

Putting a New Spin on an Old Drill

BY COREY HENDRICKSON AS TOLD TO WENDY LIND

In today's deep competition, making every maneuver the best it can be is vital. It is no different with the spin. Entering the show pen with your horse's turnaround tuned to maximum potential can mean the difference between marking the winning score or being out of the money.

There are many different drills that trainers use to teach and enhance the turnaround, and, in my own program, I have found one that works really well for me. It is not a drill I made up myself, but rather one I learned a while back from one of my mentors, Dr. Jim Morgan, a Non Pro rider who is more than capable of training his own horses. Over the years, I have tweaked the drill somewhat to work with my program, but it is a tool that anyone can use. Whether you are teaching a colt to quietly step around the turn, or freshening up an older horse's show ring spin, this drill will improve any horse's turnaround abilities. Besides being impressively simple, this drill will get even the most burned out warhorse looking forward to the spin.

The Ideal Turnaround

Before I explain the drill, let's first identify what we are after.

To me the ideal turnaround is one in which a horse quietly steps into the turn, crouches down and pivots on his hind end while turning freely in front. He should take big, sweepy, cadenced steps, turn harder every time you cluck, and then finish with a precise shut off.

A good turner will willingly start the turn and keep spinning on his own until asked to stop. Stylistically, I don't care if the horse's head is low or high, as

long as they are balanced and efficient in their movement.

To me, that is a great turnaround.

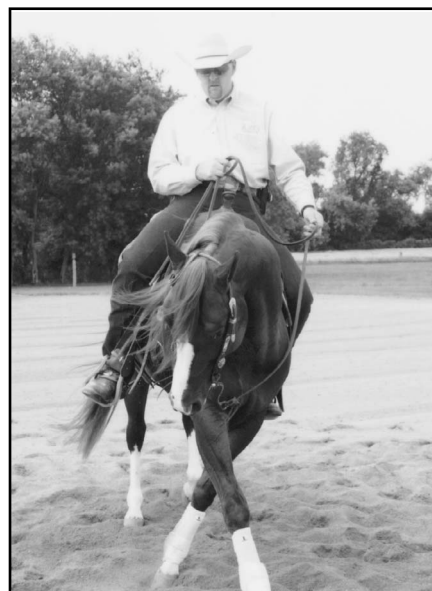
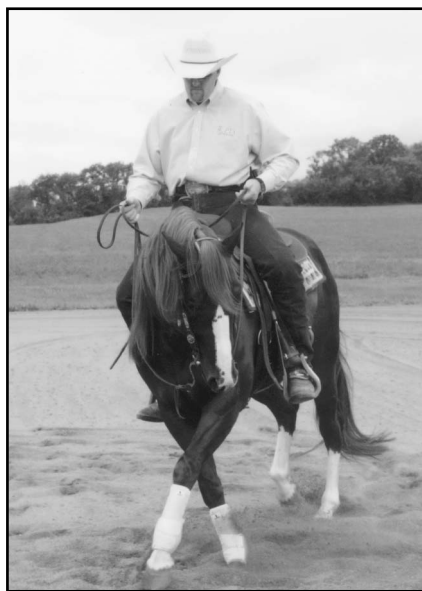
Basic Overview

The drill I am going to explain helps optimize a horse's turnaround, so they can execute the maneuver as close as possible to the ideal we established above. Obviously, there are going to be some horses that are just more talented in the spin than others, but this drill will help just about any horse.

In a quick overview, the drill involves trotting your horse counter-arced in a small circle while asking him to move his shoulders around his hind end as he keeps good forward momentum. Then, when you feel he is supple and

responsive, you will pick up your hands, change your directional cues, and drop him into a spin in the other direction. After spinning a couple of times, you will quietly push him out of the spin, counter-arc him the other direction, and trot a circle in the opposite direction from where you started.

By going through this drill with your horse, you will be working on important body positions integral to a good spin. First, you will be freeing up your horse's shoulders and encouraging him to turn with his shoulders standing up in the turn. This will allow him to make big, efficient and clean cross over steps. You also will be amazed how picking up those shoulders will clean up your turnaround, and you won't have to worry about the hind end traveling as much.



Photos by Gwendy Steif

By working on this drill of counter-arcing, you will be working on important body positions integral to a good spin.

On another level, the drill teaches horses to respect rein pressure. This drill gets a horse really between the reins, which will make your shut off more precise.

