

BECOME A BETTER HORSEMAN *with* Joy Wargo

The best way to improve our barrel racing is to become a better horseman. Being a better horseman should be a lifelong pursuit. I realize this is a very broad statement since horsemanship includes riding, nutrition, health, training, and everything in between. Two topics I seem to address the most when people come to ride with me are soundness of the horse and riding correctly during a run.

In order for us to improve our times and have effective runs, our horses must be physically able to do their jobs. If the horse is sore, the run or the training process is always less productive. Knowing our horses and paying attention to how they ride or move is very important. Noticing changes in the way they do maneuvers, the way they travel beneath you, and their attitudes will help you stay ahead of train wrecks. My general rule is if a horse does something twice that is out of character for that individual, we are going to see our vet. I say twice because we all can have a bad day. Things I consider out of character include: hesitation in the alley way, elevating in a turn, head shaking on the pattern, being worried or hot when asked to do a maneuver, a change in the way they stop or turn around, tail wringing, refusal to take leads, and a bad attitude. Along with seeing the vet, also consider some of your other team members, like your farrier, dentist, chiropractor, and any others. I firmly believe it's better to error on the side of caution and give that horse the benefit of the doubt and rule out any soreness before I start to tune or school on one. If they are physically unable to work and are disciplined for it you can cause more harm than good. Pay attention--the horses will tell you when there is a problem--you just need to listen.

The other topic is riding correctly on the pattern. Granted every horse is different and training styles vary, so for this article we will address the way I believe is correct. I will give you some background to help you understand "my way". I quickly learned when I arrived in Texas that I didn't know near as much as I had thought. I did not ride as well as I thought and my hands are not the only body part used to run barrels. I was able to ride with and watch a reining cow horse trainer. Turns out your legs and seat are the most important communication tools you have when riding. Staying balanced in the middle of your horse and riding square are very important. I learned to ride my horse from the hind end forward. I learned what it meant to have one soft in the rib cage and face, elevate the shoulders, and engage the hind quarters. I learned how to ride a horse that's in an athletic position. I also learned to keep myself in an athletic position. Now this is important because it makes everything easier for you and your horse.

I believe as a whole, our horses are honest. They do what we ask even when we don't realize that we asked it. It is important to be conscious of where our body is and what we are communicating to our horse. A very slight change in your pelvis being tilted forward or back is the difference between go and stop. Where you look when riding changes your body. If you look down in a turn your inside shoulder drops and so does your inside hip, which causes your inside leg to make contact and your horse will step their hip away. If you pull an outside rein your outside shoulder moves further to the outside, your outside hip drops, and your outside leg lays against your horse causing them to drift their inside rib and shoulder to the barrel. So you thought your hands

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said step over to the outside and what your legs and seat really said was hit the barrel. Every time you pull a rein or look in another direction your body changes. It's important to learn body control and to know what you are asking your horse to do all the time. If you ride the hind end of your horse and you ride square and balanced, you allow them to be in an athletic position. From this position they have elevated shoulders and can change direction mid stride. If you ride the front end you often cause them to be heavy in the front and they have delayed reaction to critical cues. Riding correctly on a horse that is truly broke will allow them to really use themselves by engaging the hind quarter and opening their shoulder for greater stride and power.

This is where you can utilize an average run horse with a strong and efficient turn and create a winner. Riding the hind end and riding correctly is a game changer! Riding the hind end will make a horse move forward much more freely!

Continuing to improve our overall horsemanship and especially riding correctly and listening to your horse when they are telling you they are hurt will make a positive difference in your barrel racing. Use your resources, look outside the box, ride with other disciplines, attend clinics, and become a better horseman.



JOY WARGO & JW FREEZE FAME
Photo Credit Pixel Worx

JOY WARGO...

I am originally from Wyoming. I moved to Texas in 2001 with my husband, Trent Wargo. I started to attend futurities in 2008. I began training futurity horses full-time in 2012.

Accomplishments include...

- BFA Futurity Reserve World Champion
- AQHA Senior Barrels World Champion
- AQHA Amateur Barrels Reserve World Champion
- AQHA Senior Barrels Reserve World Champion
- OKC Summer Shootout 1D Champion
- ANHA Shootout 1D Champion
- DDBHC Open 1D Champion
- 2X American Semi Finalist

Notable Horses. I've trained...

- SMOKIN KOA LENA,
- CASHIN ON THE BAYOU
- VEGAS FIREFIGHTER