

Fencing the Reining Horse

Fencing is a drill that I consistently utilize to school my horses, and to teach them to use correct body alignment, position and speed, thereby developing a great run down and ultimately, a great sliding stop.

The NRHA Rulebook defines rundowns or run-arounds as "...runs through the middle of the arena, and runs along the side and ends of the arena. Rundowns and run-arounds should demonstrate control and gradual increase in speed to the stop."

Stops as defined by the NRHA are "...the act of slowing the horse from a lope to a stop position by bringing the hind legs under the horse in a locked position sliding on the hind feet. The horse should enter the stop position by bending the back, bringing the hind legs further under the body while maintaining forward motion and ground contact and cadence with front legs. Throughout the stop, the horse should continue in a straight line while maintaining ground contact with the hind feet."

A reining horse must learn to run properly so that he can balance himself over his hind end and execute a correct sliding stop on his own (on a slack rein). Proper body alignment is critical; your horse should be straight from the poll to his tail and should not lean or drift in any direction while being guided towards the fence on a loose rein. The horse should be patient and wait for you to cue (ask) for increased speed. To utilize the tool of fencing correctly, you and your horse must learn to build speed with every stride while keeping straight and not drifting towards any "magnets" (see my article on Show Pen Advice for more on magnets). If you achieve straight body alignment and a gradual build of speed, a good reining horse will automatically engage his hind end to come to a stop before the fence. You must allow the horse to complete the stop on his own by giving him slack and trusting him, so that he can learn to balance and get into the ground on his own accord. Although you will have to correct him on his way down the pen (when he is too fast, when he is leaning, when he is drifting) you must not baby-sit him. The only way the horse will learn to fence correctly (and achieve great stops) is if you trust him (with a slack rein) and only lift your reins or take contact with his face to correct something.

When you practice fencing at home or in the warm-up pen at a show, it is important to make sure you are working on both leads. This means loping one length of the pen to the fence on the right lead and back to the other end of the pen on the left.

I use fencing as a tool, a drill; it will not teach a horse with no desire or inherent ability to perform a sliding stop. I am a believer that horses are bred to achieve a sliding stop and that a horse must have that innate ability and desire in their lineage. There are always exceptions to the rule, but to a serious reining trainer or breeder, proven pedigrees and bloodlines are extremely important.

Fencing will help a reining horse learn to perform a rundown and sliding stop to the best of its natural ability. The success is in the approach. Your horse wants to stop; as the rider, you must make it as easy and uncomplicated for the horse as you can.

Remember have fun and be patient!

Gregg Lauder