the better off we are.

"To ask the horse to back, we use the same cue as we used before we added the hackamore. Lynda rolls up and squeezes with the legs and uses very little or no rein. The mare reads off of Lynda's body, which is a natural cue for that horse.

"These natural cues certainly are not something I sat down and worked out on paper using math. I never could figure out how these cues work, but this is how horses have told me they work, and I believe what my horses tell me. One thing about this system, the horse is always smarter than you are so you must try to stay one step ahead of him. But they seem to know how to be trained better than you know how to train them so if you listen to them they will tell you how to train them.

"I went 17 years training horses, but doing the opposite of the technique I use now. I got a lot of results, but then one day I saw an old trainer down in South Texas training by free longeing and riding without equipment. I thought he was doing things backwards, so I told him how dumb he was. Then I decided that you can even learn something from an idiot, so I went home to try his method. Darned if his technique wasn't easier and faster than mine. So I had to apologize for calling him an idiot.

"So this technique that I acquired years ago, and still use, works good on these beginning horses. Now, the roll-up cue for the stop. I don't mean that you have to contort your body when you're in the show ring because it looks a little silly, but when you're starting these horses the things that you use and the things that you teach them can be refined later.

"The whole plan is to make these horses responsive, and as you go along these cues are less and less exaggerated and less and less obvious. Soon, the shifts in body position, the subtle balance communications, become so infinitesimal that most observers will not even see you give them.

"So even though these cues may change slightly as you progress they



*Dr. McCall uses threat gestures to free longe the mare as she becomes accustomed to the saddle.*

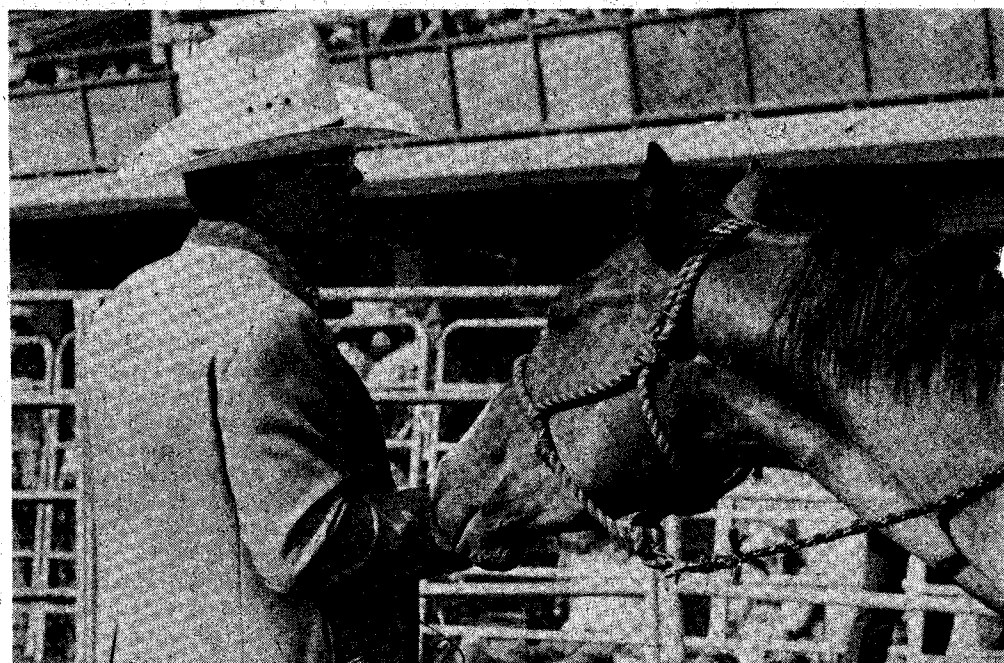
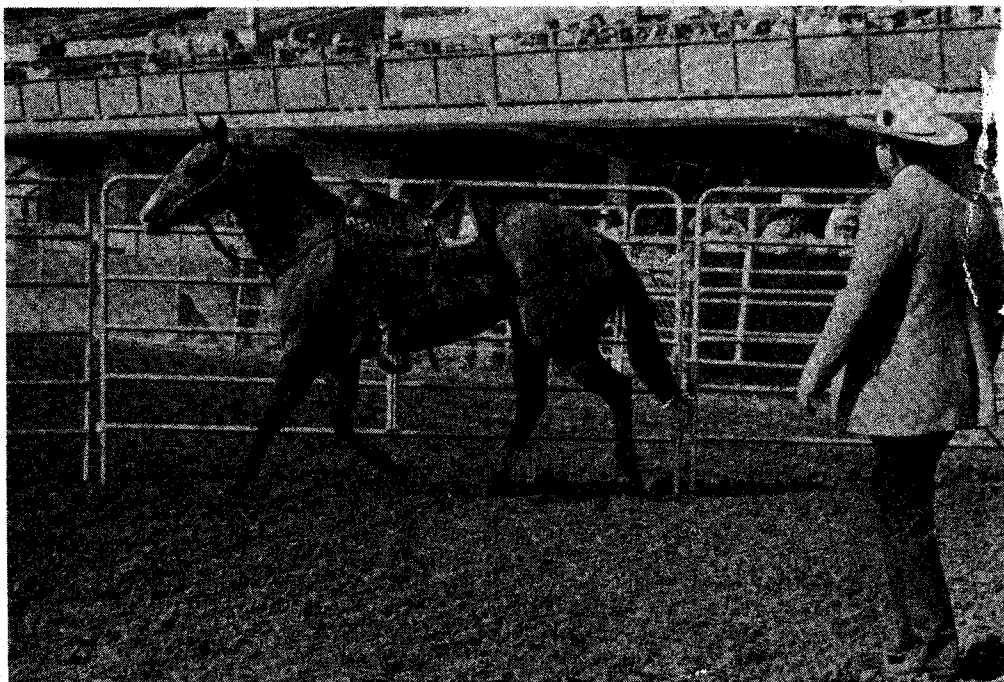
are your training base. You've made a foundation of communication between you and the horse with the horse being responsive to you.

