

# Get Ready

*Knowing what buyers want helps in prepping yearlings for sale*

It's mid-June and a yearling colt grazes in a rolling pasture of bluegrass, his only company a few fellow yearlings, a soft breeze; his only concern the occasional fly buzzing around his head. Little does this long, gangly colt know, but his world will soon be turned upside down.

Midsummer to late fall is the time for major Thoroughbred yearling sales. The question is how does that furry, pot-bellied, stilt-legged colt in the pasture get to be the sleek, muscular yearling that will fetch top dollar in the sale ring?

Roger Daly of Roger Daly Horses has been engineering this type of transformation for 30 years, prepping sale yearlings at his barn in Aubrey, Texas. Last year Daly and his crew sales prepped 429 yearlings. North Texas is home to many large horse operations and equine services, and it is ideal because of its sandy soil and moderate climate.

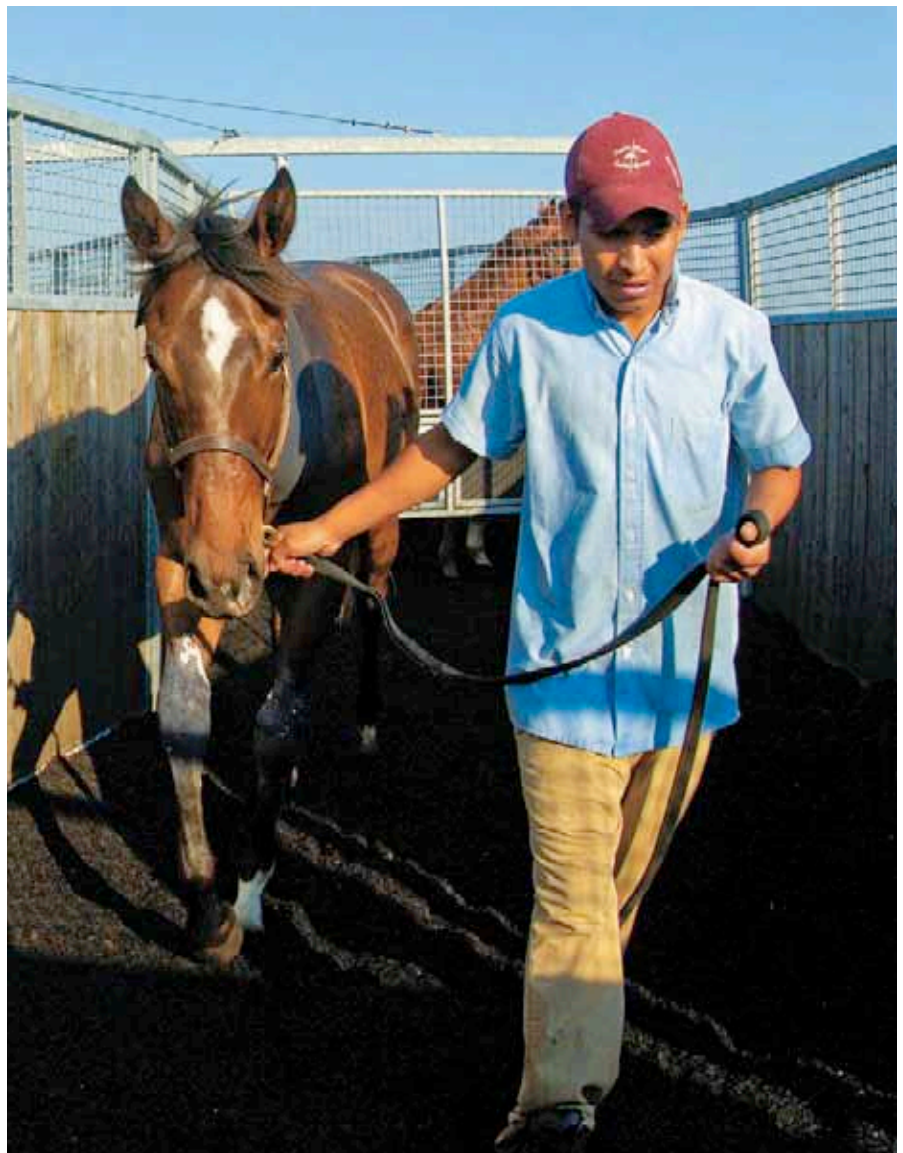
## WHAT ARE BUYERS LOOKING FOR?

To understand how to prepare a yearling for auction, we must first know the traits that ultimately make that yearling a desirable prospect, or, in other words, what buyers will look for in the days prior to and during the sale.

