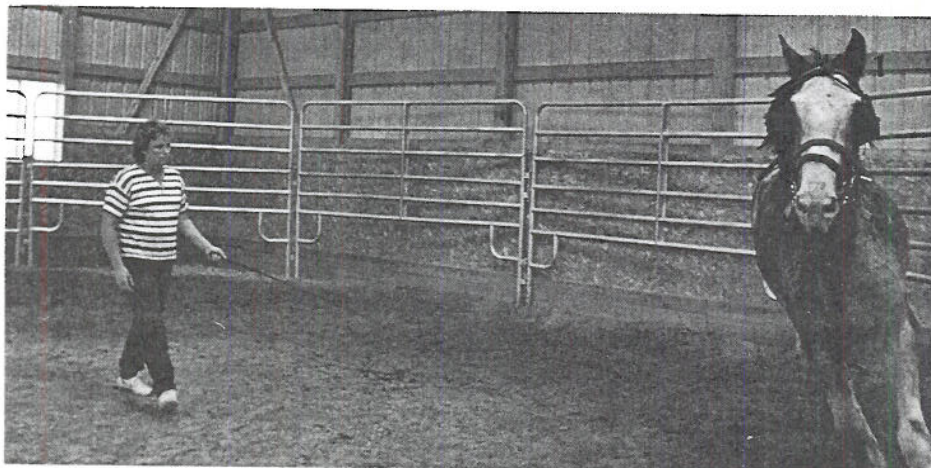


Training With Cathy Zahm: Hitching To A Wagon

Reference articles:

Round Pen Training With Cathy Zahm (DDM 86)
Training With Cathy Zahm: Hitching To A Sled (DDM 87)

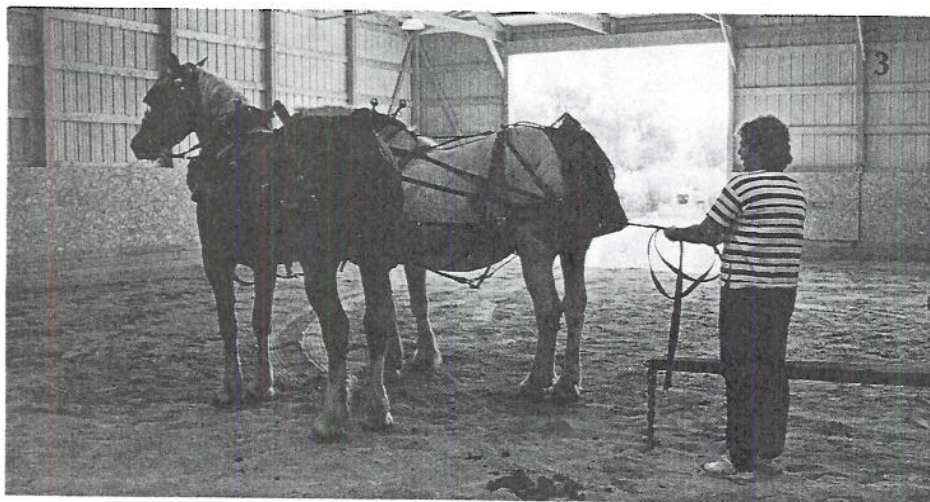


Every horse trained to drive by Cathy Zahm is started in a pair with a trained breaking horse.

In the first stage of Zahm's training program the horse is longed in a round pen (photo 1) which teaches him basic commands, respect for the trainer, and to give to the bit. The second stage is hitching in a pair to a heavy sled (2) during which the horse learns not to fear the object to which he is hitched, to pull weight, and to walk, halt and stand in harness. These steps are detailed in the articles referenced above.

The basic principles behind Zahm's methods remain constant through each stage of training:

- Always use suitable harness and equipment which is in good repair and fits the horse.
- If the horse shows resistance to a new lesson go back to previous work in the round pen or on the sled, then again try the next step.
- Introduce harness work in a pair with a well-trained breaking horse.
- Adjust the training program to the progress of the individual horse.
- "Play to win" by anticipating and avoiding problems.
- Don't attempt to train a horse unless you have the necessary experience and skill. Otherwise obtain qualified help.



