

## **Paul Buer – On Bringing Back 3-year-olds**

The last time we spoke with Paul Buer (Fan Favourite in November), the Norwegian-born conditioner for Joie De Vie Farm made reference to working his three-year-olds twice a day as part of their preparation for a return to the races. This time around, Buer goes into detail with respect to his approach on bringing back three-year-olds.

“I think three-year-olds can handle a lot more work than two-year-olds,” begins Buer. “And I believe it is important to give them a foundation that will carry them through a long, hard season. When I bring back a three-year-old, I work them alternate days in the sand pit and the pressure cart for the first three to four weeks.

“I start with eight minutes in the sand pit and build them up to 25 minutes, increasing two minutes each day they are in the pit. With the pressure cart, I start with 25 minutes and build up to 45 minutes, increasing five minutes each time. The pressure is set at 50 Bar on the wheels, and I work them five minutes with the pressure ‘on’ and two minutes with it ‘off’ and so on.

“For the next month I start jogging the three-year-old every day, starting with 15 minutes (three miles) and building up to 30 minutes (six miles). But in the middle of that period – or five weeks after they started back – I will start to take them out twice a day.

“The first time out (at about 6:30-7:30am) I jog them three miles. Then later in the morning we harness them and go out again. I will alternate between the sand pit, more jogging, the pressure cart and training in the second session of the day.

“If a horse is hardy and sound, the routine I’ve described so far will take about seven or eight weeks, before we move on to the ‘regular routine’. Sometimes you have to pull a horse out of this routine, if you have one that’s not sound enough, or not strong enough to handle the volume of work. But generally, I’ve found that this approach builds a foundation that makes the horse strong and durable, and also places far less stress on their joints.

Buer’s ‘regular routine’ is not the ‘usual’ approach for most North American conditioners:

“Ninety-five percent of my training is done on the straight track, and in intervals. In about week eight after their return after a layoff, I start my three-year-olds with five quarters in 41 seconds each, with 40 seconds in between each quarter. I train them twice a week, and continue doing five quarters each session – first in 41 seconds, then in 40 seconds, then 39, then five quarters in 38 seconds.

“At that point I will go six quarters in 38 seconds, and will stay there with the horses until their heart rate is where I want it.”

Buer has a specific approach – and a caveat – to measuring heart rates.

“After their workouts, we walk them for five minutes, then jog them for five minutes, then put them into the cross-ties for two minutes before checking their heart rate. I don’t think it really matters what routine you use after the workouts, but your approach after the workouts must be consistent to get proper readings on the heart rate. My horses are measured 12 minutes after the workout.

“Once I am satisfied with their heart rate, I will start to go seven quarters in 38 seconds ... then seven quarters in 37 seconds ... then seven in 36 seconds ... and finally seven quarters in 35 seconds. That’s where I hold them. I have found that once a horse has gone seven 35-second quarters a few times, you can train him anywhere.

“After they’ve reached that point, I bring them to the Meadowlands three times to be trained. The first time I will only go in 2:15. It’s a joke for them, but I am playing it safe and I want them to get used to the turns (again). The second week we train them in 2:08, and the third week in 2:02, though they are on tight lines. The next week, they should be ready to qualify in 1:58-1.59.”

Just as I think we have completed the approach to the returning three-year-old, Buer adds one more ingredient to the recipe.

“I almost forgot – but every six weeks, I turn them out for five days. I believe that if you are going to work a horse hard, he needs some rest along the way to absorb the training. It keeps them happy, and they deserve the break every now and then.”

Next time, we’ll focus on one of Buer’s racing students – and the approach during the race campaign itself.