The Drill in Detail

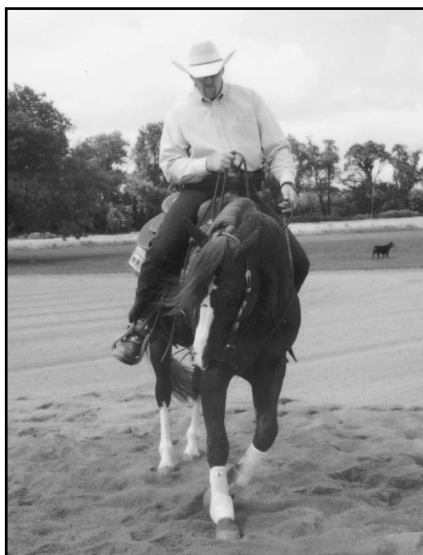
Now that you know the basic gist of the drill, let's go through it once in detail, starting to the left.

First, I start by arcing my horse to the right, while trotting a circle to the left. As I am doing this, I focus on moving my horse's shoulders around his hind end by bumping with my right leg and right rein cue. Don't think so much about pulling your horse's nose to the outside, but instead about moving his shoulders to the inside of the circle.

I continue trotting a circle in that inverted position, and I am talking a pretty small circle - just big enough that the horse is actually trotting and not trying to sit down and turn to the left. I don't worry about the horse crossing over in front when I am trotting that circle. Instead, I am more concerned about going forward and lifting the shoulder away from my outside leg and rein cues. I want everything from my leg forward, meaning the ribs, shoulders, neck, and head, to move away from the outside leg cue.

I keep trotting this circle until I feel the horse moving his shoulders willingly off of my cues, softening in the face and neck. Once I feel that, I will ask the horse to switch directions and spin to the right in the same position I have him counter-arc in. I do this by moving my hands to the right, opening up my right leg, and cueing with my left leg.

Because the horse was already arced slightly to the right while trotting (to where I can see his right eye), when I switch directions he is in the perfect position to spin to the right. When he steps into that turn, his shoulder is up and out of the way, which allows for those big, clean cross-over steps we are after. Then, depending on how far along the horse is in its training, I add a cluck for speed and outside (left) rein and leg pressure. On the more finished horses, I



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might turn six, seven, or eight times, and ask them to put some speed into it.

After I turn my horse around a couple of times, instead of just stopping, I keep the motion continuous and encourage him forward out of the turn by lowering my hands and pushing him forward. I then do the drill again, but the other direction. So I would counter-arc him to the left, while trotting the circle to the right.

By counter-arcing to start the drill, and counter-arcing after finishing the turn, you have pushed that shoulder all the way through the turnaround. That serves to loosen up those shoulders so they swing back and forth, teaching your horse that the shoulder never gets left behind and never sticks out past the outside rein. Throughout the drill, you want to keep everything soft and yielding and, as you ask with more hand and leg cues, your horse's shoulders should move faster.

Depending on the horse I am riding and how well trained they are, I might trot that counter-arc circle ten times until they break loose and soften up. Or, if that first circle is nice and soft and I feel the horse moving off of my cues and speeding up as I

ask, I will just trot one circle before switching to the turnaround.

With Younger Horses

With younger horses, I start working on this drill as soon as I can control their body. It really helps create a lot of guide, even out of the turnaround, while also teaching them to respond to an outside rein cue.

Instead of trotting a circle, however, I slow everything down with the greener horses and start by walking a circle and counter-arcing. Then, when I switch directions into the turn, I just let them step around quiet and maybe go through three or four steps. If I feel them lose forward momentum, I just walk out and ask them to do it again. I repeat this drill quietly, over and over, and gradually start adding speed when they are ready.

The Spin is the Reward

One of the great things about this drill is that it makes the spin the reward. Asking your horse to trot a small circle while counter-arced is uncomfortable and strenuous. It is not so hard that they can't do it or dread it, but it takes a lot of patience, strength, and body control. So, when you ask them to step into the turn, as soon as your hands move the other direction, their shoulders will go with your hands to the other direction.

To be honest, the more you do this drill, and as soon as you quit asking them to counter-arc and put your hands down for the turn, they will want to turn all by themselves. Often, they will even try to beat you to the turnaround. And when they do turn, they will turn with more deliberation and speed because their shoulders are up, and they can step around efficiently. When you make the turnaround the reward, it makes the horses look forward to it and they try harder.