Cathy Zahm Demonstrates Hitching To A Wagon

The horse must first master preliminary training in the round pen (1) and pulling the sled (2) before Cathy Zahm "even thinks about hitching him to a wagon." The preliminary training may take a few days, a few weeks or longer, depending on the horse's temperament, physical condition and past experience. When the horse is responsive, calm and confident on the sled, he is ready for the wagon.

Prior to the first time the horse is hitched to the wagon, Zahm gives him a short workout on the sled. This allows him to

work off excess energy before the new experience. Zahm takes this precaution with nearly every trainee, including an apparently quiet horse, as well as those that obviously feel fresh or excitable. She usually works the horse on the sled until he "breaks a sweat," but is not physically or mentally exhausted.

The team is harnessed and ground driven to the wagon (3). In biting a horse, Zahm generally a bit which is as mild as possible while still maintaining control. But the first time he is hitched to a wagon, she uses a Liverpool or elbow bit with the reins attached to the middle slot on the curb (a strong setting). In later sessions she moves the lines to the upper slot or cheek ring for a milder setting.

The team is backed to the wagon (4). If the green horse is upset by bumping the tongue, Zahm takes him back to the sled for more preliminary work or sacks him out around the legs.

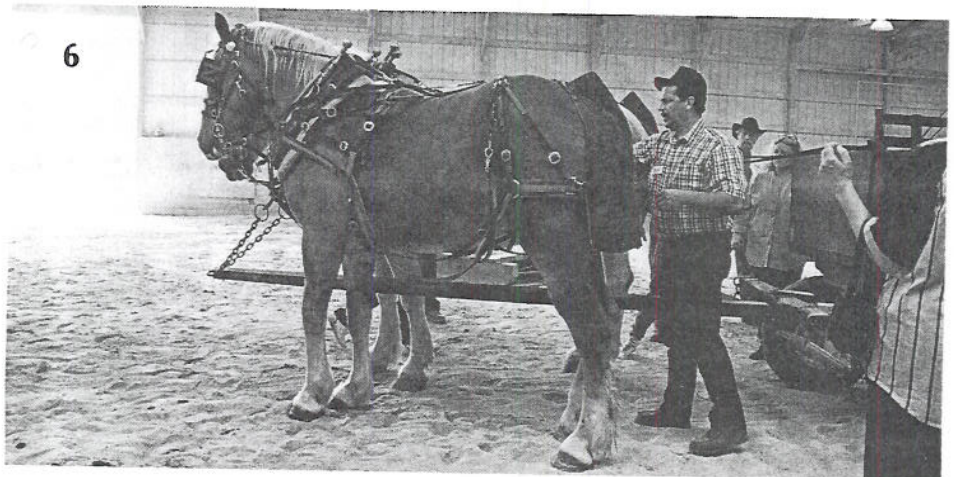
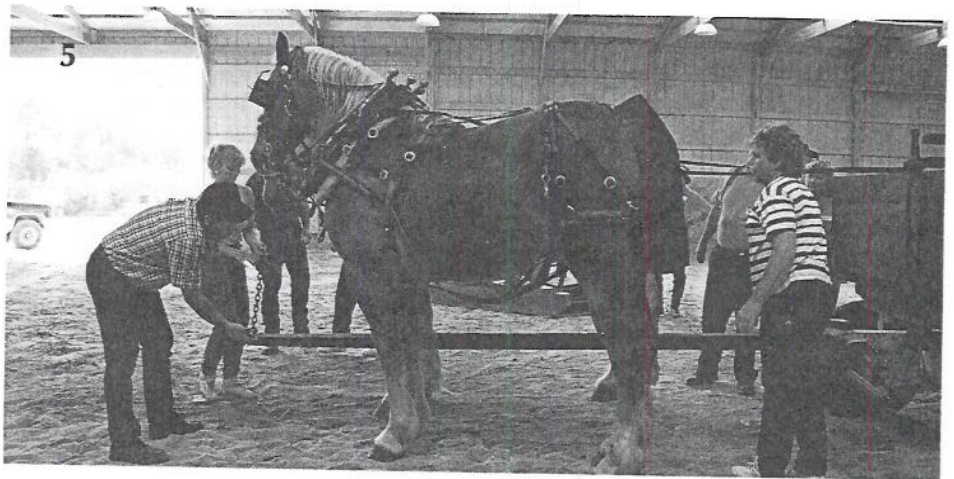
The pole chains are attached (5) to the tongue and harness. In this example the green horse is on the off (left) side of the team. The breaking horse on the right side is a 14 year old Percheron mare.