"As the horse progresses and becomes lighter, he may become so responsive to sensitive gestures that you are incapable of giving light enough cues. He may become over-trained. A light, athletic horse can become so good at reading cues of balance off of his back that the rider will then need other cue aids, such as a saddle and bridle, to coarsen him up. This is just as I explained earlier about the desensitization of the horse when I added a hackamore.

"Humans may be very sensitive in their hands and dexterous in their hands, but the horse is more dexterous with the balance of a human on his back, so we have to start developing hands for the horse in order to stay up with him in his lightness and responsiveness."

Lynda repeated the routine she had performed when the horse had no tack on: walk, trot, turn into the rail, away from the rail, stop and back. Then she brought the mare into the center of the round pen for saddling, and Dr. McCall continued, "It's good to be able to ride a horse without tack, it shows that you have some rapport with that animal, but darnt, they just don't have any classes in shows where you can ride in without a saddle and bridle to demonstrate what a good job you did training that horse. So the first step is getting the horse accustomed to the tack. Show the saddle to the horse and let her know it isn't anything to be afraid of. Most horses, after you've ridden them bareback, don't mind something put on their back. They don't care because you are probably the worst thing they could have up there, so putting a saddle on usually doesn't scare them.

"The thing they haven't had happen to them yet is to have a girth put on them. Your legs squeezing them isn't quite as confining as this girth, so when you girth it up you want to do it smoothly. You don't want to jerk it up tightly or quickly. Take the time to introduce her to it. It's also a good idea to put a lead rope around the barrel and pull it up until they get used to it for three or four times before you try putting on a girth. But they usually will stand still until you girth them up.



