

SHOWMANSHIP POLISH

Part 1: Hand Position & Control

As a judge who evaluates showmanship contestants, I'm privy to a lot of presentation mistakes—and hand control is a biggie. Poor hand position prevents your horse from moving and stopping straight, decreasing your chances of a high placing. A correct position ensures control of your horse's body, so you can easily keep him straight and balanced.

When I judge, I want to see fluid, controlled movements. Your maneuvers should happen with a purpose, but shouldn't be overdone. A showmanship pattern should look like a flowing "dance," with all movements blending together. To achieve this, you and your horse must be familiar with one another, and you both need to practice extensively. Hard work pays off in the show ring.

In this three-part series, I'm going to break down three common showmanship elements that can make or break your performance. For Part 1, I'll give you a judge's-eye perspective on proper—

and improper—hand position and control, and tell you why attention to detail here is so important. If the class results

Event appeal: Showmanship at halter.

Goal: To improve the aesthetic quality of your showmanship presentation. You'll study, and learn to avoid three common hand-position mistakes—pulling your hand toward you; pushing your hand away from you (toward your horse); and pulling your hand down.

Benefits: By mastering a correct hand position, you'll maximize control over your horse's body, while minimizing excessive movements that would detract from the overall fluidity of your showmanship pattern. A correct hand position also guarantees a good first impression, as it allows you to project a controlled, seamless, and natural presentation.

come down to one or two competitors with similar scores, I'll place the detail-oriented one higher.

In the following photos, a student demonstrates three common hand-position mistakes—pulling toward her body; pushing away; and pulling down. After you've studied the wrong ways, you'll see the correct position, so you can mimic it the next time you're in the showmanship ring. But, before you examine the mistakes, you need to know how to set yourself and your horse up correctly, before stepping off toward the judge.

THE STARTING LINE

In this photo (at right), the handler and her horse are demonstrating the correct positions prior to stepping off. You should be standing upright with good posture, looking straight ahead. Hold the lead just below the chain with your fingers closed, yet soft and flexible. If you hang on the lead shank chain, you'll inadvertently apply pressure to your horse's head, which will easily push him too far to the right or left, ruining his straight alignment.

If you hold the lead too far down from the chain, you'll sacrifice control over

Perfect your showmanship presentation by avoiding three common hand-position mistakes. Judge and Team H&R member Andrea Simons acts as your coach.

BY ANDREA SIMONS, WITH ALANA HARRISON PHOTOS BY CAPPY JACKSON

Next month: Pivot pointers (how to teach your horse to pivot on the correct hind foot).

March '08: How to synchronize your legs with your horse's.

your horse's head. While a longer-held lead conveys a higher degree of difficulty and confidence in your horse's responsiveness (and is more impressive to the judge), it makes it more difficult to correct a mistake. I'd rather see correctness with a shorter lead than mistakes with a longer one.

For best control of your horse's maneuvers, stand at his throatlatch, and as you walk forward, stay in the zone between his eye and mid-neck. The distance you maintain between you and your horse should be close enough (to your horse) to keep control, but not so close that it compromises your safety or effectiveness. Examine the "correct" photos (on page 60), then determine what will work for you and your horse. (If you have difficulty assessing the distance yourself, seek the advice of a professional showmanship trainer.) Your elbow should be at your waist, at a 90-degree angle, and it should be agile, soft, and functional, so you can quickly correct a mistake if need be.

I do *not* want to see, or hear, an obvious go-forward cue. Instead, make your cues subtle, smooth, and silent. As you walk forward, I want to see a pleasant expression on your face and that of your horse.