Daly stated buyers will evaluate pedigree and the performance of the sire and dam and their offspring. "They'll start looking there and have certain individuals picked out that fit their criteria, particularly for their part of the country," he said. Buyers will also evaluate how the horse is put together, how the horse travels, and how the horse stands. A horse that keeps a level head, has a sleek coat, and is "fit, but not fat" will draw attention.

## ARRIVAL

When yearlings arrive (ideally 90 days before the sale) at Daly's, the first thing the crew does is evaluate their health-care history. "When yearlings come into a commercial operation, they are stressed



Prepping for the sales requires a multi-faceted plan that keeps each individual yearling in mind

more, so it's very important they've had all their vaccinations and deworming to try to keep them healthy going through this process and when you ship them to the sale," said Daly.

Next the crew will find out how much the yearlings have been handled. "We de-

termine how much each yearling knows; if it's not halter broke, that yearling gets tied to the burro for a couple of days and learns some patience and learns to lead."

At that time the yearling will also be assigned a stall; the importance of this task is not overlooked. "It's kind of like

weaning them all over again. They've run since they've been weaned with three of their buddies and now they can't play with them or see them. We move horses around a little bit so they get used to being in different stalls so when they get to the sale ground they settle right in; they're not looking for a friend. It's a lot less stressful on them when they get there," Daly said.

## NUTRITION

Feeding yearlings is a challenge in itself. Consideration must be given to the rapidly developing body, while still achieving the goal of having a fit, muscular yearling by sale time. Not long after being purchased at auction, yearlings become 2-year-olds and are put into heavier training.

Daly utilizes a simple plan of attack, tailoring his program slightly to fit each horse's need and initial body condition. Crews feed a concentrate three times a day and offer hay free choice. "We work very closely with Purina and their representatives," said Daly. "We feed Strategy (a pelleted feed by Land O Lakes Purina Mills); it's worked well for us for a number of years on all the different horses we have. The only supplement we use is Amplify (an extruded fat supplement), which Purina also manufactures. We find it really helps with the hair coat and turning loose of the hair when the boys groom. We keep hay in front of them all the time. Here it's free-choice alfalfa, the best that we can buy. You've got to get them feeling good from the inside out before you get a good hair coat."

## EXERCISE

Different forms of exercise are used to build muscle and trim fat from sales yearlings, including treadmills, ponying, hand

walking, hot-walkers, mechanical exercisers, and round penning, the latter of which is the method Daly prefers for a number of reasons.

With 92 yearlings to exercise by lunch (grooming is done in the afternoon), time becomes a factor. Daly has five 62-foot-diameter covered round pens in which crew members exercise the yearlings using surcingles and longe lines. "In the round pen they can get their head down and they can run, buck, kick, squeal, and carry on; you can get them worked pretty safely. We work them on a line and like to get a rope around their legs, let them drag a rope around, and handle their feet so when a horseshoer comes they stand nicely without a problem. We try to do a lot of those things that make a horse easier to handle."

In this system one person can easily work a horse and quickly move on to another, and the young horses can be exposed to situations that they may encounter later in life, such as standing hobbled. Daly also considers ponying to be an excellent method of exercise, but sheer numbers forgo that option for him.

While yearlings are being exercised, they are also sweated. "We put a neck sweat on every one of them. Sometimes they don't need it, but it tightens their neck up and makes them look more physical; also, it gets them broke to that thing going on and off and the sound of Velcro ripping," said Daly.

When I asked at what speed the yearlings are exercised, Daly chuckled. "However fast they want to go!" he said, "Ideally, long trotting really is probably the best, but they'll canter or lope in both directions. The more they trot the more muscles they use. We don't get too excited as long as they are going forward."

## GROOMING

After the yearlings have been exercised in the round pen, they are either hand walked (which prepares them to walk out and stand in the show ring) or put on a 60-foot walker to cool out. Then the crew takes the horses inside for a midday feed-



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ing and an afternoon of grooming and relaxation. Like everything else, daily grooming has benefits besides just keeping coats bright and shiny. It allows the yearlings to gain experience that will

make the days leading up to the show less stressful.

"We try to clip them two to three times before we go to the sale," said Daly, "just so they get used to the clippers, so the last

two days prior to leaving for the sale you can zip through that; they're used to it and it saves you a lot of time."