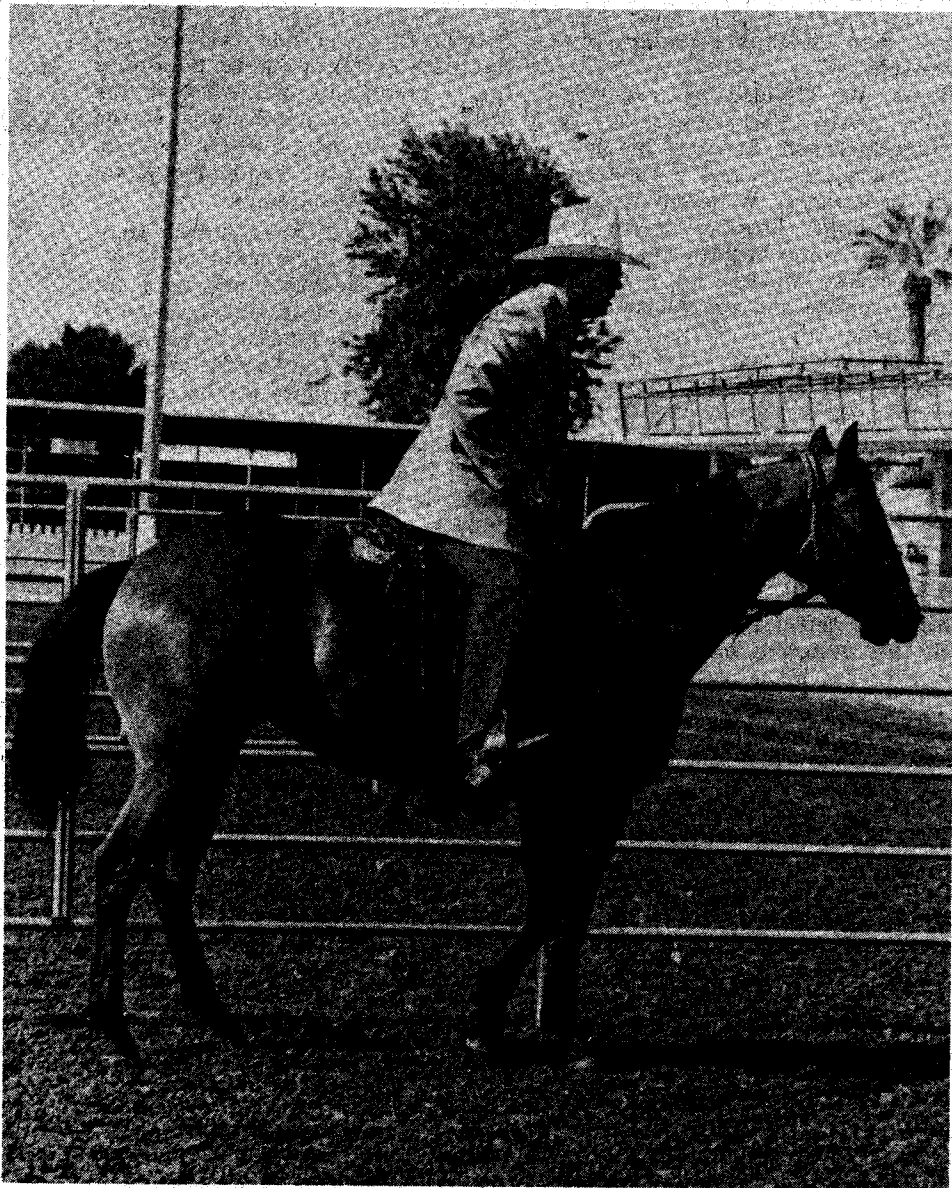
*The mare respects Dr. McCall during training as if he were a dominant horse and invites him to play a game of nip at rest time.*

Then, walk the horse around. This is when things start breaking loose when you introduce tack and cinch them up tight then ask the horse to move out.

