

“When training young thoroughbred foals, are there differing rates of learning efficiency due to sex or sire?”

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The New Zealand thoroughbred breeding industry demands expedient and effective foundation training for their young horses with minimal risk of injury. The behaviours are required to be elicited at differing levels of arousal and in various environments. Typically training is kept to a minimum and occurs pre weaning and post weaning for a set number of days. The aims of this study were to describe the learning efficiency in foals for three foundation behaviours and to understand if sex or sire altered these so that future stud training programs may be adjusted accordingly to minimise training time and costs. The effectiveness of a foal training programme run by Equus Education (NZ) Ltd on a commercial thoroughbred breeding farm was investigated. Approximately 2150 foals have been trained over the past thirteen years with a 100% success rate and zero injuries to any mares or foals. In this study foals were trained using the 10 ISES principles at three to six weeks of for foals to be competent in the three foundation behaviours.

Lay person message: Training using the 10 ISES training principles was successful for all foals. At three to six weeks old thoroughbred foals already showed differences in their rate of learning to be approached, pick up their feet and lead. These differences were not shown to be based on sex or sire.

Keywords: learning efficiency; foal; training; foundation; behaviour; thoroughbred.