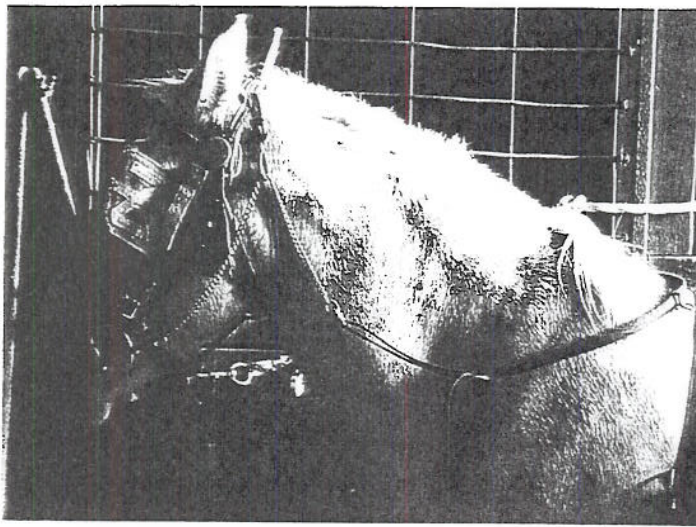


# Round Pen Training with Cathy Zahm

RIGHT: Cathy Zahm recommends a biting rig which has a snaffle bit, blinders, check line (sidecheck), side reins, girth, back-strap and crupper. UPPER MIDDLE: Cathy Zahm works the horse to the left, holding the whip in the right hand. LOWER MIDDLE: The whip is held in the left hand as the horse circles right.



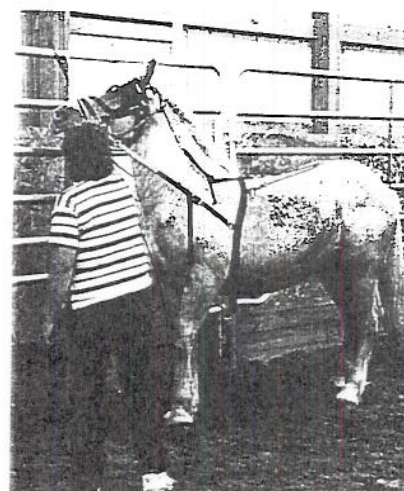
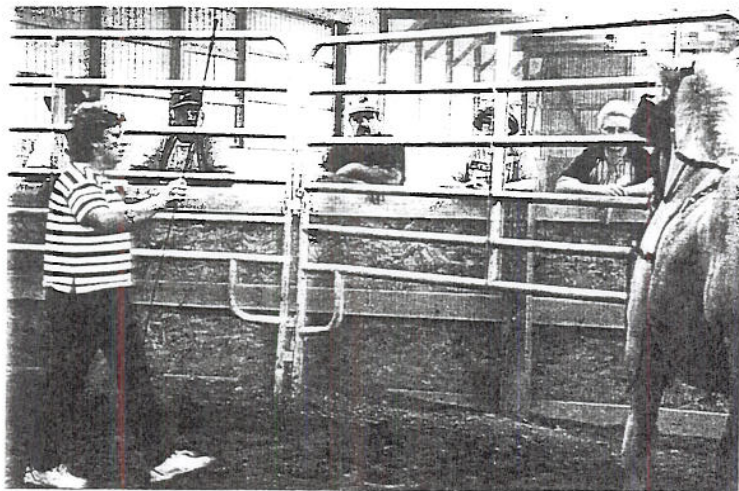
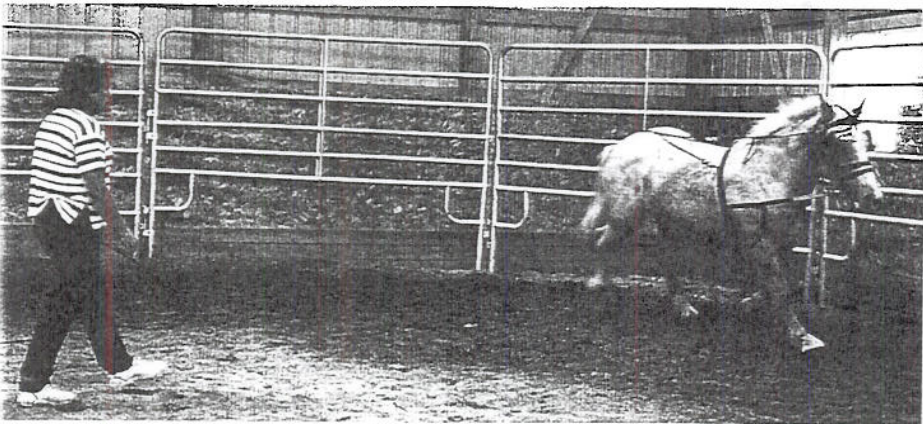
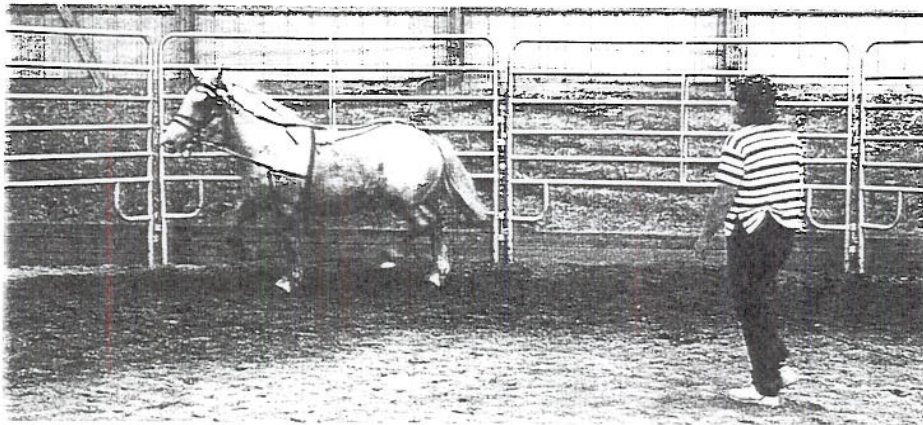
The round pen is equivalent to elementary school for horses in training with Cathy Zahm at Z Hidden Valley, Huntington, Indiana.