Developing Strength

Another benefit of this drill is that it helps develop strength and fluidity, especially through a horse's back, shoulders, inner legs, and chest. Those are all stabilizing muscles that don't ordinarily

Meet Corey Hendrickson

Corey Hendrickson has been rising up the ranks of NRHA competition the last several years, and now has NRHA earnings of over \$71,000. Hendrickson also has several top futurity finishes to his credit, including the 2003 NCRHA Open and Intermediate Open Futurity championships on Heza Sure Whiz. In 2002, the trainer showed his NRHA Futurity entry, Smart Boot Tee, to a third place finish in the Intermediate Open Division while also winning the Reserve Limited Open Division championship title.

Originally from upstate New York, Corey didn't really decide to train horses for a living until later in life. "Where I grew up, you had two options for making a living: either working in an apple orchard or as a dairy farmer," says Hendrickson. Since he hated cows and didn't feel like picking apples, Corey took the first equine related job he was offered - breaking horses.

"Back then, it really wasn't training horses, it was just a round pen and a

bronc saddle, and you rode them until they quit bucking," he laughs.

Eventually, Corey followed his interest in Reining, and started riding reining horses twelve years ago, with an intermittent stint in the pleasure horse industry. Ironically, it was then that he met Dr. Jim Morgan.

"I needed help with a horse one day and I asked Jim for advice. He really is one of the main reasons I got hooked into the sport. Dutch Chapman and Charlie Smith also helped me a lot. Dutch taught me to show a horse, and Charlie taught me how to maintain an older horse," says Hendrickson.

Hendrickson also rode with Albert Burton for a while, before becoming head trainer at Even Odds Farm in Woodstock, Illinois, five years ago. Cliff and Gwendy Steif, who bred and originally owned Hollywood Dun It, own Even Odds Farm. Currently the operation has about twenty horses in training.

Corey says he learns the most from late night training sessions at the



Photo by Pat Feuerstein

major shows. "I have learned more training techniques in the middle of the night while watching Tim McQuay, Todd Bergen, Shawn Florida, all of my heroes," he says.

Corey just celebrated his third anniversary with his wife Katie. The couple has a son named Garrett, and a daughter, Taylor.

Special thanks to Gwendy Steif for the excellent photos that accompany this article.

get used in the other maneuvers we perform. By counter-arc-ing you are putting them in an off balance position, and the reward for them is to find their balance. So, they are stretching and strengthening those muscle groups. Additionally, when you start lifting that shoulder up, you are also loosening the muscles on the inside of the leg that is stepping over, as well as the muscles that run all the way up the shoulder, neck, and poll.

Finishing Touches

I use this drill to teach the spin to the younger horses in my barn. For the older, finished horses, it is both a good tune up and warm up exercise. With this horse, I start out with the drill to loosen his shoulders and muscles. After my horse is warmed up, I will stop him, let him catch his air, and then ask him to turn from a standstill like I would in the show pen.

When I do work on starting the spin from a stop, I initiate the spin by drawing the outside rein across my horse's neck. Then, when I feel my horse is committed to the spin, I cluck and add speed. On a finished horse, when I ask for the spin, I should feel that inside front foot step back

out of the way. As soon as I feel that, and the outside front crossing over, that is when I am going to cluck and add speed. I make a point to not cluck continuously, but instead just once or so. In reality, I want my horses to turn on their own, without the cluck. When they do hear me cluck, that is a cue to get going. I might also follow up the cluck with a cue from my outside leg. At that point, I will have my hand down, and the horse should lock into position and turn until I tell him to stop. I try to cluck once a revolution, and maybe twice on the third spin to finish that turn with a lot of electricity.

If, however, I feel the horse step forward, then I am going to pick my hand up and make sure I have them committed to the turn before I ask for speed and go through the rest of my cue sequence.

A turnaround to me is confined forward motion. And in order to confine forward motion, a horse has got to move his shoulders around his hind end. In

the same sense, my horses don't generally hold a pivot foot, but instead they reposition that pivot foot from time to time without traveling. I personally feel that a horse that holds his pivot foot in the ground without repositioning can in no way turn as fast as one that repositions the pivot foot.

Simple and Effective

To me, the most impressive part of this drill is that it is so simple. It makes so much sense once you do it. A lot of people bend their horse's head the direction they are going to go, and pull them into the turn tighter and tighter. I myself am not good at that, so I had to find a way that I could get the same results with a different strategy. This drill fits that requirement. Over the years, I just tweaked this exercise to suit me, and I found that the more I could get a horse to lift that shoulder while trotting in that small circle, the more he wanted to turn. I truly believe if you work on this drill, you will see a marked improvement in your horse's ability to spin. □

Reiner

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