

Teaching the Young Horse the Turnaround

Before working on reining maneuvers with your young horse you will need the following equipment:

- ▶ a snaffle bit;
- ▶ a running martingale; and
- ▶ splint boots to protect your horse's front legs from accidental contact.

Your horse should have a basic education before you teach reining maneuvers. Also, he must be physically able and mentally trainable to achieve any degree of success.

Before starting your turnaround training, warm-up 10-15 minutes by trotting and loping both directions. This will allow your horse's muscles to become supple and will allow time for his mind to settle and focus on you. Then, at the walk using two hands, guide him into a 3 meter circle to the left. Tip your horse's head to the inside of the circle until you can see the corner of his left eye. While maintaining light contact with your hands, lightly bump with both legs just behind the cinch, to drive your horse into your hands. Your horse should then flex at the poll, round his back and shift his weight to his hindquarters, freeing his shoulders and front legs to lift and reach. If your horse has difficulties with this exercise use just enough of a correction with your legs or hands to solve the problem (maybe you need to bump a little harder with your legs and apply slightly more pressure with your hands). Maintain your cues until he responds the release and try again. **Your release is telling the horse he did something correctly.** Depending on your horse, this could take one session or several.

When your horse can maintain this frame and stay soft, supple and relaxed on every circle you're ready to teach a turnaround. Walk 3 or 4 circles to the left as discussed, guide your horse into smaller and tighter circles using your neck rein as well as keeping him focused inside, release your left leg (inside leg) and maintain a steady and cadenced bump with your right leg (outside). Be patient and keep your cue steady until your horse starts to slow his hindquarter down and crossover in front. Once your horse crosses over correctly, release your cues, reward him and try again (starting by walking circles again to the same side). One or two correct steps in the beginning is great. Work on the same side 3 or 4 times or until he is good, then switch to the other side. Now you have a foundation for your turnaround and can build the number of crossover steps gradually during your training sessions down the road. **Remember to keep it slow and relaxed, speed is not your goal at this point in your training.** Cadence and correctness is what you want. For a right turn, simply reverse the directions, change your leg and frame position.

When starting to teach the turnaround to a young a horse expect the unexpected. If he walks a good framed circle but as you start to guide into a smaller and smaller circle he wants to cross under instead of over, you should try to release your hands more as you initiate the turn, keep him focused to the inside, maintain your steady outside leg bump, and reward him for a good crossover step. Your horse wanting to "suck back" to much is not a bad thing, as he is using his hind end and sitting back. You should also try to increase your inside bend with your rein. This will encourage him to step over correctly. If he steps under, walk out and try again until he gets it right, release and reward. Again, you are looking for 1 or 2 correct steps, you cannot expect more until you can achieve this. Training is a series of small steps, not one giant leap.

Another common reaction when starting to teach the turnaround is the horse that does not slow his forward momentum enough to really reach across with his front legs. To encourage him to slow down and reach across you will have to make a stronger barrier with your hands. As you start to make your framed circles smaller, keep him focused inside and increase the pressure with both reins slowly, while maintaining your cadenced bump with your outside leg. Be patient and

wait until you feel him want to back off from your hand pressure and move away from your outside leg...then release and reward. Timing is important and you want to reward him when he has tried to figure out what you want (slow down and reach across). If (after a good crossover step and you have released and rewarded him) he wants to walk off again, no problem, don't force him to stay there... just go right back to work walking circles and try again. Soon he will figure out that remain still after a couple of good crossovers steps is easier than wanting to walk out. In this situation, him wanting to wait for you to ask him to go forward is what you want. **Remember that horses learn by repetition and by keeping your program simple and sticking to it, you are giving your horse the best possible chance to figure out what you want.**

You should practice teaching the turnaround maybe 2 or 3 times per week (assuming your horse is worked 5 days a week). Schooling every day may create resentment and this does not motivate your horse to learn. Keep him fresh and willing by (between turnaround sessions) loping circles or working on basic body exercises.

Good luck and be patient!