

Training For The Stop

with Fred Hunter

When focusing on the stop in your training program the initial step is getting the horse's back soft with a break in the poll. I do this by first making sure my horse can lunge both ways easily in a circle. I then bit the horse up with our Train to Win bit by taking the left rein under the chest back up the girth doing the same with the right rein which I tie together in a knot over the saddle. I begin with slight tension on the reins and move the horse forward in the circle; as the horse becomes comfortable I then tighten the reins by degrees applying more tension until the horse can actually lope circles with his face at a ninety degree angle with the ground.

When I stop the horse I prefer he stays straight and not turn in towards me. This is also the opportunity to get the horse to back freely.

This exercise is not limited to a certain time frame or age of a horse; it is a great tool for breaking the horse down and softens them in the poll.

Continuing to ride with the Train to Win bit you will eventually find the horse bending and flexing with a break in the poll. This creates

softness in the back and better nose position for the stop.

Generally I use 'whoa' as a cue for the stop; this is critical not only in the training process but also in the show pen. As Nancy shows our horses she does what we call 'ride the horse into the stop' mean-

ing she is pushing the horse to the stop in two ways—verbally and release of rein pressure. The verbal whoa may be spoken one to three times depending on the rodeo environment such as Redding, CA with a long alleyway and a great distance to the first barrel or the opposite situation at the Days of 47 Rodeo which is a small indoor arena. Second, is a deep seat in the saddle pushing the rein hand forward, releasing all rein pressure.

I have found that a hand or rein check from the rider interferes with the horse's timing creating too many mixed signals.

The use of the word 'whoa' is the basic condition response training of the stop, so from the ground while lunging the horse to the finished horse you reinforce the verbal whoa.

The point needs to be made that in any discipline—reining, dressage, jumping, cutting or barrel racing—the great trainers will always tell you they can never have a horse broke enough. I never give up on working the stop, even with a horse that I have worked for several years.

There are many things that you can use when working the stop—walls or corners are all good tools. I will drive a horse into a corner where he has to stop using a verbal whoa as well as the rein contact. Walls or long fences also help to keep the body straight. The use of a wall or fence when stopping and backing allows me to change direction on the horse keeping him on his hocks. There are two elements to this change of direction; one, the body needs to be straight and two, you need to allow enough room from the wall to make the turn.

Eventually this consistent training allows me to stop my horses with their nose bent, shoulders lifted and hips engaged in the stop, setting them up for the perfect barrel turn.

There are many training tools and significant time that goes into creating the correct stop on the barrel. I believe the barrel horse stop is the most difficult train and step one in the math, yet is overlooked or neglected in many barrel horse training programs.

Again, the stop is only one fourth of the math in the turn of the barrel. As you study these two pictures, you will recognize one left

turn and one right turn on two different horses and yet the stop is almost identical.

View the video below:

