Do not try to set your horse's head until you are satisfied that he can do a fairly good running walk. After the running walk has been established, if the colt's head is still not right, use a standing martingale on him and tighten up on the chin strap. Bear in mind that some Tennessee Walking Horses have more head action than others, although the proper nodding action in reluctant colts may be improved through the use of martingales and tightened chin straps. Most Tennessee Walking Horses set their heads gradually themselves.

There is only one way to ride a Tennessee Walking Horse; just mount him and relax. Do not post, and do not put any weight in the stirrups except just enough to balance yourself. Get on the horse and sit down. Ride your mount in a flatfoot walk for several minutes in order to get accustomed to the horse and the feel of his mouth. Put enough tension on the reins to steady the horse in his gait, riding with a flexible wrist so you can give and take with nod of the head.
Do not pump your horse, but if his head is not properly set he may work you. When you have had your horse going along in a good smooth flatfoot walk for several minutes, urge him to increase his speed and let him go into a running walk. Please remember that the running walk is an extended flatfoot walk. Ultimately, you will derive much pleasure from his smooth gliding running walk. When desiring to canter, you must give the cue which the previous trainer or rider has taught the horse, as the various trainers have different ways in starting a horse to canter. Some will swing them on the rail, some will signal them with their foot behind the forearm and on the side, and some will tell them to canter by speaking to them. All horses when circled to the left should canter on the left lead, which means that their left forefoot should be much extended, and when cantering to the right in a circle the right forefoot should be much extended, and should never cross behind. Crossing is very uncomfortable to the rider, and is very conspicuous to the onlooker. When your horse starts crossing in the canter, just put him back in a flatfoot walk and start all over again. Most riders prefer an English saddle. Use any type bridle equipped with a curb bit, and be sure the curb strap is not too tight. When a horse is broke and ready to show or ride for pleasure he works well without a long shank rough bit.

After our colts have been in training for two or two and one half months we begin the canter. A suitable place to teach a two-year-old to canter is on a gently sloping rise. Allow your horse to run or lope as slowly as possible up the rise, gradually slowing and gently raising him with the reins. Give him his head and when he starts to go too fast, pull him back. Help him to canter by lifting his head and putting pressure on his mouth. After the colt learns to canter at your command on the side of a
hill, ride him on level ground and gradually develop the "rocking chair" canter by riding him in this gait every day. We teach our horses to canter along with the running walk, as I believe in many instances a horse's running walk may be improved if he is taught to canter early in his training period. However, it is advisable to canter them for only a few minutes each day, because too much cantering is hard on their legs. Before giving the signal to canter, always drop your horse back into a flatfoot walk. When we desire to canter on the left lead, we pull the left rein and touch the horse gently with the left foot behind the left fore-leg and on the side. We change our lead by performing the same maneuvers on the opposite side of the horse and in reverse. Remember to drop back to a flatfoot walk each time you change leads. The canter our Tennessee Walking Horse gives you is easy although it has lots of spring, is gently rolling and has lots of head motion.

During the second part of our colts' training, many of them are somewhat awkward and will often step on their front quarters with their hind feet. Therefore we start our colts off in the canter with the aid of quarter boots. It is often a good idea to canter a colt in a fairly large circle, and when he finds out he is not going anywhere he will stop trying to go fast and will soon develop a well established gait. As he becomes sure-footed we continue his training in circles, on the track, on sloping ground and in other places.

It is very important for every owner of a Tennessee Walking Horse to thoroughly understand the gaits of his horse, and to so develop him. If at all possible, have a good ground man to watch the performance of your horse doing the different gaits while you are riding him. He can tell you when and how to pick up your horse, when you are bitting him right, and tell you at what
angle he looks the best and does his best reaching. A good ground man is able to point out the things that are done wrong during the training period and a horse is usually straightened out much sooner if two people work together on him.