"I usually like to longe the horse and if they shy from that girth they will jump up there and take off. But when they do, we use a threat gesture. We growl at them or shake a whip at them to teach them that even if they're scared when there's something

on their back they're not supposed to hop up and try and get rid of it.

"Most of the gestures we use on the ground are aggressive. We use very few submissive gestures. If you have a person in here that is a timid person and very submissive the horse will start to be aggressive. Occasionally I'll have a young student that isn't familiar with this whole thing and he's scared and timid and the horse will run him out of the ring. When you start communication with a horse on his own level you better be prepared to back it up on his own level. You have to throw your chest out and say, 'I'm here to train you and I'm here to tell



*To cue for the back up, Dr. McCall rolls forward as Lynda had done while riding bareback. Cues become more subtle as horse progresses.*

you what to do.' If you can't do that then the horse will say, 'Well, hey, one of us has to take charge and if you want to play the submissive role then I'll just chase you around here.' But you've got to be careful because most of your gestures are aggressive, but you don't want to use too much aggression because you don't want to force the horse. You want to be able to work together as partners and work together as one so you have to mix submissive gestures in with the aggressive ones.

"You do need submissive gestures to call a horse in. Fading back, tucking your head, relaxing, tells the horse it's all right to come in, so they drop their ears down and their head down. This is the time to reward the horse and the time to quit a good day's work."

With the saddle and halter on the mare, Dr. McCall free-longed the mare, as was done for her preliminary training without tack. After the horse nicely performed the maneuvers for

each gesture, Dr. McCall mounted and repeated the routine, using the same cues Lynda had used while riding bareback. Again, the horse performed nicely on a loose rein, working off of weight shifts as the primary cues.

With the mare's beginning stage of training complete, Dr. McCall began to talk about using his techniques for retraining spoiled horses, "If someone brings me a runaway, or a bucker, or whatever, I'll start the horse in the round pen. I've taken some pretty rank horses that scared me to death and I've started them off and brought them along and retrained them without mishap. If you let a mistake happen, however, or a mishap takes place they'll revert back real quick. A mishap can be anything from a bird flying overhead to you accidentally getting the side of the horse with your foot when he is kind of goosy. But if a mishap doesn't take place they get more and more solid and you don't have to do anymore work. But if

something happens, you make a mistake, you push too hard, and they revert back into their bad habits then you might have to use more restraint.

But I don't use any more than I think I have to. That's the key — never use more than you have to. Be as easy on them as you can because they're all individuals. Even the meanest, rankest son-of-a-gun I had, turned out to be a pretty nice horse. He had been trained to be mean. The people that got on him were scared to death of him from the time he was a baby. He would chase people out of the lot and got to thinkin' he was pretty tough stuff. He started thinking people were made to be chased after and he'd come after anybody with his teeth and hooves. We had to get a little rough with him to teach him to respect our personal space, especially when he first came out of the stall.

After 30 days that son-of-a-gun wouldn't think of hurting a human. We would take him out on trail rides, under bridges, through tunnels, and he'd do anything you'd ask him to do and he'd enjoy it because he liked to be praised.

"Most horses like being praised and will work for praise. Research behavior reports on dogs claim that dogs will work more for praise than for food. We don't have documented evidence that this is true for the horse. They may not work for it as much as dogs do, but they like people to tell them when they've done something well. That is, if they respect you and think what you have to say to them means something. If you have that respect, they'll work for that praise.

"Whether we're talking about starting a green horse or retraining a spoiled horse, our philosophy — and it's not just our philosophy, I've heard other trainers say it too — is that we try to be as easy training a horse as he'll let us. And the technique we use now is the easiest way of training a horse that I know of."

The mare's attitude toward the McCalls, her willing obedience, and apparent desire to please, almost-made the training session too easy to believe. But the logic of using a language of communication by horse-expression mimicry, is so simple that maybe this is a way of achieving horse sense — by using simple common sense. ★