Work in the round pen is like longeing without a longe line. This simple groundwork teaches commands that prepare the horse for driving and riding, and instills respect for the trainer. "It teaches pecking order," says Cathy Zahm. She notes that this is just as important for a gentle backyard horse as it is for a horse that has never worn a halter. "Sometimes a pet or spoiled horse is harder to train because he doesn't respect you," says Zahm. The goal in the round pen is to establish mental control rather than merely exercising the horse. "There can't be any doubt in his mind that he must obey."

Zahm's underlying strategy in all phases of training: "Play to win by planning ahead. Think about what you want to do and how the horse may react before you start each step." For instance, her round pen has a 36-foot diameter. This size is large enough to allow the horse to walk, trot and canter comfortably, but it is small enough to confine the horse within the trainer's reach. Since the horse cannot easily escape control, he learns to obey promptly and reliably rather than learning to try various evasions.

The use of a biting rig is another key to Zahm's method: "The biting rig makes things so much easier," she says, because by the time the horse has learned basic commands he has also learned to wear

harness and to "give to the bit." To put on the biting rig, Zahm "double ties" the horse with two short ropes tied at right and left on a wall so he cannot shift from side to



FAR LEFT: As she tells the horse to "back," Cathy Zahm approaches him holding up the butt of the whip. LEFT: If necessary she taps the horse's nose with the whip until he steps backwards.

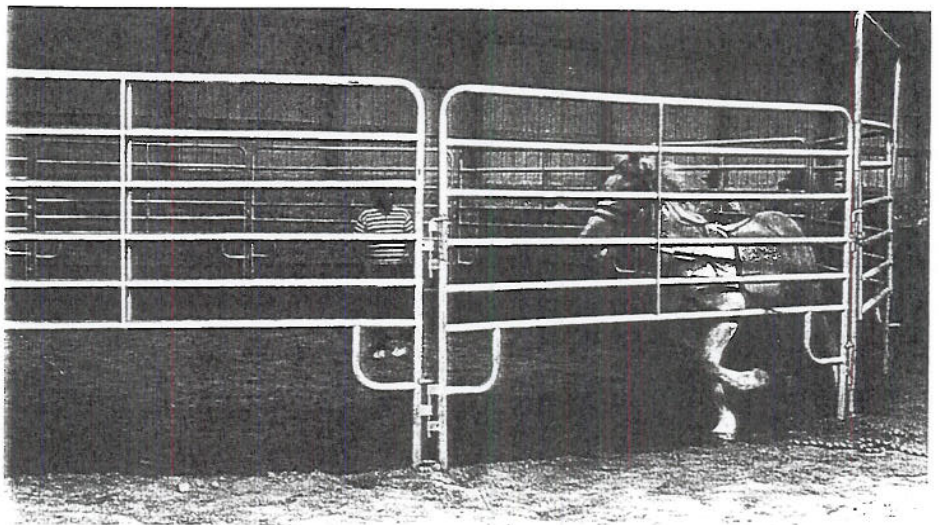
side as he could in crossties. Then she stands on a stool to put on the bridle so the horse does not learn to raise his head. She uses her thumb to open his mouth to avoid banging the bit against his teeth. The crupper is gently placed under the tail without catching any hair under it. These simple precautions when tying and harnessing are part of "playing to win" by avoiding natural equine reactions, like pulling, which can become a bad habit.