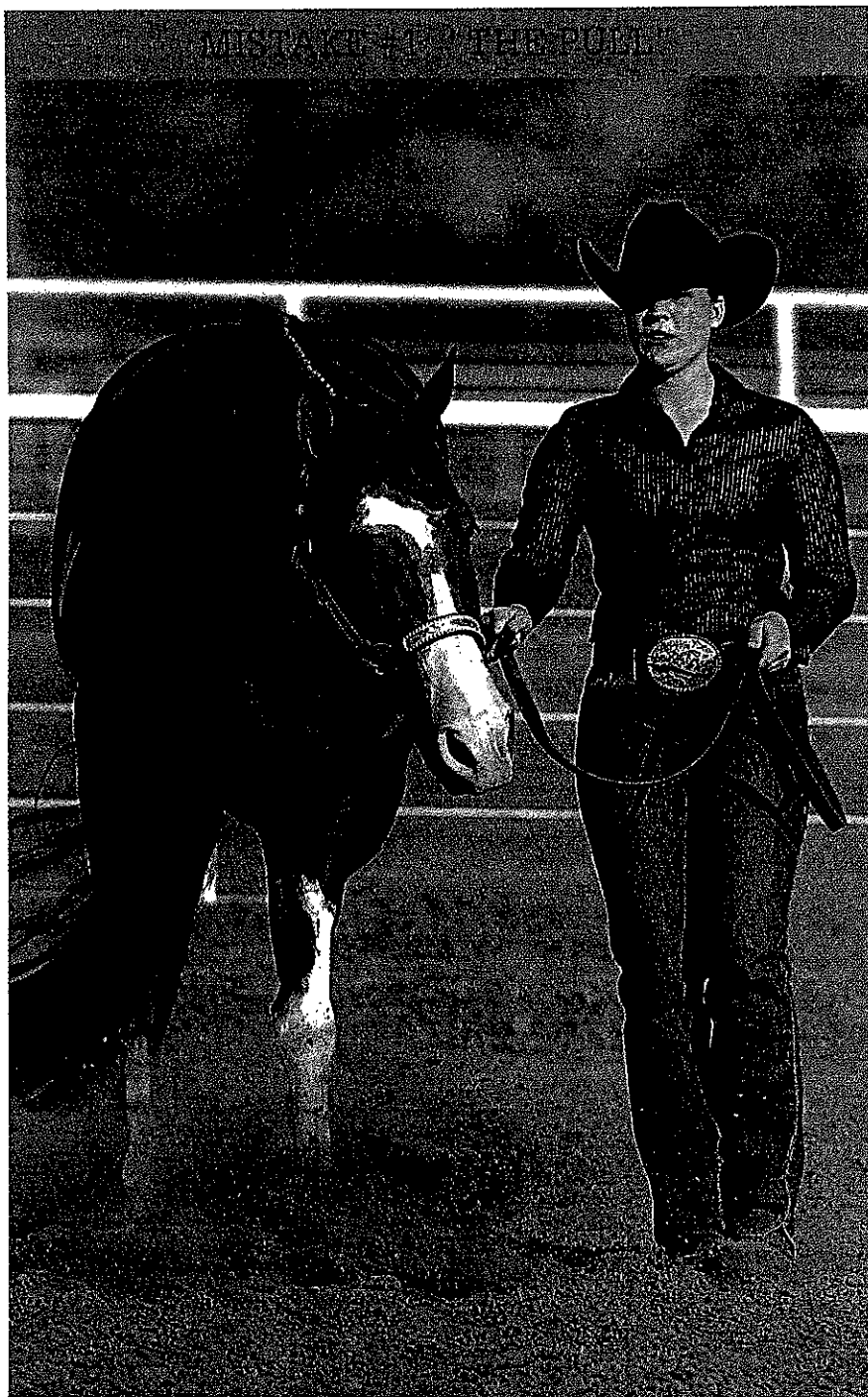
To earn a good score, your horse's body must be straight and balanced, and he needs to carry his head and neck at or slightly above his topline. Anything lower detracts from your presentation.

Now that you know what you *should* be doing, let's examine the hand-position mistakes you may be tempted to make.

MISTAKE #1: "THE PULL"

In the photo, the handler is pulling the lead (and her horse's head) toward her body, causing her horse's hips to cant away from her. Even though the hip-out mistake isn't blatantly obvious in this photo, it still detracts from her overall impression and prevents her horse from remaining straight and balanced. And worse, this will make it impossible for her to stop her horse straight.

This mistake is common when the handler becomes overly anxious or nervous and starts to walk too fast. If



you do this, your body will tense, causing your arm, elbow, and wrist to become stiff and jerky—conveying, in turn, a lack of confidence to your horse. As your body stiffens and you begin to walk too fast, your horse will be inclined to move his hip out while curling the front part of his body around you in an effort to keep up.

To correct this problem, you need to relax your body and re-examine your position. To give your horse's head the freedom he needs to maintain a straight nose-to-tail alignment (without sacri-

ficing your control), soften your arm, elbow, and wrist, and confirm that your arm is bent at a 90-degree angle. Any more bend will tempt you to pull your horse's head toward you. When you practice, be conscious of your position, but try not to let anxiety overtake you. And, as you walk forward, count slowly in your head to prevent yourself from walking too fast and consequently pulling your horse's head toward you.

