

# ROBIN RIVELLO'S GUIDE FOR WILD HORSE ADOPTERS



## INTRODUCTION:

Wild horses are extremely intelligent, and are not like domesticated horses. They learn very quickly, good or bad, and it can be difficult to undo something that was taught incorrectly. Usually you will only need to teach them something once and they will retain it. These horses respond extremely well to praise and complements. Having a sense of humor helps a lot too. Also, remember to keep love and respect in your heart, they will sense this in you. Keep your newly adopted horse in a smaller area. Do not turn out into a large field or large arena; otherwise, you will not be able to get near them in their new found freedom. **DO NOT** put them with any other horses, even if you adopt more than one. Make sure you have separate areas, because they will not bond with you, only with each other, or the other horses. This will only frustrate you and you won't get anywhere. They will know it, and won't be accepting of you. My Mustang mare Reno showed me how it all works, and I would like to share it with you. I have worked with or trained more than 8 mustangs since Reno, and they are all very different, although Reno was one of the more difficult ones. I would like to mention that I am the President of the US Wild Horse and Burro Association. [www.uswhba.org](http://www.uswhba.org).

## BRINGING YOUR WILD HORSE HOME:

The **Bureau of Land Management** does not require you to halter the horse at the time of adoption. The **BLM** will ask you if you are haltering the horse and, will do so for you, if you provide them with the halter. The **BLM** will halter the horse in the chute prior to loading the horse on your trailer. They will also allow a drag rope, provided it is made of cotton, and does not have any knots in it. The halter should be nylon. I have had all the horses I worked with haltered with drag ropes. The **BLM does require** that you have a stock trailer with a step up, not a ramp load, because you will not be able to back up to the chute with a ramp for safe loading. Look over the area that you plan to house your horse. Make sure that you can back your trailer up to the area gate you are releasing your horse into. **YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO LEAD THE HORSE.** If you are not able to get the trailer up to the gate, you must either look for another location, or figure out a way to make a sturdy, high barricaded, runway into the corral area before the horse arrives home. Make sure there is fresh hay, water and a salt block available at all times. If you have automatic waterers you still need to put a bucket or tub in the pen. The horses will not know how to use a waterer right away, but their natural curiosity will have them using one in no time.

## BEGINNING TO WORK WITH YOUR HORSE:

Work with your horse in a quiet manner. Reading out loud while sitting on a stool or bucket is good way to start. Reserve any scolding or raising of your voice for later. Speak

in a monotone voice while talking or training. When your horse makes any accomplishments, praise them like “HAPPY NEW YEAR”!! They love it! Besides, it will be hard for you to contain your excitement anyway. Equally, they do not like to be scolded, “BAD HORSE”!! They progress slowly at first, but will quickly gain momentum. Clean the horse’s pen daily. Start by taking a plastic muck bucket and a pitchfork into the pen. The horse will watch you with curiosity, and you may even see a look on their face of “cool a maid”. To move the horse out of your way, simply make a shooing motion and say excuse me, they will move out of your way, then praise the horse for doing so. The horse will eventually move out of your way without you having to ask. After about 4 or 5 days you can use a wheelbarrow, but make sure the horse can’t run out. Always remain calm. These horses will not intentionally try to hurt you, they are just scared and unsure. They have about a 3-foot personal space you are trying to invade by getting close to them. It is best accomplished in the beginning by letting them check you out, like while reading or cleaning the pen, and letting them come to you to sniff and nose around. Each time they come near you, gently blow in their nose, this is a horse way of greeting and recognition.

**NOTE:** While you are working with the horse in the enclosure, do not just “throw” the lead over the fence rail, or try to hang onto the horse at any time. If they get away, even in this instance it will greatly affect your tying and leading training later. I recommend teaching tying and leading, after the all over body touching and brushing, but before the legs and feet handling. (Make sure that you either already have, or that you install something secure to tie the horse to in the area where you will be housing and working with your horse.) There are many uses for the drag rope, it teaches the horse to give to pressure on its own each time it steps on the line. You can use it to pull the horses head toward you, so that the horse faces you each time right before you hand out grain or other treats in the early stages of gentling. Just remember to gently ask them to look at you, blow in their nose again, and then release.

