

A Lesson

REINING

with
Shaun Saunders

Shaun Saunders is a force to be reckoned with in the world of reining and in 2013 was the leading money earner.

At the tender age of 17 Shaun clocked up his first major win in the National Reining Horse Association Open Derby. Since then awards continue on.

At only 26 years of age, this young gun professional trainer and rider has amassed over \$130,000 in prize money and together with his wife, Hayley, has 15 horses in work and in their care at Wamuran Old Horse Deals is pleased to present our trainer of the month, Shaun Saunders.



Reining is like dancing where two partners perform a routine. When danced well, it is a beautiful demonstration of horse and rider in sync and harmony with each other. There is a leader and a follower, obviously the rider is the leader and the horse should be a willing follower. In the dance of reining you are judged on how well you and your horse execute each manoeuvre. The best reining manoeuvres are achieved when you guide the horse with very subtle cues and the horse responds without resistance. The less you have to do, to get the horse to do the manoeuvre, the better. Hence, why it can look so easy.

Each manoeuvre is scored with either plus or minus, depending on how well it is performed. Major factors include: Correctness, Willingness, Finesse, Speed and Degree of Difficulty. With the best reining horses, the more you ask for, the more they give. They do this for two reasons, because with good training we have rewarded their try, and secondly because great reiners have great attitudes.

NRHA has 12 patterns and each pattern consists of stops and rollbacks, spins each way, 2 large fast circles and one small slow circle left and right, 2 lead changes, stop and back up. Each pattern does these manoeuvres in a different order. I could write a whole chapter on each manoeuvre but I will keep it short and explain what we look for and ways we as riders better ourselves and stay out of our horse's way.

SPINS OR TURNAROUNDS

Beginning from a standstill, the horse spins 360 degrees or more (up to four and one-quarter full turns) in place around its inside hind leg. It is a spectacular manoeuvre to watch, the smoother and faster it is the more spectacular and the more points are awarded. The hind pivot foot remains in essentially the same location throughout the spin, though the horse will pick it up and put it down as it turns. Spins are judged on correctness, smoothness, and cadence. Speed adds to the difficulty and will improve the score if done correctly.

Great spins are all about good footwork, the more efficient a horse uses their feet the faster and more cadenced they can spin. The most important thing is to get the front feet moving correctly. The inside front foot should reach back and lateral,

almost up under your foot. This will allow plenty of room for the outside front foot to cross over. The closer a horse keeps their front legs and hind legs, the faster and more cadenced they can turn. We can only achieve this when they have their back picked up and they are soft in the bridle, if they lean on our hands they will transfer their weight to their forequarters and leave their front feet too far out in front of them. When a horse gets on its front end it will shift its hind end.



Lay the neck rein against the neck, not across it.

We have to remember that we have to do all this one handed. With this in mind it is very important we teach our horses to neck rein. Our horses should move off our outside bridle rein and look away from the neck rein. It is reinforced with our outside leg. We should lay the neck rein against our horses' neck, not across it.

CIRCLES

The circles may not be the trademark manoeuvre but when performed well are extremely exciting, and while in the early days of reining they were just used to get from the spins to the stops, are now just as important to perform well in an event where half points can make all the difference. They show how well trained our horse is and if we haven't done our homework it will show up in the circles.

We perform large fast circles at a near-gallop and smaller slow circles at a lope. Our circles should be perfectly round, with the rider dictating the pace of the horse. There should be a defined change of speed as the rider transitions from the large fast to the small slow circle.

Circles are also a very important part of our training. We use circles to teach our horses to guide and stay between the reins. They are the foundation to teach collection and softness.

If they are tracking the circle and their body is in the correct frame and they are going the speed we ask, then we need to get out of their way and give them some responsibility!



The outside front foot crosses over the inside front!



Give your horse a sweet spot or a spot where we release the pressure on the reins and off our legs.

photo: Susan Cartmellan

In my opinion, the most important thing to keep in mind when riding circles is to give our horses a sweet spot or a spot where we release the pressure on the reins and off our legs. If they are tracking the circle and their body is in the correct frame and they are going the speed we ask, then we need to get out of their way and give them some responsibility. When they drop their shoulder, speed up or leak out then we have an excuse or reason to train on them. The more we can put our hand down in our circles and leave them alone, the higher the degree of difficulty and more points we will receive.

SLIDING STOP

The trademark of the reining horse, and the most exciting manoeuvre to watch along with the spin. The horse should accelerate to a gallop and then when we cue the horse saying the word "Whoa", pushing into our heels and slight contact on the reins, they should go to ground, planting their hind feet in the ground and allowing their hind feet to slide, while continuing to "walk" forward or pedal in the front.

The back should be raised upward and hindquarters come well underneath, with the horse almost folding in half.

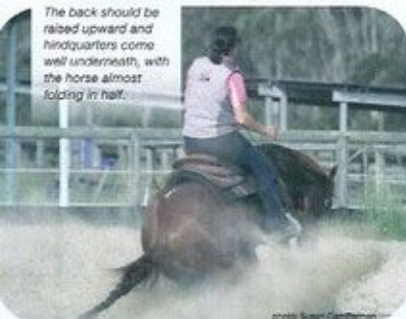
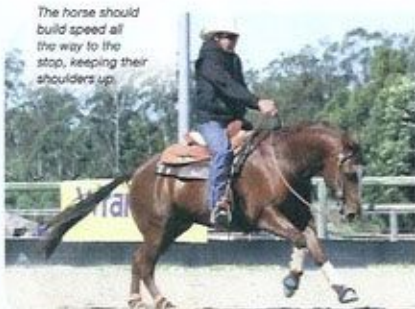


photo: Susan Cartmellan

A great stop begins with a good approach; your horse must run down to the stop straight and build all the way, gaining momentum all the way to the stop. That way your horse's shoulders will be up and can initiate the stop on their hindquarter.