### TURNOUT

Daly offers limited turnout to yearlings but never in a group setting. "When they come for that 90 days, it's time to learn. You don't want them getting kicked, bitten, or having their tails chewed on. We alternate turning them out individually in the round pen or turnout pen. If they

get a turnout day, they don't have to work that day." Daly also adjusts the schedule in accordance with how the horse feels. If a yearling is "doing aerobics" in its stall in the afternoon, it may be worked a little more; if it appears overly tired, it may be given a light work day or a day off.

### FARRIER WORK

The sandy soil at Daly's necessitates only trimming on a regular basis. Seven to 10 days prior to the sale, horses will be fitted with light front steel shoes or aluminum training plates. This allows time to deal with any problems; for instance, a quicked nail (when the nail is driven too close to sensitive tissues in the hoof capsule) could make a horse lame. The plates keep the shape of the horse's feet, prevent damage to the hoof if the horse paws in the van/trailer, and also prevent the horse from becoming sore at the sale, where he may be taken out 40 to 50 times a day for potential buyers.

### TRAILERING

One consideration for trailering is what is termed "shrinkage," when a horse loses body condition during transportation due to stress and dehydration. Daly prepares for this by ensuring that each animal has adequate condition before leaving. "They do shrink on the road and at the sale. The yearlings will shrink more than the older horses that have been to the races."

Another important note: Long before it is time to leave for the sale, the yearlings have learned to load and unload easily; this will make it easier to get to the sale and prepare the horse when a buyer is ready to take it home.

### AT THE SALE

Daly stresses the importance of having a good crew that is prepared for prospective buyers at the sale grounds. "Buyers look through and see everything you have; they'll make a short list and come back to the ones they like," he said. "They may come back two to three times, and then send their vet or trainer by. It gets fairly involved. It's a lot of money, and they want to find the best prospect they can. Have all of your equipment ready and keep the horses clean and ready to show at all times."

### VETERINARY WORK

Two to three weeks prior to the sale, horses at Daly's will be examined by Dr. David Stephens, managing partner of Weems and Stephens Veterinary Hospital located just down the road in Aubrey, Texas. Veterinarians will radiograph (X-



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ray) yearlings' fetlocks, knees, hocks, and stifles, and they will view the horses' throats endoscopically to evaluate upper airway function. The intention is to gain information that allows the prediction of the horse's athletic future; however, interpreting and applying the findings can be very complex and depend on many factors that may be difficult to quantify, according to Stephens.

As long bones develop, cartilage end plates convert either to articular cartilage or harden (ossifies) and turn into subchondral bone (bone that provides support for the cartilage of the articular surface). Osteochondrosis dissecans (OCD) is considered a metabolic bone disease or developmental orthopedic disease characterized by focal improper ossification, leaving unhealthy areas of cartilage and/or subchondral bone. Radiographically, OCD is visible as semi-loose or completely detached fragments within a joint or as dark regions along the articular surface and subchondral bone.

"OCD is a malformation of cartilage and bone," said Stephens. "Some (OCD lesions), depending on the location are minor and heal as the horse matures; others are more problematic. There may be fragmentation and cartilage or bone de-

bris that needs to be surgically removed. Prognosis for many of the commonly seen OCDs is good with surgery; however, prognosis for OCDs along weight-bearing surfaces is often guarded, with or without surgery. Generally, we don't worry about a lot of OCDs other than explaining to sellers and/or buyers what the issues are; these are the steps that will probably be required for resolution, so do you want to incur the additional cost and expense and potential risk of fixing them?"

So how does a buyer or seller determine if OCDs might mean a yearling's career is threatened, even before it starts? According to Stephens, the outcome depends on size, extent, and location of the OCD lesions: "We've seen enough of these over the years to support the track-record data that says certain OCDs are minor and don't affect the prognosis of soundness in a long-term fashion, while other OCDs are actually problematic and these horses tend to have lameness and soundness issues in the future."

#### SCOPING

The functionality of a horse's upper airway is another factor buyers may use in their sale-time decisions. Veterinarians

use an endoscope to examine the cartilage that opens and closes the horse's airway, as well as the epiglottis and the soft palate to identify potential problems, but again there are considerations.

"To me, scoping has a few more gray areas than what radiographs or other types of evaluations have," cautioned Stephens. "Intrinsically, we put categories on what's ideal and what we all like to see, but there's varying degrees of suitability. Some buyers want a certain type of throat realizing that something less than ideal is very serviceable and suitable. For whatever reason over the years, some buyers develop the idea that the throat can be a problem for long-term serviceability and they want to eliminate any and all risk they possibly can so they look for horses that have the most desirable throat. An educated buyer tends to look at the whole picture (scope, X-rays, and catalog page) to determine their interest in purchasing that individual, not just one aspect of the evaluation performed."

