

Steering a Western-Trained Horse

Q I'm having trouble steering my Western-trained, 6-year-old Quarter Horse. I'm a Training Level, middle-aged dressage rider. I have trouble doing circles and other school figures. How can I learn to communicate better so she goes where I want her to go?

Name withheld by request

FRAN DEARING

A To achieve success at steering, you must understand a fundamental principle: A horse goes in the direction his shoulders go, not necessarily in the direction he is looking. From what you describe in your question, you're experiencing a major glitch in communication.

Typically, a Western horse is taught to steer using the principle of indirect reining, commonly called "neck reining." When a rider uses this system to turn her horse, she uses the rein opposite to the direction she wants the horse to turn. This indicates to the horse the direction in which his shoulders are to move. For example, your mare has been trained to turn right with a slight counter flexion of her neck (e.g., she's looking left),