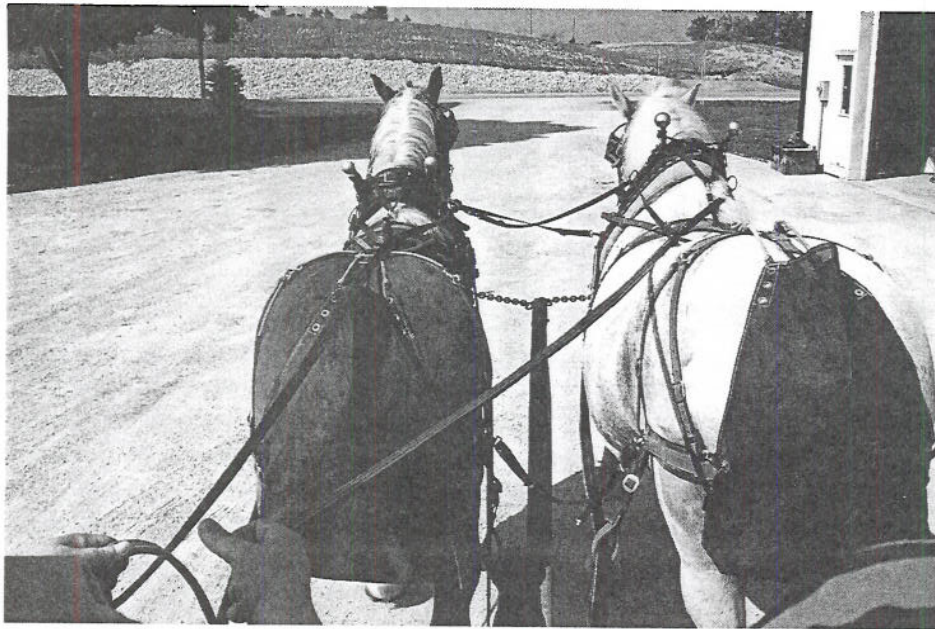
The traces are hooked to the eveners, inside trace first (6). The traces should be premeasured against the wagon to determine the correct length so that hitching is quick and easy. This helps keep a fidgety colt under control.

The coupling reins (inside lines) are attached to the bits (7). Though Zahm usually works alone, these photos show her with a class of students during one of her driving/training clinics.

When the team is ready, Zahm signals the horses to start with a click of the tongue. Here a student driver holds the lines (8).

The team is driven at a walk around the farm or along local roads. The green horse is held steady by the breaking horse and gains confidence from his teammate. The breaking horse sets a good example by responding correctly to the driver's commands. As in previous hitching to the sled, Zahm explains that "the green horse learns as much from the breaking >

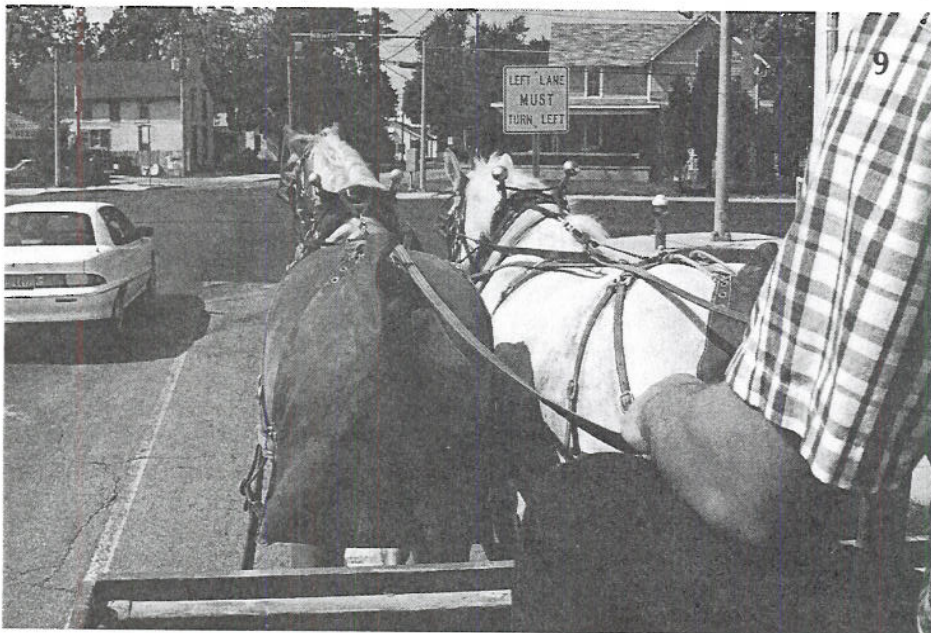




horse as he does from the trainer."

When the green horse is responding well, he is given additional experience, for instance, crossing a road (9).

Zahm notes the importance of good reinsmanship, particularly in driving a green horse. She tells novice drivers to "gather up the lines until you feel the horse's mouth, then give an inch." This establishes a comfortable contact so the driver is not hanging on the horses' mouths, but can instantly respond to any situation. To issue a command, Zahm says, "Speak to the horses first, then use the reins." She urges the horses on with a click of the tongue, followed, if necessary, with a tap of the whip. She does not call for more speed by slapping with the reins, but occasionally she will slap a rein to indicate, "behave." If one horse lags behind his mate and the whip excites the faster horse, she uses a fiberglass rod (a livestock staff) to poke the slow horse instead of tapping him with the whip. When slowing the horses she applies the reins gradually to give them a chance to respond. "I expect them to slow down in three strides, before I increase the rein pressure."



Zahm plans the length of each drive to suit the horse's physical condition and behavior. She stops when the horse is responding well. "Don't wear them out. If the horse is good, quit."

Zahm believes the horse must have plenty of exposure to traffic and roadside distractions (10) to become "well-broke." If the horse hesitates or spooks at something, Zahm may tap him with the whip, but keeps it light if at all. "If you use the whip severely, he will associate the scary object with punishment."



First and foremost, says Zahm, the driver should always be looking ahead and planning, in order to anticipate the horse's reactions. "Remember to 'play to win' by being alert for anything that might bother the horse. For instance, be ready for his reaction to a low branch that brushes against the wagon, or a soda can in the path of a wheel. Keep in mind that often it's not necessarily the obvious things that scare a horse. It's a big rock or a kid on a skateboard that frightens him."

In this demonstration the horses were apprehensive when Zahm's wagon passed a schoolyard (11) where a throng of children ran towards them for a closer look. But the driver had prepared by gathering the lines and held the team on a straight course. Zahm further advised, "When the horse shies from an object he fears, make him keep looking towards that object. This helps prevent him from running away from it. Try talking to him

in a calm tone; don't let yourself sound excited or nervous."

When crossing obstacles on the road like puddles, railroad tracks, white lines or shadows, the breaking horse can be particularly helpful. In this example (12) the near horse, a 24 year old gelding, pulled the wagon across the railroad tracks while simultaneously pushing his green mate back into line.

Cathy Zahm stresses that it is necessary to teach the horse to stand still in harness. On every drive she makes random stops where the horses stand for several minutes, even in the face of distractions like a passing train (13). She sets the wagon brake which, with the help of the breaking horse, restrains the green horse if he is fidgety. The horse that stands well is less apt to start into a traffic lane after a car passes. Zahm further discourages this tendency by waiting for several cars at an intersection rather than letting the horse take his cue to move from the first car that passes.

Many horses panic at the sound of air brakes. Zahm teaches her pupils not to fear this noise by standing them near a steep hill with truck traffic. She picks a spot at a safe distance from the traffic but within earshot of the air brakes. Gradually she moves the team closer (this may take several drives) until they can be driven along this road (14). With the right handling, says Zahm, many horses can overcome this natural fear.

After the horse is driving confidently in a pair, he can be put to a single cart to gain experience working alone. Zahm finds most of her training horses need only a week or so to make this adjustment. The overall breaking period, says Zahm, should be as long as required to make a "safe driving horse."

After every training session, Cathy Zahm takes the horse to a wash rack where he is hosed down, scraped and left tied for 30 to 60 minutes. This is not simply idle time, but additional training that teaches the horse to accept a bath and to stand alone. This improves the horse's stable manners and increases his level of patience in situations where he must stand for a long period—a definite plus in a driving horse. □