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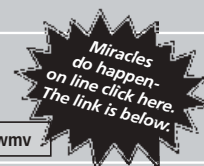
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heart to pump blood, which is required for muscular activity, ventilation, and oxygenation of tissues.

"I think there's some science and data behind it, but there are a lot of variables that you can't determine," said Stephens. "Here in the Southwest not many people use heart scores, but in Kentucky it's another tool some people use on marquee individuals. If you look at the top 10% at Keeneland, those horses are million-dollar horses, so how do you

separate 50 horses with good ability and good conformation? How do you take that and narrow it down to 10 or 20 that someone would bid on? Electrocardiograms are used frequently, and a lot of racing programs use it very successfully."

#### WORKING WITH YOUR VETERINARIAN

In view of the complex nature of problems an owner faces in getting a yearling to a sale—ensuring that the animal is healthy, keeping all of his paperwork in order, addressing issues that might affect the horse's health and/or future perfor-

mance—Stephens stresses the importance of the client-veterinarian relationship and prefers to work with clients he knows well.

"There's a lot of shades of gray and that's where as a vet it's really important for me to understand my clients' risk tolerances and their desires and intents," he explained. "It allows the buyer to have more confidence in the information being provided. It's communicating a very confusing and complicated topic and putting it in terminology that the purchaser understands."


However, the situation may arise when a buyer or seller decides to seek a second opinion; for instance, if a buyer receives a negative evaluation of an individual horse that he or she thinks has promise. Stephens said that a second opinion is not a bad thing. "It's good for the seller and buyer to have confidence. They're more apt to pay what an individual desires and what they can afford."

#### STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

In one of the most down economies in recent history along with rising feed costs, hay costs, shortages, and costs of wood products, fertilizer prices, and fuel costs; one cannot help but wonder what the overall impact on the horse industry has been.

But Daly, whose business could be measured in a large part by the number of horses that go through his barn each year, emphasizes that while overall dollars at some sales may be off, he remains optimistic. "We're doing well. We lived through the '80s and this doesn't seem to be nearly as bad as then or at least down here it's not. Like everything else, it always turns around; you just learn how to manage a little better and work a little harder," he said.

#### SUMMARY

Buyers look for a Thoroughbred yearling that has desirable breeding, travels well, has a good hair coat, meets the standards set with their veterinarian, and is fit but not fat. A marketable young horse is produced through genetics, nutrition, exercise, training, farrier work, and veterinary consultation. There is little doubt that before a young Thoroughbred horse even sets foot on a racetrack, a small village of individuals has invested countless hours along its journey to the sales ring and, perhaps, one day to the winner's circle. 

*Jon Padgham is a freelance writer and works as an equine nutritionist for D&L Farm and Home in Aubrey, Texas. He obtained his master's degree in equine nutrition from Kansas State University in 2001.*



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# HealthWatch

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## PASTURED HORSES MORE FIT

Horses are better able to maintain fitness when turned out on large pasture, according to Dr. Patty Graham-Thiers of Virginia Intermont College, in Bristol, Va. She presented her recent study results at the 2009 Equine Science Society Meeting, held May 29-31 in Keystone, Colo.

In the project, researchers divided mature horses into three groups:

Full-time turnout on a hilly 100-acre pasture;

Stalled during the day with light exercise five times per week; and

Stalled during the day, but not exercised.

Groups 2 and 3 spent nights in half-acre paddocks. After 14 weeks the horses in both the pastured and exercised groups had lower heart rates, faster recovery times, lower blood lactate levels, lower rectal temperatures, and lower peak CO<sub>2</sub> blood concentrations after an exercise test, indicating a greater level of fitness.

Additionally, only the pastured horses showed an increase in bone density over the course of the study.

## PLASMA TRANSFUSIONS

Plasma is widely administered to horses for a variety of reasons, such as a critical illness, failure of passive transfer in foals, or prophylaxis against *Rhodococcus equi*.

Researchers from Michigan State University examined transfusion reactions to plasma, both mild and severe, that can and occasionally do occur in horses.

They reviewed the medical records from 50 adult horses that received plasma transfusions in 2006 and 2007 and found 10% had a reaction. These reactions included hives, itchiness, swollen eyes, fever, and increased heart rates. They noted some of these clinical signs could have been due to the horse's primary disease, rather than the transfusion itself. They recommend monitoring horses during transfusions for signs of reactions, so veterinarians can stop plasma treatment and administer anti-inflammatory drugs if necessary.

