

FARMER'S QUARTER HORSES

JOE FARMER

Common Barrel Problems and Fixes...

As a young boy, I was surrounded by a family of barrel racers. Among my father and sister, there were a host of family friends always spending our weekends at local horse shows. I started out at age 3 doing walk-trot and then advancing to pee wee barrels.

It has been in my experience over the years there are some common problems with running the barrel pattern ranging from over shooting the barrel to diving on the barrel to horses stiffening up and not turning.

Some remedies I have come up with to resolve these issues after ruling out physical pain (teeth, chiropractic, etc.) are, first of all do some basic drills before doing pattern work, such as working on crossing over in the front end. I always want my horse to extend their outside leg over in front of the inside leg, keeping their weight and power on their inside hock and always continuing to drive forward. I want my horse to listen to verbal cues, also by my weight and body position. I also want them to stop on a loose rein and keep them soft laterally.

I do the basic warm ups, long trotting, loping circles, roll backs, keeping them stopping on a loose rein, lateral flexion and once they are sharpened up, I then move on to the pattern.



Common first barrel problems I have encountered are having a horse that runs too straight and ends up either running down the fence or they get to the barrel and do not have enough room to make the turn at that speed. Therefore, they have to slow down to an almost stop and gather themselves, then take off again, costing you time. When I determine the size of pocket

they need, and every horse is different, so your horse will have to tell you exactly how much pocket they need, I generally give a lot of room when slow working since they will tighten up when running faster. If I'm working



Joe Farmer has been barrel racing since 1990 when he, along with his father and sister, barrel raced as a family. Joe won the KMBRA Adult and Youth division of barrels in 2004 and was high point winner in 2003 of the Grayson Co. Agriculture & Recreation summer circuit. Among barrel racing, Joe has done some exhibition poles. He now breaks and trains horses at his facility in Leitchfield, KY. Joe enjoys the challenge of breaking horses along with working to solve issues. In his spare time, Joe enjoys barrel racing his palomino mare, Bellas Golden Pistol and client horses.

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with a horse that runs off at the first barrel, I will start at a walk and ask them to stop on a loose rein approximately 2 to 3 strides before the barrel and back off the bit a few steps. Then, I walk forward a couple steps and stop again, then let them stand for a few seconds to comprehend “I have to slow down and turn instead of running off”. I NEVER want a horse to get to a barrel and speed up. Again, give them plenty of room behind the turn and finish close. Sometimes I will do this several times until they get soft in my hands and are listening. Then I move on to the next barrel.

The second barrel issue I have dealt with most often is a “diver”. They want to dive into the barrel instead of circling. The best routine I have found to address this is heading straight to the second barrel and approximately 2 strides before the barrel, shift your weight into the outside stirrup and use the inside rein to step their shoulder out. Ask them to stop on a loose rein; that changes their thinking from anticipating the turn too soon. Again, exaggerate the pocket on approach and the room behind the barrel so they stay comfortable and on the backside of the turn, put weight in the inside stirrup to finish up close and tight.

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The third barrel is similar to the second barrel on turning issues. I have encountered running to the barrel and not having a pocket and ending up going in too close. Again, I will step their shoulder out about 2 to 3 strides before the barrel and an exaggerated “whoa” and a deep seat to stop on a loose rein. Back them up a few steps, then keep a nice soft circle with lots of room. On the backside, step into the inside stirrup for them to follow my weight into finishing up the turn close.

In some cases, I have had horses that wanted to start running again before they finish the turn. To help in this case, I have found that while turning I will leave the barrel and stop them, back them up to keep them squared up and to let them know they can't run again until they finish the turn completely.

My horse is always rewarded for the slightest effort. Always be as fast or faster to praise your horse as you are to correct and scold them. Horses learn from reward and praise, not from punishment.

Over the years, I have watched, listened and put into play many methods of many trainers but the one that has been the best fit for me is from multi-time world champion barrel racer, Lance Graves. It's simple and easy to learn and to put in place. Every horse that has come through my program, responds very well to these drills and tuning techniques very quickly.

Joe



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