

Bridle Up with
Dennis Auslam

LUNGING THE BARRELS

In the last article, I discussed the basics of properly lunging your horse. This time, I will be building on that skill by adding another element: barrels. Lunging your horse through a pattern of barrels will help him become more supple and soft in the bridle. It will also teach him to watch where he puts his feet and to multi-task (by listening to you and paying attention to where he is putting his feet). When a horse learns to watch where they are going, your ride is going to be much safer.



I use 10-12 plastic barrels
A four-knot rope halter
A 12-foot lead rope
and a training stick

I would recommend using 10-12 plastic barrels of any size. Steel barrels are not a good alternative because they can injure the horse. If you don't have barrels, I recommend investing in them. They are inexpensive, accessible, and very helpful when doing exercises like these. In addition to barrels, I also use a four-knot rope halter, a 12-foot lead, and a training stick. When lunging a horse through the barrels, it's important for you to stay outside the pattern of barrels. If you don't, the horse will have you trained to stay in the barrels while he's on the outside running around.

When setting the barrels up, I don't put them in any certain pattern. The first few times you do this exercise, the horse will knock the barrels around and reposition them, but eventually they get tired of that because it's uncomfortable for them. Soon, they'll start watching where they're going and bumping into the barrels less.

would if there were no barrels. I send my horse out into the barrels on about six feet of line and get control over his shoulder right away. If I have the proper amount of respect and control of his shoulder, I am able to get him to go where I want in the barrels. I try to stay even with the drive line, which is right behind the shoulder.

A lot of times when a horse is first introduced to the barrels, he will reject them. If my horse rejects going into the barrels, I let him punish himself. For example, if he wants to side pass outside the barrels, I let him. If he wants to back up, I let him. I will encourage him to continue to side pass or back up until he realizes that he is only making more work for himself.

Once the horse has mastered going through the barrels, it's time to work on the "whoa." I ask my horse to stop the same way I would if I was

To start this exercise, I begin the same way I

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Continued.....Lunging Barrels

lunging without the barrels: I ask for a “whoa,” then follow it up with another “whoa” if he doesn’t listen the first time. If he still doesn’t respond, I will firmly pull down on the lead, which transfers pressure to the knots on the rope halter. Once my horse stops, I remove all pressure. When my horse has stopped, I make him stand and wait for directions while staying focused on me. It’s important to make the horse stop and wait because if you are constantly rolling your horse back and forth, “whoa” just becomes a reverse.

Next, after my horse is focused on me, I ask for a reverse by pointing my stick in the direction I want him to go and tap the ground next to him. If he does not move off, I will tap his shoulder with the training stick. Initially, I don’t like to reverse my horse inside the barrels; until he has gotten his footing, I will ask for a reverse outside the barrels.

When my horse has successfully reversed directions, I continue sending him through the barrels the same way as before. Remember that if your horse rejects the barrels again, let him continue to punish himself until he realizes he is wasting energy. Just stay behind the drive line and work with him. Whatever your horse does, never let him stop and take a break; that’s only rewarding bad behavior. When bad behavior is not corrected, it becomes trained behavior. While bad behavior needs to be corrected, we also need to remember to reward good behavior. Some horses respond to a pat on the forehead, while others prefer a verbal cue. It varies from horse to horse. Find out what your horse responds best to and use it when needed.

I never lope a horse through the barrels; I only walk and trot them. I also never stand in the same place while doing this exercise. I continue working my way around the pattern, keeping on the outside while encouraging my horse to go forward. While doing this, I still maintain control over the shoulder and keep his nose and eye on me. Remember to release the pressure on the line whenever the horse gives.



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Continued.....Lunging Barrels

When I'm working with a green colt, I do this exercise every day that we work. For the first 30 days I work with a colt, this is the first thing they go through because it makes them start to pay attention to me and learn to get their feet where they need to be. This exercise builds a work ethic and gives them direction, as well as discipline. However, on older horses that need a tune-up or are having disciplinary issues, I do it on an as-needed basis. I usually do this exercise for 15-20 minutes, depending on the particular horse and the condition it's in.

One of the advantages of lunging a horse through a pattern of barrels is the safety factor. If I'm having trouble lunging a horse or if a horse is behaving badly, this is the first exercise I use. The barrels will protect you by giving you a barrier. When you reverse your horse, you can step behind a barrel. Chances are, if your horse moves towards you, it will avoid the barrel, therefore avoiding you.

Do YOU have an idea for an article? If you have a topic you wish to read about or any question you want answered, please e-mail Addie O'Neil at aoneil233@gmail.com.

By Dennis Auslam with Maria Gilland
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About Dennis Auslam:



Dennis has been a trainer for over 30 years, working with many different breeds and disciplines. He grew up with horses and has worked with some of the best trainers in the industry. His passion is horses and people and he loves helping people learn how to work with their horses, progress in their riding abilities and make that connection with their horse. You will find Dennis at various horse related events in 2013. He also does numerous clinics and demos, both at his stable Redwood Stables in Morton, MN and at other venues. His main focus is on confidence building for the horse and the rider.

For information regarding his clinics and demonstrations please visit his website at www.redwoodstables.com. Interested in hosting a clinic? Call (507) 525-6691 or email us at redwoodstables@mvtvwireless.com.