After about 2 days, hold out small amounts of feed from your hand, and with your other hand, try to gently touch their nose. You can also, take this a step further by saying “X” or some other code word that doesn’t have any “horsy” meaning to it each time the horse puts his nose to your hand before you give the treat. This is referred to as “Target Training” and was an article in “Equus Magazine” around August 1993. I did this with one mustang I trained, and the results were wonderful. Every time you want your horse to come you say the command “X” and your horse will come put its nose on your hand. This is an easy way to catch your horse later on when turned out. After about a week switch the grain to Alfalfa or Timothy hay cubes broken into small pieces. This is better for them, BUT MUST be kept to small pieces, in small amounts. (These cubes expand to 3 times their size in water, and you do not want to cause colic.) You can also begin offering carrot and apple pieces and some horse cookies. Try to make sure to stay away from the sugary, and molasses cookies. There are lots of treats that don’t contain sugars. Horses love them but the sugar isn’t good for them, same goes for the grain too. The small amount of grain you were hand feeding, which should be no more than a ¼ to ½ pound daily at first, can now be given at breakfast and dinner. This will also help with the

bonding, and if you have other horses being fed, they will start to figure out the routines of domestication.

**TIP: I use one those \$1.00 white pouches you can get at most home improvement stores, that the construction workers use for nails and screws that ties around your waist. Keeps your pockets clean, and is much handier.**

Once you have begun to get the horses trust, slowly but assuredly, start to work your way up the horses face and then proceed to the shoulder and neck area, then along the top line and sides. These processes most likely will not be done all at the same time, and in some instances may take several days. HAVE PATIENCE and some perseverance as well. Sometimes you may have to push an issue a little, and be determined. REMEMBER TO ALWAYS end on a good note! If you are working on something and it's not going very well, and you are becoming frustrated. Step back, take a deep breath, and do the last thing the horse mastered. This way you can both relax for a second before starting over what you were working on. Sometimes you may have to think of another way to convey what you want. (Reno needed things in graphic detail with pictures! She was not taking my word on anything. But with patience and some rethinking of ways to teach her, she eventually became a really dynamite horse.)

If you only have a half hour or so, because you need to be somewhere else, and you are planning on starting something new, DON'T. **(These will always be the days when your horse is most uncooperative. Either, don't do anything at all that day, or review something simple, otherwise plan on being late.)** Repeat-**DO NOT STOP** unless you end on a good note. (And yes, this happened to me on more than one occasion. I swear they know if you're in hurry.)

Once your Mustang starts to accept you touching them, and realizes that you are not a threat, and actually may even be a friend, after all this is the ultimate goal. You will see that touching more and more of their body will start to happen rapidly.

After you are able to touch all of the horse's body, start introducing brushes. Soft ones at first, then the more vigorous ones. If you were fortunate to adopt a horse that is extremely curious, and does not show fear of you, readily comes up to greet you, and in general will pretty much let you touch and brush them from day one, you are truly one of the luckier people. (No I did not have this luck with Reno. However, we did have it with some horses, and others it was somewhere in between.) At this point I like to have other people come by to visit, pet them, give treats, and if possible groom. Provided these people are calm, and not afraid. Try to find other "horsy" people if you can, and don't let anyone rough up your horse.

**THERE ARE SEVERAL METHODS OF LEADING AND TYING. THE INITIAL TRAINING DONE IN THE SMALL ENCLOSURE, AND A SAFE WAY TO LEAD IN A LARGER AREA SUCH AS A PASTURE, OR ARENA. BEGINNING LEAD TRAINING:**