The horse should build speed all the way to the stop, keeping their shoulders up.

photo: Susan Cartmellan

Two things that will wreck a stop are:

1. **Blasting off in the run down.**
2. **Losing momentum to the stop or 'scotching'** as we call it, this will cause your horse to get on their front end and not stop as well. These two problems can be avoided or fixed with good training and a maintenance program. Horses that burst to a stop, for example jumping gears from 2nd to 5th, are generally getting too excited about the stop, as a lot of good stoppers do and are in a hurry to get down there. We need to teach them to wait for us to ask for them to build and if they do burst, don't reward them with a stop. Simply draw them back to the speed you asked for and make them work for it in a tight circle until they come back to you. Scotching is the horse anticipating the stop and beating you to the ground before you ask for it. This can be avoided by a good fencing program and not stopping your horse too short too often. If you have a lazier type horse they will be more inclined to beat you to the stop, in which case you should not stop short very often.

The most important things we need to remember as riders are...

- Sit up and allow our back to be a shock absorber, if you sit up too straight and stiff in your stop and your horse goes to ground too hard you will get jarred forward in your stop.
- Look up and ride your horse all the way to your stop. It will help you sit better and stay out of your horse's way.
- Be slow with your hand when you ask your horse to stop. This will give your horse plenty of signal you want to stop.
- Don't throw yourself back when you ask for the stop, this will affect your horse's balance and possibly make them go to ground hard and stiff.



photo: Susan Cartmellan



ROLLBACK

Performed at the end of a sliding stop, the rollback is the spectacular act of the horse turning 180° on their hindquarter, over its tracks and loping out in preparation for the next manoeuvre. A snappy, crowd pleasing rollback will add points to your stop.

Timing is very important in a good rollback. Allowing your horse to stand up at the end of its stop, and then as your horse starts to rock back placing their weight on their hindquarter, is the best time to initiate the rollback, looking up over your shoulder to where you want to go, starting slow and riding out strong.

When training the rollback it is good to overturn say 360° and lope out to keep your horse honest and not leaking out of that rollback. If they get used to turning 360° and loping out, 180° is going to be easy.

LEAD CHANGES

There is a left and right lead change in all patterns except short stop and beginner patterns. It is the act of changing the horse's leading front and hind legs at the lope mid-stride, during the suspension phase of the gait. The horse should not break gait. Precision is the most important factor: A horse taking more than one stride to complete the change, or a horse that changes early, late, or that changes only the front feet and not the hind feet will be penalized. You may not gain a lot of points in a lead change, but you can sure lose a lot, so it is important to pay attention and get it right.

Body control is the most important factor in lead changes. To train our horses to change leads and keep our horses honest in their lead changes, it is important to have good hip control.

Our horses should move off our legs softly and stay soft in the face when doing so. Counter canter is also an important exercise for teaching our horses hip control and training and maintaining lead changes.

Keeping your horse from dropping their shoulder through the change is important so we don't drag leads or have late lead changes. A good exercise to keep your show horse honest and not dropping their shoulder and anticipating the change is to ride your horse through the centre and set up for the change but don't actually change, counter canter until your horse is relaxed and waiting on you. Then ask your horse to change, reinforcing that they keep their shoulder picked up and their hip drives deep. Looking up and sitting back allows us to use our legs effectively in the lead change.

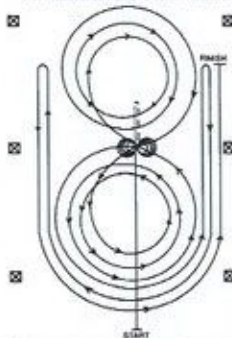
BACKUP

The horse backs up quickly for at least 10 feet (3m). The horse must back in a perfectly straight line, stop when asked and hesitate a moment before the next manoeuvre. It is judged on quickness, willingness and smoothness.

When teaching our horses to stop, the backup is very helpful. It allows us to teach our horse to be soft in the bridle, transfer their weight to their hindquarter and hocks and pick their back up. Backing your horse up each day helps build strength through your horse's top line.

Reining is an exciting sport that requires a lot of horsemanship to get shown. If you are interested in getting started in reining make sure you seek out a good trainer and well trained horse. Go to a lot of the major shows and watch the reining. Find someone you like: their style, their horses, and introduce yourself. Most reining trainers will be happy to help you in any way they can.

A REINING PATTERN



1. Run past the centre marker and do a sliding stop. Back up to the centre of the arena or at least ten feet. Hesitate.
2. Complete four spins to the right. Hesitate.
3. Complete four and one-quarter spins to the left so that horse is facing the left wall or fence. Hesitate.
4. Beginning on the left lead, complete three circles to the left: The first circle small and slow; the next two circles large and fast. Change leads at the centre of the arena.
5. Complete three circles to the right: The first circle small and slow; the next two circles large and fast. Change leads at the centre of the arena.
6. Begin a large fast circle to the left but do not close this circle. Run up the right side of the arena past the centre marker and do a right rollback at least twenty feet from the wall or fence - no hesitation.
7. Continue back around the previous circle but do not close this circle. Run up the left side of the arena past the centre marker and do a left rollback at least twenty feet from the wall or fence - no hesitation.
8. Continue back around previous circle but do not close this circle. Run up right side of the arena past the centre marker and do a sliding stop at least twenty feet from the wall or fence. Hesitate to demonstrate completion of the pattern. Rider must dismount and drop bridle to the designated judge.

The best reining manoeuvres are achieved when you guide the horse with very subtle cues and the horse responds without resistance.



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