## TIPPY-TOED FOALS MIGHT HAVE CONTRACTED TENDONS

One of the most common deformities equine veterinarians deal with in newborns is contracted digital flexor tendons. These might cause foals to walk on the toes of their front hooves instead of walking flat-footed.

Anatomically speaking, all horses have

two major tendons that run directly behind their cannon bone (the large bone between the horse's knee and fetlock). They are fittingly named the superficial flexor tendon and the deep digital flexor tendon. Because the deep tendon attaches to a bone inside the horse's hoof, if it were to be contracted or shortened, it would cause the horse's leg to curl up beneath itself—which is what happens in a case of contracted tendons.

Veterinarians can correct the deformity in many ways, but each case requires individualized treatment. Fortunately, "the prognosis for a foal born with contracted tendons is good," said Dr. Eric Carlson of the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital. While some minor cases might not need any treatment, more severe deformities require intervention.

One of the treatment options veterinarians can try is an intravenous antibiotic, as "it is thought that the drug prevents the influx of calcium ions into the muscle fibers and brings about relaxation (of the

tendon)," Carlson explained.

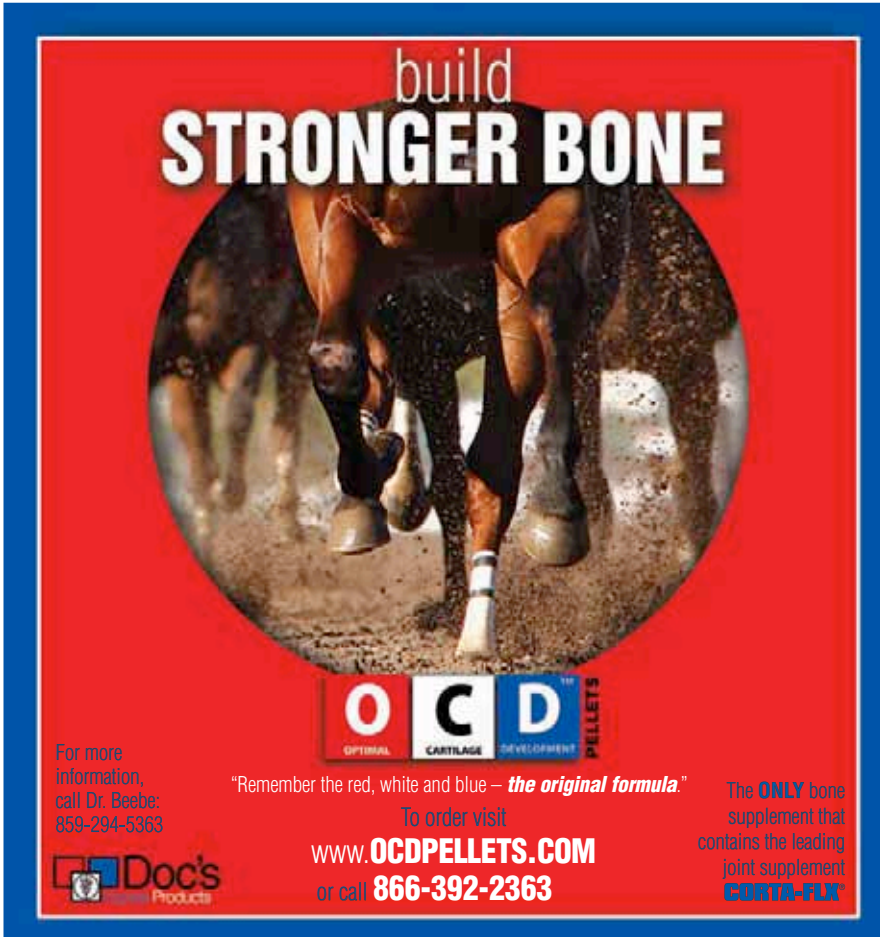
Other options include using toe extensions that help to change the breakover point of the hoof and stretch the tendons, as well as splints or casts. The condition might also require corrective surgery.

## HURRICANE SEASON TIPS

With the hurricane season upon us, it is important for horse owners to ready themselves in advance for evacuation and other recommended tasks related to hurricane preparedness. Get a list of tips from the Louisiana State Animal Response Team and the Equine Health Studies Program at the LSU School of Veterinary Medicine in article #14290 on TheHorse.com. 

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