In your enclosure, after the horse is gentled, pick up the lead rope and put gentle pressure on it to one side. Do not pull; just hold a small amount of steady pressure. If the horse

moves away, move with the horse, keeping the same amount of pressure, until the horse figures out that it can release the pressure by moving in the direction of the pull. As the horse moves to the side you are holding pressure on, the lead rope will go slack, therefore, the horse **not you** has released the pressure. Repeat the process to the same side, until the horse consistently moves each time you put pressure on the rope and then do the same thing on the other side. Once the horse does well moving to each side when pressure is applied to the rope, you can start with forward and back. (Back is sometimes easier, if you have trouble with forward). Move to the side of the horse. Put pressure on the rope asking the horse to step forward, always making sure that you let the rope go slack with each small effort the horse makes. It is very important that you do not continue to pull when the horse moves forward, or in any direction that you're asking him to move. Reward every little effort the horse makes. The horse will not fight you because you're not pulling, you're asking, and the amount of pressure never gets more only less when the horse gives to it. Use verbal commands as well, such as forward, back, or walk with me. Once the horse has learned how to give to the pressure on the lead rope, practice walking, turning and backing in the enclosure. Teach your horse to lead from both sides. This can be extremely beneficial in a lot of instances, for example trotting the horse out and doing circles for a vet exam. Do this frequently and it will also help keep the horse from becoming one sided.

## **TYING:**

**I CANNOT STRESS ENOUGH HOW IMPORTANT TYING IS, AND THAT YOU DO IT CORRECTLY.** Tying is a very important part of training, and you want to make sure the horse does not free itself. It is usually uneventful, but some horses may not be very happy the first time they are tied. If you can, use an inner tube or similar heavy rubber tube to tie the horse's lead rope to. Tie the inner tube to a stout post. There should be a solid wall in front of the horse so they can't get a leg caught anywhere, or move around in circles. Always tie the horse fairly high and fairly short, so it is less likely to get a leg over the lead rope. Once the inner tube is tied to the post, tie the lead rope (with a quick release knot) to the inner tube. The heavy rubber will give so the horse is not pulling on anything solid. The horse will usually quit pulling after it tries this once or twice, (especially since it has already been taught to give to the lead rope pressure). The first time you tie the horse, "for real" make sure that they cannot get away. Tying is a basic that the horse will need to do all of its life. Doing it correctly or incorrectly, will be the difference between being able to tie to a tomato stake, or never knowing when they are going to run off, breaking everything in their path. I did this incorrectly with Reno, but I did not make this mistake with the others I trained. For this you will need 2 nylon halters and 2 cotton lead ropes with bull snaps that are woven back into them, or a heavy rope that won't break, or chafe the horse. You will also need a sturdy telephone pole, or other immovable object. Fencing is not recommended. Trust me! Tie the horse using both halters and leads, and then start a grooming session. When the horse pulls back just step away and say nothing. Wait for them to stop, and ask "ARE YOU DONE"? OK. (Ask the horse to step forward, if the horse still has tension on the ropes, or to back up if too close to pole.) Resume grooming, if they do it again. Keep repeating this process until they just put their head down and enjoy the grooming. Once they master this, practice

with removing and replacing the halter while tied, putting the halter around the horses neck as if you were getting ready to put a bridle on, keeping the second halter and lead on the horse, then practice with them untied, but with the lead in your hand.

## LEGS AND FEET:

Your horse should be tying and leading by this stage. Legs and feet will usually be an issue regardless of temperament to some degree. I recommend starting with a front leg, and then the other front leg. **Do not do the hinds yet.** Start by first working on rubbing your hands up and down their legs. If they pick their feet up while you are doing this, it will only be a reaction to get away from you touching their legs. Keep in mind; this is an extremely vulnerable place of their body. You are now asking them to **really** go against instinct by doing this. Just tell them quietly “that’s not what I want” wait for the horse to replace their foot on the ground and do it again until they accept you touching the legs without any reaction. Once the horse accepts you touching, rubbing and brushing their legs, you can start to ask for them to pick up a foot up by tapping the side of their lower leg or ankle with your open hand, and say a command, such as “FOOT”. Don’t try to take the foot just yet, let the horse pick it up and put it down on their own. Praise them like HAPPY NEW YEAR!! , then ask them to do it again. Little by little, after the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> time of getting the horse to pick it up on command, take hold of the foot for a second. Then a little longer each time, until you can hold it, and pick it out. Then replace it to the ground. This should all be done in one day, so plan on a lot of time for this. Once this is mastered on the 1<sup>st</sup> front foot, proceed to the next front foot, and repeat. When you master this, you can quit for the day. Resume the next day with review of the previous day, and then proceed to the hind legs. In most instances the hinds will go rather quickly. **Be careful of a kick though**, and scold your horse for this, and then start again. If you follow these guide lines you will have a horse in which you can put leg wraps on easily, or inspect for lameness or swellings, without having them constantly picking up a foot. You will also have a horse that you can just ask for a foot and get it. How Nice is That!! Oh, and your blacksmith will love you for it.

