

Survival Tips on Living with a Young Horse

By **Cindy Hale**

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Joey is a joy. But honest to God, I never set out to buy another young horse. I felt like I had put in my time with young, green horses. When I was a teenager, my parents couldn't afford a trained show horse, so I became a catch-rider for various trainers on California's hunter-jumper circuit. I rode a lot of naughty, half-ruined, hotter than Hades greenies. The mantra among trainers and sales agents became, "Put that Cindy Raab on the horse and she'll get it around and make it look decent." The result? I didn't win a lot of medals or blue ribbons as a youth, but I certainly learned how to ride. Yet I constantly yearned for the luxury of riding a fully trained, entirely trustworthy horse.

Then I transitioned to the small ranch that my parents bought. We began raising Thoroughbreds for the racetrack. My sister and I figured that the exceptionally good movers or the exceptionally slow runners could just skip the whole racetrack scene and head directly to the show ring. It worked for a while until our mother saw a Trakehner and fell in love. Thus began two decades of dealing with baby green warmbloods. Would the insanity ever stop? Or was I destined to spend my life aboard horses that were some shade of green?

Now you can understand why I really didn't intend on buying a three-year-old horse when I went looking for a yin to Wally's yang. I had my heart set on an 8-to-15 year-old horse who was perfectly happy to live the life of a pampered recreational mount.

Unfortunately, I couldn't locate anything of that age that made me happy in that price range. So, despite the fact that my friends and relatives thought I'd truly gone insane for even considering a three-year-old, I bought Joey. It was a gamble. I had to bet that his time spent being hauled to halter classes as a yearling and his good start with a professional trainer would pay off. There was another gamble: Since he was only three, I really couldn't predict his soundness. Sure, his conformation was exemplary, but his physical integrity really hadn't been tested. You can understand, then, why I was so spooked by his episode with the muscle spasms and tying-up syndrome a couple of weeks ago. Though it could've been instigated by a myriad of benign causes, not the least of which was an underlying cold he'd had, I decided to be extra neurotic and put him on a specialized diet, just in case he was had the congenital (yet totally manageable) disease called Polysaccharide Storage Myopathy (PSSM).

I have to say, after today's ride aboard Joey where I enjoyed his laidback demeanor, I made a good gamble. Yet despite my youngster's disarming traits, I've had to reacquaint myself with some of the things I'd forgotten about dealing with young horses. In essence I've given up trying to cure myself of my insane proclivity for riding young horses and am just learning to live with what surely must be a crazy mental defect among horsewomen.

Ironically, I have a crop of adult friends who have apparently likewise suffered psychotic episodes and purchased young horses. On their behalf, I've decided to share a few tips on dealing with young, green horses: Just when you think your young horse is bombproof, he'll surprise you. Sure, he's nonchalant about the sudden eruption of the neighbor's automatic sprinkler system. And he didn't flinch when the street sweeper cruised past in full functioning force. But God forbid you ride past a front lawn decorated with a ceramic garden gnome or a topiary plant shaped in the image of an animal. Can you spell S-P-O-O-K? He looks lazy. He seems relaxed. So even though he wasn't out yesterday you decide to forego five minutes on the longe line. You casually tighten up the girth and climb on. Surprise! Suddenly you're blasting into the rodeo arena from Chute 5. Can you stay on for the full 8 seconds? Everything looks tasty to a young horse and ends up in its mouth: Your best pair of reins, the lead rope, the rake handle, the sleeve of your mother's cashmere sweater... you get the idea. Young horses find inventive ways to harm themselves. Weaving their legs through corral fencing seems to be a popular choice. So is orally pruning a row of pepper trees. (See Number 3, above). For these reasons, keep a credit card handy specifically for unexpected vet visits. You're going to need it. Never brag about your young horse's talents. Never, ever, ever. For example, if you tell your friend how bravely your baby crosses water, the next time you're at the river your youngster will remain fixated on the bank with the world's most severe case of hydrophobia. This warning goes double if you're showing your baby horse. He might be jumping a course at home but once at the showgrounds he'll become utterly stupefied by the mere concept of a crossrail. Inscribe these words on your forehead: "Young horses live to humiliate their humans."

There. You've been appropriately forewarned. So if you're crazy—like me—and own or ride a young horse, take heed of my tips. If you have your own tips or any other young horse thoughts, you can click on [Submit a Comment](#) below or email



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