New Job for Off-the-track Thoroughbreds

by Emily Heggan

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Imagine a 1200-pound animal bred for high performance and speed galloping down a track at 40 miles-per-hour; its hooves striking the dirt, its mane flowing in the wind and the cheers from the crowd as it gallops down the home stretch and crosses the finish line. Now, imagine that same animal cantering around a course at a nice steady pace jumping over three-foot fences at a horse show.

Retraining ex-racehorses takes a lot of patience, tolerance and time, but they can eventually result in excellent riding horses in many equestrian sports.

Stacy Anderson, owner and trainer at Wishing Well Show Stables in Hammonton, believes that introducing an ex-racehorse to his new life as soon as possible is an important step to the retraining process.

â€œI turn them out the same day. I ride them the same day they arrive too,â€• says Anderson. â€œI do thi they donâ€™t settle in and get too comfortable; just like going to a horse show you school them before you show, same thing at home, you want them to get used to their new surroundings.â€•

Once the new horse has become acquainted with his new home and surroundings, it is good to start teaching him the basics. Racehorses are trained completely different from other riding horses. They have different saddles and bridles and are handled differently.

â€œThey need to learn to have a rider on their back rather than up their neck,â€• says Anderson. â€œThe understand collection or a lot of seat and leg, so getting them to understand the basics is important. Balancing them is what I like to work on for the first few months before we go to the next level of starting them over fences. Racehorses need to learn what life is all about off the racetrack and that itâ€™s not all about running.â€•

Retraining racehorses isnâ€™t only for the experienced trainer. A lot of younger riders are getting a leg up on retaining them as well.

When thoroughbreds first come off the track they can be confused and sometimes donâ€™t get the hang of things right off the bat. But over time they learned to have a different work ethic and to just be a regular horse. The process of retraining them might not be easy to some. Some horses are slower learners, just like people.

Itâ€™s good to start with them learning how to find their feet and doing a lot of trot work to build up their muscle. A lot of thoroughbreds coming off the track may lose weight and muscle from not being worked every single day and are not being fed the same type of feed. Itâ€™s important to try and ride him at least four times a week or more, depending on the weather of course. An important key to working with an Off-the-track thoroughbred is repetition, especially when it comes to learning a new skill.

Retraining ex-racehorses does take a lot of patience and time, but in the long run, it will eventually pay off and have a new partnership and the thoroughbred will have a new career.

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