## FEET:

Now you must do something about the mess those feet are in. To prepare your horse for the blacksmith, you must teach your horse what this is about. To do this, you will need to bang on your horses feet with a foot pick to get them used to the feel of the hammer, take an old rasp to get them used to the vibrations. You will also need to work with your horse’s feet in the various farrier positions, in between your legs for the front feet, and over your knee, being underneath them for the hinds, and the forward positions with the foot on your knee. When you begin each of these processes, take it slow and just pet or rub the foot and around the coronary band and ankle area. Then move on to using the rasp and simulated hammer. When your horse has mastered this you can call the farrier.

Once your horse is leading, tying, grooming, and has had its feet done, I recommend having a vet check, and their teeth looked at, for optimum health. You can proceed to the

next steps while you are waiting for you're vet, you do not need to stop while waiting for your appointment day. Don't forget to check your horses' records from the BLM to see when the horse is due for the next deworming.

## **TEACHING TO LEAD OUTSIDE OF ENCLOSURE:**

You may need to have assistance from someone else with this. Leading and tying are 2 of the most important things you can teach a horse. If this is done incorrectly, they will now have learned a "**BAD THING**" that is difficult to correct. (I know, it happened with Reno and I, and we just came to an agreement on this. I learned from my mistakes, and they were not repeated with the other horses I trained). Use a longing cavesson with the multiple rings across the nose. (A note on cavessons: I have found recently that they are primarily making the more universal type with the top ring turrets up by the brow band. If this the only style you can find, it is perfectly acceptable, however you may need to find a longe line with a longer chain shank, or purchase an additional chain shank to add onto the one on the longe line. Or a side pull halter will usually work just as well without the use of a stud chain.) Use a longe line with a chain shank, run from the left side ring across all nose rings, through the right side ring, and up to the right side top ring. Make sure the cavesson is fitted properly so it does not twist on the horses head, and make sure the chain is long enough to reach as instructed. You and your helper will both need to wear gloves that fit well. Next, have your helper hold the end of the line with 1-2 loops in hand, while you hold the rest of the line next to the horse. Your helper must pay close attention to you and the horse. It's also important that you both remain calm and relaxed. With your helper walking next to you, (who is essentially your anchor, like in the tug of war game) begin to lead the horse around, preferably in a larger enclosed area. Most often the horse will walk nicely around for a few minutes, or laps. Sometimes the horse is calm or sometimes very excited. Just pat the horse and reassure with soft words. The horse may all of a sudden go to bolt. At this instance you and your helper must also run with the horse a short distance, and then on **your** command, you and your helper pull back together. (This can cause the horse to fall down if pulled too hard so try to avoid pulling the horse down. If the horse does fall, don't get excited they will get up). The horse may, or may not, after getting up try it again. But if so, repeat this process. Guaranteed they will only do this a couple of times, and will never again, try to get away from you. **NOTE: If you do not run, and just try to pull back on the line, the horse will drag you both, or get away and WIN!, THAT'S BAD!!!** Over the next several days I like to walk the horse around the farm. Again make sure you're helper is with you. I lead them around vehicles, tractors, barrels, anything and everything. I will ask the horse to put his nose to objects as well, for instance the truck tailgate. I will bang on it and ask the horse to touch it, then I will drop it down and jump up and sit on the tailgate and ask the horse to come up to me, and look in the bed. Use your imagination and remember to praise and reward you're horse for all efforts.

