

Green Horse Rules to Live By

Ten tips for owning or riding a green horse.

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When working with a green horse, regardless of the type, you're going to have some highs and lows. To help you keep your wits and your optimism about you, here are 10 rules to remember:

1. Building a bond with your horse through groundwork exercises has its benefits, but eventually you have to get on and ride. The work you do on the ground is not a substitute for the work you're going to do under saddle.
2. Rarely is a training problem solved with a stronger bit or a trendy gadget.
3. When in doubt, longe. Or encourage your horse to kick up his heels in a large turnout paddock. A green horse that's fresh and frisky can't focus on his work.
4. Be patient. Don't skip ahead to a more difficult request before you've laid the foundation. For example, you can't expect your green horse to pick up his leads if you haven't first taught him to move laterally in response to your leg aids.
5. Don't accept bad jumping, sloppy leg yields, rushed transitions or crooked halts. Every time you ride your green horse, you're teaching or reinforcing something. While you don't want to bore your horse, you should repeat a schooling exercise until your horse — and you — get it right.
6. Keep an eye on your horse's legs and joints. The stress of training on a green horse can produce swelling, soreness and stiffness that can become a serious unsoundness issue if left unattended. Giving a green horse time to heal and recuperate can save you vet bills and heartache.
7. While you work with your green horse, find opportunities to ride an experienced horse. Consider taking lessons on a school horse. Riding a finished mount will give you a feel for what you're aiming for with your own horse.
8. If you find yourself getting so frustrated that you end up yanking on your horse's mouth, kicking, spurring or whipping his sides, then it's time to dismount and step away from the greenie. You and your horse are not communicating, and it's time to seek professional advice.
9. You can train your green horse at home, but when it comes time to show, don't forget to train your green horse to compete. Your horse will have to learn all about the horse show routine: the chaos of the warm-up ring, the distraction of unfamiliar horses, the water truck, the loudspeaker, et cetera.
10. Regardless of how carefully you chose your green prospect and how meticulous you were in his training, be prepared to accept that your green horse may never develop into your dream horse. Ultimately, you may have to modify your goals or find your horse a new home so that he can enjoy a career better suited to his talents.