

# Hip Engagement

Dennis Auslam

Bridle Up Horsemanship Experience

Written by Addie O'Neil

When choosing a barrel racing prospect a person tends to look for certain characteristics. Among these characteristics is the hip. A horse with a strong, muscular, and well conformed hip is able to turn a barrel with ease. However, if that horse is not taught how to use the hip properly and engage it when needed the horse will have a very difficult time running the barrel pattern correctly.

In order to teach the horse the correct way to use its hip I start with very basic maneuvers at the walk. There are an unlimited number of patterns and exercises you can do to teach your horse how to use their hip correctly. For the one I will talk about in this article you will need six barrels. The first set of barrels I set up 12 feet across from each other. The next pair I set 8 feet across from each other and the last pair I set 4 feet from each other. The measurements are taken from inside to inside of each barrel. (See...Fig A)

I ride my horse in a figure eight pattern around the barrels, starting with the 12 foot pattern first. What I concentrate on is lifting the shoulder, bending my horse's ribcage, and asking them to engage the hip. If we do not ask them to engage their hip they will swing it out and away from the barrel which is the

exact opposite of what we want in a barrel racing horse. I use my inside leg to hold the ribcage up while slowly bumping the horse's side with my outside leg. The outside leg keeps the hip engaged and moving forward. Always stress to your horse the importance of forward movement and do not let them stall in the pattern.

Another important piece in this pattern is the change from barrel to barrel. As I bring my horse around, I want to ask them to cross over as soon as I have completed the turn, versus asking them to

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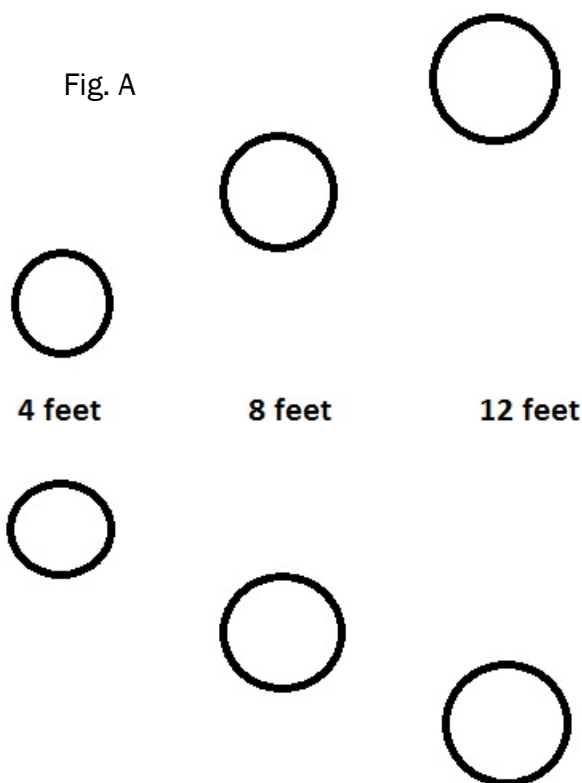
cross over when I reach the next barrel. This allows them to engage their hip earlier and be better prepared for the next turn.

When my horse has grasped the 12 foot pattern, I will move on to the 8 foot pattern, then finally the 4 foot pattern. It becomes more difficult the smaller the pattern gets, so it's important to make sure the horse is ready to move on before doing so. As the rider you need to be prepared and not be late in your cues, especially when the pattern decreases in size. When you're ready to up the ante ask your horse to trot the 12 foot and perhaps even the 8 foot pattern. Don't be afraid to change up the patterns as well and keep your horse guessing so they are listening to your cues at all times.

Watch a video demonstration...

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Fig. A



#### 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 2014. 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.

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](mailto:aoneil233@gmail.com).

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

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