## **HOSE TRAINING:**

You will need your longe cavesson, longe line or long lead line with chain, and your helper person. Don't forget your gloves! Most mustangs have been around hoses while water tubs or buckets have been filled, and are used to the sounds, but when it is directed at them it is now something different. I like to use a sprayer attachment that has a shower setting, and just a gentle stream of water coming out of the hose. I hold the hose up to the horses' mouth from the side of their head so they can see it, and play with it. Praise them each time they even look at the hose and not try to run. Make sure you have some treats as well. Use your pouch it is much handier. A really hot day is also quite helpful. Little by little I get their front legs wet starting from around the shoulder area, keep praising, and running the water over more area of the horse, it helps if you have a bath scrubber mitt of some type or use your hand, to rub them. If your horse enjoys regular dry grooming, he will realize that this is just a wet grooming. Do not push this first time with giving the horse a full blown bath, or trying to get their head wet. Make sure you end on a good note, and try to hose them at least few days (weather permitting). Remember that when you do bath them you must introduce the sponge, and the soap smell. The water that runs out of the sponge when you apply it may also make the horse take notice, so stay aware, and have a helper for the first few real baths as well. When you start to get the horses head wet, use a little trickle of water, start over the horses nose and sides of face, then straight up the head. Be mindful of ears and eyes. Over time your horse won't mind what you use, just remember to introduce it first.

## **TRAILER TRAINING:**

As above while leading around the farm I will also take the horse around the trailer. When I am ready to begin training them to get on and off the trailer I make sure that I have my helper and another person, and, a seasoned horse that is quiet to help with this. It is better if the horse is a pasture or stable buddy. I have the other person lead the seasoned horse up to the trailer, while I and my helper lead the mustang. Load the other horse, and have that person stay with that horse. You and your helper then ask the mustang to get on the trailer. He may go right on, or just look inside, and perhaps put one foot on. Praise him for any efforts made, but do not let the horse move side to side or back, keep them facing the inside of the trailer. This may take a little time, but do not start to pull and push or hit the horse, they will not go in this way. Use little tugs on the line and your forward command. Bit by bit they will get on. Praise the horse well, pet him, let him relax, and then ask him to step off slowly. They may not do this well at first, but remember to give the horse lots of praise, and a minute to relax. Ask the horse to load again, and unload several times. When the horse is comfortable with loading and unloading, I like to take them for a ride around the block or to the gas station, and then back home. Give lots of Praise for this first trip. The next time I trailer the horse I like to go to a friend's barn, and lead them around over there. I take my helper, the helper horse, and my third helper for this. **Make sure that the helper horse is familiar with the other farm, and is comfortable there.** I have one person leading this horse around while my helper is with me leading the mustang. The next time I go, I take my helper horse along, but I leave them on the trailer, and with my helper person lead the mustang around alone. If your friend has an arena, and will let you use it. Trailer your mustang there on occasion to do longe work, or riding after you have mastered these at home. The first

couple of times you go it is helpful to have your helper horse, and friend to go along and do the same work you are doing. At this stage you shouldn't need another helper person to lead your horse with you.

## **LONGEING:**

Get out your cavesson and longe line. Changing equipment with each new lesson is a good way to let the horse know that it's time to pay attention. Attach your longe line to the cavesson in the same manner as you did for leading. I like to start my longe training with some simple exercises first. I will rub the line all over the horses body, drape it over the horse and let it slide down, gently toss the line onto the horse while holding a smaller amount of line in my hand to desensitize the horse to this new experience. I will also do the same with the longe whip. The horse may be pretty afraid of the whip in particular. The longe whip is one of the methods used by the BLM to move the horses around in the pens. Once your horse no longer minds these objects, put the whip aside, and start the horse **walking** in a small circle around you. Use the end of the longe line to help you keep the horse moving. (If you have trouble with the horse wanting to walk towards you, or wanting to stay closer to you, you may need to use a smaller whip in your hand, such as a dressage whip, to tap the horse on the shoulder or the side of the neck to keep him out on the circle. If you have this problem again with the larger circle you will need to use the longe whip to reach the horses shoulder.) Work in both directions on this smaller circle. Once you have the horse moving in a small circle quit for the day. The next day you longe, review all of the first days process, but before you start to longe ask the horse to "whoa and stand" in one spot. Drop the longe line to the ground in front of the horse where he can see it, gently tug on the line at the horses head, and say "whoa and stand". Step away, if the horse follows you, put him back where he was, and repeat the line drop, and commands. Do this until the horse stands still and you can walk all around him or away from him until you come back and take the line. **Praise Your Horse Well.** Next start your small circle again, this time adding in the little tug with the "whoa" and "stand" command. Reverse the horse and repeat on the other side. Quit for the day. The next time you longe, review the previous lessons, but start to increase the size of the circle a little. Each day increase the circle a little more until the horse is around 10 to 15 feet out. Now you will need the reach of the whip to keep the horse moving. Always stay even with your horses shoulder area, and keep the whip pointed toward the horses' hind end to help you keep him moving forward. After you have the horse is longeing well at the walk progress to the trot. (I do not ask the horse to canter until they are longeing in a bridle with side reins). If you do not feel confident with longeing, or how to teach a horse to longe, ask a "horsy" friend who has knowledge in longeing. Otherwise, there are many excellent books out on the subject, or if you have internet access, you can find lots of great training information there.