The first time the biting rig is put on some horses are wary, but Zahm finds that most accept it well enough to be led to the round pen. She is careful when leading a horse wearing blinds. "Don't forget that the horse can't see to the side. If you let him step on you or hit a gate, that can really scare him." For the occasional horse that fights putting on the biting rig, Zahm advises: "Put him in the round pen and wear him out a little until he will stand quietly while it is put on. If a horse is very spooky, I'll let him wear a winter blanket first, then the harness is no problem."

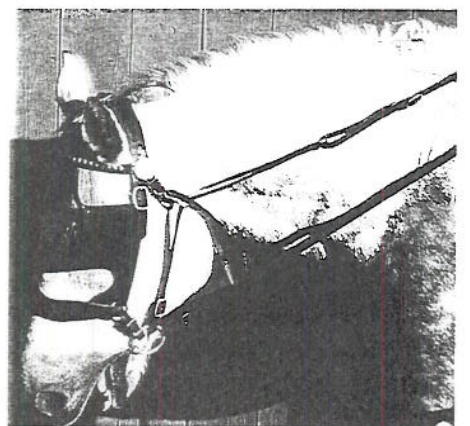
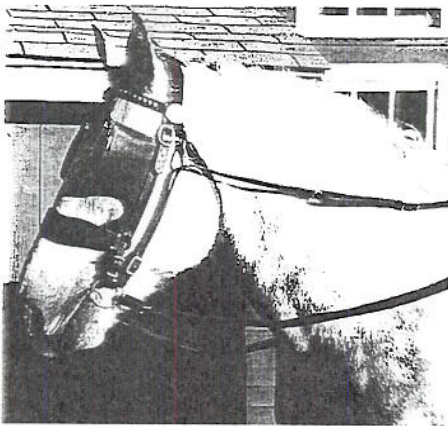
Not until the horse is in the round pen are the side reins snapped to the bit. "The side reins should be just long enough that a little tuck of the nose will relieve the bit pressure." Then Zahm starts with work at the trot by positioning the horse on the outside of the pen and herself near the center facing the horse. The whip is held in the hand on the side towards the horse's hindquarters (in the left hand when the horse moves to the right or clockwise, in the right hand when the horse moves to the left or counter-clockwise). She first "clicks" to the horse (her signal to go forward), then snaps the whip near or on the the hindquarters repeating this until the horse responds. To stop the horse she steps ahead into his line of vision, raises the whip and says "whoa." To reverse the horse she steps towards the horse's head holding the butt of the whip up in a threatening position and says "back." If necessary she taps the butt of the whip on the horse's nose until he backs up a few steps and then turns and moves off in the other direction. The horse is worked equally on the right and left circles.

Zahm keeps round pen sessions fairly short, usually 10 to 15 minutes. "Don't make the horse do it so long that he hates it," she says. To help the green horse learn to give to the bit, Zahm works him in the round pen as usual, then leaves him there alone for 30 to 60 minutes. The horse will "experiment" on his own by backing up, overflexing his neck or gaping his mouth until he discovers that flexing at the poll just enough to relieve the rein pressure is the best way to carry the bit.

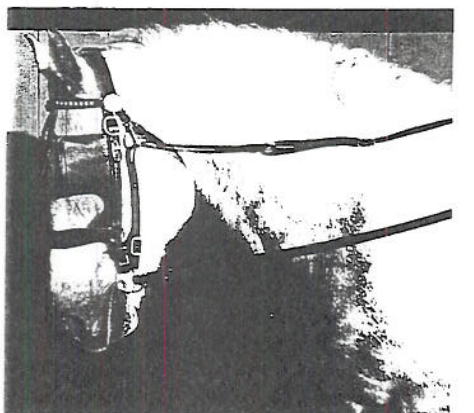
When Zahm feels the horse will readily move forward, stop and back up on



ABOVE: After a few training sessions in the round pen the horse responds obediently and energetically to Cathy Zahm's commands. Her next step is to hitch the horse with an experienced breaking horse to a heavy sled.



ABOVE: Natural head carriage without bit pressure. ABOVE RIGHT: It is normal for the green horse to try to avoid bit pressure by stretching or opening his mouth. RIGHT: As the horse learns to accept the pressure he starts to flex and chews on the bit. BOTTOM: The horse gives to the bit by flexing at the poll and he may chew lightly on the bit.



command, and he gives to the bit, he is ready for the next stage in her training sequence. Most horses reach this point in just three or four lessons. Zahm's next step is to hitch the horse in a pair to a heavy sled. But there are occasions that she may return the horse to the round pen, for instance, when exercise would help him settle down before his first time driving in traffic, or before hitching him following a layoff. "A tired horse is less apt to act up." A horse that gets lazy and unresponsive in driving or riding will get a refresher in the round pen. Zahm adds that round pen training can be continued for weeks or months to a more advanced level, for example, to teach commands for each gait, to develop the extended trot, or to improve the lateral bend.

Cathy Zahm believes that round pen training is the safest, most effective way to start a horse. "Everyone who trains a horse should have a round pen." □