In the flatfoot walk the horse is supposed to walk "square and on all four corners" in a 1, 2, 3, 4 movement. The running walk should be a faster movement and with more stride. A ground man can watch your horse's movements from the front and from the rear as well as from the sides while the horse is being ridden. Watching them front or back, the ground man can tell the rider if the horse is going too fast, if he is "w winging" or throwing his feet, or is unusually wide behind. If the horse is "w winging" or wide behind he is not performing the gait correctly and it is better to take him back to a flatfoot and start again. From the sideview your horse is supposed to be moving in an even "gliding motion" with lots of nodding action.

All Tennessee Walking Horses should be exercised daily. If you do not have time to ride your Tennessee Walking Horses daily, turn them out in a small paddock for a portion of each day, or else work them on a long leadline of approximately 20 feet in a circle about you. Either of these methods will take lots of the play out of your horses and they will relax and settle down to work quicker. This also keeps the horses limber. A horse that stands in the stable constantly and with no exercise is prone to be tight and choppy in his gaits.

By working our two-year-olds only a small amount each day, they are fairly established in their flatfoot walk and running walk, with only a beginning in the canter at the end of their first year under saddle. But as the new year rolls around and our colts are three-year-olds, we increase their working time. They are more fully developed, larger in size and heavier in weight. As
we begin to finish our colts we continue to bring them out of the barn in a flatfoot walk. We spend plenty of time on this gait, for although it is is the slowest of the three gaits performed by the Tennessee Walking Horse it is by no means the least important. Remember a good flatfoot walk is the foundation of the never-to-be-forgotten running walk.

As three-year-olds we work our colts alternating between the running walk and then the flatfoot walk, because by now one gait will help perfect the other. Now is is easier for the horse to change from one gait to the other at the will of the rider. We are also doing more with the canter, and working it in more often with the flatfoot and running walk.

It is a good policy to work the horses on different tracks on the outside of the barn, as well as around over the countryside, ever in new territory. Too much riding on the track will often cause a horse to sour on working in a circle anywhere, including in the show ring. By the time he is a three-year-old you will have learned where your horse likes to work the best, and how to bit him to get the best gaits out of him. Always keep in form, and when you get the key to your horse and what it takes to make him perform his best, you are nearing your goal of having a top show or pleasure horse.

As far as shoeing the Tennessee Walking Horse is concerned, the weight carried by each horse together with the angle of its foot depends almost altogether with the horse; one horse may break too slow or too fast in front and not roll, or it may break too fast behind or too slow. We think that each individual horse is a different proposition, and should be studied by the rider and the ground man. Most Tennessee Walking Horses walk better if their feet are long. If they stumble or if their legs get sore, it is indicative that their feet are not at the correct angle. It is
advisable to have an experienced blacksmith attend to your horse's feet. You cannot make a horse in a blacksmith shop, but you may help correct a slight flaw. If we have horses that are inclined to pace in the fairly early part of their training, we shoe them with heavier shoes and ride them in loose ground, up and down the hillside, in tall weeds, or most anywhere that the going is hard. Caution: Do not shoe your two-year-old colts too heavily, because by so doing their tendons may be pulled or their legs otherwise permanently ruined. As previously stated in this article, the pace is a one-sided gait and when your horse in inclined to be thrown off balance he will stop pacing and begin to walk. When our horses are inclined to trot, we shoe them light in front and this time find some good, hard, level ground, then take the horse back to a flatfoot walk and gradually ride him out of it into a running walk. This may take time to bit him down and get him into a good running walk, but when he hits it you can be very sure you will have a good running walk that is square on all corners.

We keep the horses' ears and fetlocks closely clipped. It is a good idea to go over your horses daily with a rubber curry comb and a long bristled brush that is fairly soft. If a horse is inclined to have brittle hoofs, use a good hoof oil daily, and above all clean your horses' feet out every day, as this goes a long way in keeping your horses' feet healthy. The old adage "No foot, no horse" certainly applies to the Tennessee Walking Horse. In order to keep our horses looking their best we use light weight blankets on our horses in the stables. This does much for their hair toward keeping it clean and shining and making it lie smooth. We use tail sets on our horses and put them in stables equipped with tailboards. Our tailboards are about three feet high and 14 inches wide.