## **BRIDLING:**

I like to use an English bridle headstall, and a loose ring 3-piece (French) training snaffle. **REMINDER:** What you teach the horse will be remembered, so make sure it



is done correctly. Reins over the head first, then put the halter around the neck while tied, put the bridle on, and then take the halter off. Reverse this process, and then repeat a couple of times, letting the horse just get the feel of the bit in its mouth. Let the horse play with the bit on their own, while doing something they like, EAT! Give small treats to help the horse learn that they can eat with a bit, and that they won't starve to death if wearing a bit. **DO NOT** leave the horse unattended, because they can get food stuck over the bit and have difficulty breathing and you will need to remove the bridle. I would only do this for a few minutes or so to start. Then gradually increase to about a half hour over several days. Now you can begin to longe them with the cavesson on **over** the bridle, but using only the cavesson to longe from. Just let the horse carry the bit.

## **SADDLING:**

Show your horse the saddle pad first, and let him check it all out. Rub the pad on the horses' body starting with the head and neck. This shows them it is nothing to be afraid of. I prefer to start with an English saddle because it is light and more manageable. The stirrups can be run up and it's a little lighter for the horses' first introduction to saddles. Gently place the saddle pad on the horses back, smoothing it down, patting it a little, and re-adjusting it. When the horse no longer cares what you are doing. Remove the pad, and repeat this process with the saddle. Patting, flapping the side panels, anything you can think of. Once the saddle isn't a big deal, replace the pad, and the saddle. Next attach the girth to the off side, and bring it under the belly and hold it lightly underneath the belly while holding the saddle. Then cinch it up a little at a time, until the saddle is secure. **Be careful when cinching, some horses don't mind, but occasionally they may try to bolt away. So make sure you are in a paddock.** Next, drop the stirrups down; Snap the leathers on both sides for the noise. When the horse no longer cares about this, gently drop the irons onto the horse's sides, and push them gently into its sides. (This is why I like the English irons). After this is completed, lead the horse around awhile with the stirrups up, and then down, for a few days, then put on the bridle and cavesson. Longe the horse with the stirrups up first, and then with them down. Once the horse is longeing in full tack you can begin to introduce artificial contact with side reins. Introduce **one** side rein at a time on the **off (or outside)**, of the circle. **PLEASE USE ONLY ALL ELASTIC ONES ASK YOUR LOCAL TACK SHOP FOR THE CORRECT SIDE REINS.** Adjust the side reins to longest setting and attach through the billet of the saddle, and to the cavesson. Ask the horse to walk, they may resist at first, but will soon catch on. After the horse accomplishes one side, remove the outside rein. Reverse the horse, and repeat this process on the other side. Then you can attach both sides and longe. Little by little shorten the side reins (over the course of a couple weeks) to around halfway. When you feel the horse is ready, remove the cavesson and begin to use the bit for longeing. Run the chain through both rings and clip together fairly close so there isn't a large loop for them to get a foot through accidentally. If you have the "Y" attachment that is great. Now, **repeat** the side rein process, but using the bit. Bring the side reins in again a little at a time over the next couple weeks. During the time in between, you can begin putting your foot in the stirrup, or just pushing down on the stirrup with your hands. You can begin to step into the stirrup and lie over the horses

back on both sides. **(Make sure you have a helper when starting this)**. Have your helper lead you around a few times on each side. Getting up on both sides trains your horse to mount from either side. This comes in handy sometimes, and it is better for your horse's spine to switch sides. You can also, during this time, start putting on a western saddle, which weighs considerably more, so also get your horse used to longing in it as well. I RECOMMEND riding the horse for the first time in a western saddle.

## **PONYING:**

I have had the pleasure of an older seasoned mustang help with teaching a young mustang all the necessary ropes and discipline of trail riding. My wonderful mare Reno helped me to teach my now 3 year old Skye how to go out and enjoy the world. If you have an older or seasoned mount that you think can handle the job, by all means take the opportunity. It is not hard if you start at home, and all of your ground work has been done correctly. Use a nylon halter that doesn't have a throat latch clip, and does not have an adjustable nose buckle. The only a buckle should be the crown piece. Make sure the halter fits well, and is not too loose or too tight. The top of the nose band should only be  $\frac{3}{4}$ " to 1" inch below the bottom of the cheek bone. You need to have a leadline with a chain shank. I like the round braided smooth nylon ones. Once again you will need to have a helper for this initial training. Run the chain shank from the left side of the horses head starting with the side ring, make one wrap around the nose band, through the other side ring and up to the top side ring, this way you will have total control of the horses head. Start in your paddock or arena area. You will need to get both horses used to being next to each other and to go in the same direction. Also, you will need to learn to have a lot more lines in your hand, and to control both horses. I find that putting a knot in my reins helps if I have to drop them or lose them, the reins are still right there on my horses neck. **DO NOT PUT ANY KNOTS IN THE PONYING LINE.** It will not feel good ripping through your hand, and it will NOT help you to hold on to it. You will probably have to let go of the line a lot in the beginning. If you drop or lose the line and have trouble getting the horse you are riding to go over to the horse you are ponying or that horse moves away and you cannot get a hold of the line. You will need the assistance of your helper to retrieve the horse and hand the line back to you. It gets really tiring getting on and off a hundred times. Also, if you are remounting and one or both of the horses is still a little shaky about this new idea, it could take you a long time. Once you get both horses going together in straight lines and a large circle, practice large figure eights and then smaller circles, and smaller figure eights. Do this at a **walk only** for the first day or so, progress to the trot, repeating the above maneuvers. I do not usually canter, even on trails. Cantering only excites the horses and makes it difficult to control them both. Practice dropping the line and retrieving the line, mounting and dismounting while holding the line. After you have mastered these in the arena, move on to a larger field. When you pony on trails for the first ride, use common sense, try to plan your route to use only wider trails where both horses can fit, and there are no bridges or other really scary things. Keep it short and simple so the horse can gain his confidence. Progress slowly to harder and narrower trails where the horse you are ponying must follow behind the lead horse. I recommend that you ride with someone else, and use good judgment when it comes to knowing the horse you are ponying. If his temperament

is such, that when he gets away from you in the arena, and is hard to catch, or if the horse is a bully to the pony horse, this may not be the best thing to do.

## **RIDING:**

With the ground work completed, you can begin getting up on the horse. Use a western saddle, and a helper, step into the stirrup. Gently ease your way on top of the horse, and just sit there for a few minutes with your feet out of the stirrups. Wiggle the saddle around with your body. (Don't forget to praise the horse). Next, have your helper begin to lead you with a separate line, attached the same way as the longe line, or using the longe line. If the horse is receptive to this, add a little leg pressure. If all of this is successful, put your feet into the stirrups, and add a little leg pressure. Do this for a few days. Sometimes, the first day it's acceptable, but the next day it's not. After a couple of days, introduce light rein contact, while still having a helper on the ground. Practice with direct reining the horse and some leg pressure, but having your helper let out some line, and walking along with you to help in case the horse spooks or stops and won't go forward. Once you feel you are ready, have your helper release you from the line, but walk along side of you. Have your helper gradually walk away. In the beginning always be sure someone is still there with you. If they have a quiet mount to ride, ask them ride along with you. This will help your horse build confidence, and it is a **MUST** when you begin to ride outside of an enclosed area.

**OTHER TRAINING TIPS:** You can teach your horse a lot at home, such as walking on plastic, paper, carpets, etc. Rub each of these objects all over their bodies, and then ask them to walk over / on them. A quick note on Velcro, it is used on many items for horses, for example boots and fly masks. Open and close the Velcro a few times while the horse is in the stall, and let them check out the items. My Skye loves Velcro. She knows how it works, and likes to undo things like her shipping boots and the other horses fly masks. Ironically, she was petrified of it at first introduction. Blankets and sheets are a real good way to get your horse used to wearing things on his body. For instance the feel of a blanket helps with the feel of a saddle pad, and the belly straps are great for getting the horse used to the feel of the saddle cinch. **A Note On Blankets:** I always put it on the horse for the first time in a stall. Take the blanket on and off several times, and leave it on the horse for the night. Leg straps can be interesting for the first time. The horse may run around you a few times, and then realizes it won't hurt him. He may even do it again when the other leg strap is clipped. I use a plastic step stool around the horse once it is tying well to groom from. I push down a little on their backs to get the horse used to slight pressure on their back, people being above them, and for mounting block purposes. I will also use the step stool in the early riding stages with the assistance of my helper. I will lay over the horses back, pat his sides and rear end, and have my helper walk us around a little. (Provided the horse is old enough to carry weight). Whatever you can think of that will be a benefit to you in any situation, try to teach the horse at home. Remember to always teach in a positive way, and to always use lots of praise. You will have a very remarkable horse.

I want to mention that there are a lot of ways to train horses, and lots of variations of them as well. If one method isn't working try another or any combination. If you still have problems, ask some "horsy" people for suggestions or enlist the help of a professional trainer. I owe many thanks to a lot of people who helped me progress and refine my skills over the years. My Dressage instructor, Lisa Post, at Chestnut Ridge Equestrian Center, a lot of "horsey" friends, and Ms. Lynn Kamer, and her wonderful Mustang Twinkles, who got me interested in the Mustangs. With great sadness, I regret to say Twinkles is no longer with us. Twinkles, was a wonderful friend and mentor for a lot of horses. Lynn taught me a lot about the Mustangs, and distance riding, I thank her very much for both. Nancy Bowker, who is the author of The New Horse Handbook, John Rarey Horse Tamer, and co-author of The Wild Horse, An Adopters Manual. Nancy got the idea to write the Adopters Manual because Reno was so tough to work with. I had to come up with some really creative ideas, and at the time there really wasn't a lot of information out to help with the wild ones. Nancy is a wonderful person and has been much more than a great friend.

**If you have any questions, or need any assistance, I am more than happy to help. You can contact me Robin Rivello at 732-742-5044, E-mail me at [president@uswhba.org](mailto:president@uswhba.org) or [saveawildone@yahoo.com](mailto:saveawildone@yahoo.com) or, write to me at 23 Hooker Street, Jamesburg, NJ 08831. Reno and I want to wish you all the best and hope you have as much love and fun together, as we do.**  
**Sincerely,**  
**Robin Rivello and Reno.**

I would like to add, that my husband Michael, adopted his first Mustang in August of 2002. Sunny was 2 then, she is now 9. She and Mike had some ups-downs together, to say the least. Sunny is now in a surrogate mare program. Mike adopted a yearling mustang we had to rescue last February, she is 2 now, and her name is Indigo. I adopted a 9 month old mustang in June 03. She is 6 now, her name is Skye. She has been a joy, and we do a lot together. The Mustangs are all different, but however long or short a time it takes to get them to come around is well worth the effort. These horses are magnificent!!!!

## **ROBIN'S BACKGROUND**

I have more than 30 years of experience working with horses. I started riding when I was 8, got my first horse when I was 9. He was an old horse that was an ASPCA rescue, and he passed away when I was 12. I continued to ride, take lessons, and work at stables for several more years. When I was 20, I cared for a friend's horse, and then I acquired a 3 year old Standard bred that I retrained as a riding horse. I also took in, and retrained several more domestic horses. I got involved with the mustangs in 1989, and have primarily spent the last 18 years working with mustangs. In the last several years Mike and I have been doing more to assist the BLM. I have fostered and or trained over 17 mustangs just this past year. ©2002rev2005-06-04rev2005-07-17-rev2008-12-30