MISTAKE #2: "THE PUSH"

Here, notice how the handler is push-

MISTAKE #2 "THE PUSH"



ing her hand toward her horse, causing him to move his front end out (to the right, away from her). This prevents him from maintaining a straight and balanced line. Even though the handler isn't grossly pushing her horse's head away here, you can still see how his front end is bowed out, ruining his straight alignment.

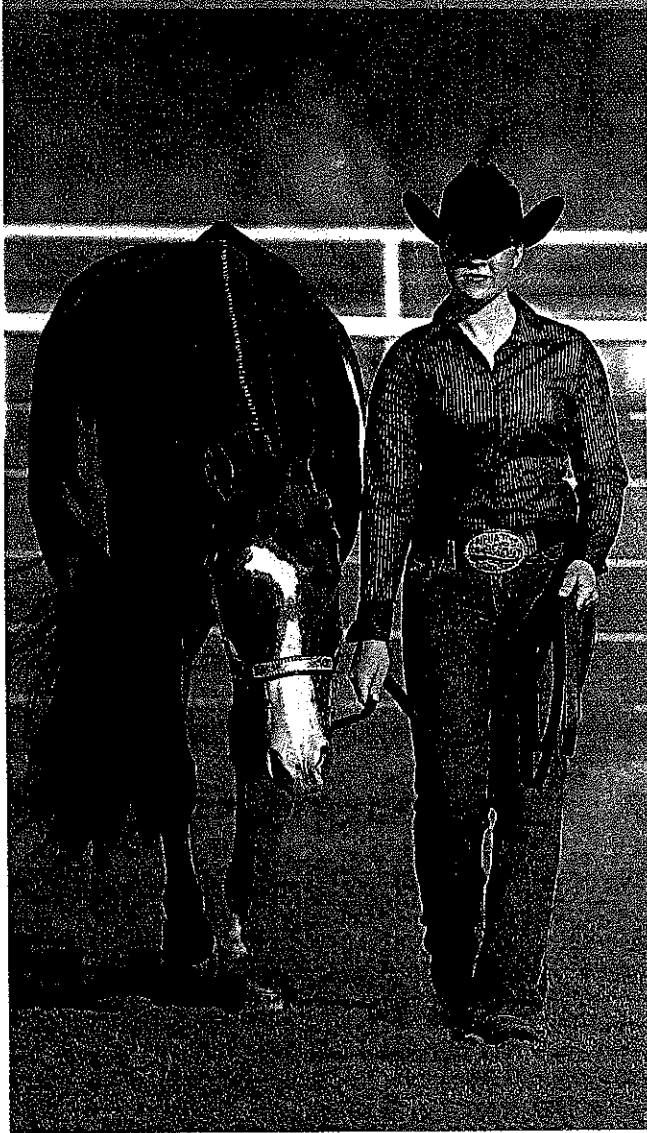
Handlers often make this mistake with "mouthy" horses. A horse that relishes play biting, pushing, or rubbing his head against you, or is otherwise silly, isn't just a nuisance. His behavior can also ruin your showmanship presentation quickly. If you're accustomed to pushing his head away with your hand or arm every time he disrespects you with this behavior, you'll easily be tempted to correct him by pushing the lead away from you in the show ring.

If you have a mouthy horse, work on correcting his ground manners before you begin to practice showmanship. Then, perfect your hand position at home, not at a show. When practicing, double check the 90-degree angle in your elbow. If it's less than 90 degrees, you'll likely push his head away from you. If you're unable to assess the angle on your own, enlist an observer to help you.

MISTAKE #3: "THE PULL-DOWN"

The final common hand mistake I see in the show ring occurs when handlers pull their horses' heads too far down. Whether the handler is conscious or unconscious of this downward pulling, it clearly puts the horse off-balance, prevents overall straightness, and detracts from a positive presentation.

MISTAKE #3 "THE PULL-DOWN"



This error tends to happen when the handler tries to pull her horse forward when he's not responding to her go-forward cue. If his head's being pulled down, he won't be paying attention to where he's going. Like you, your horse needs to find an eye-point to walk straight and maintain a correct body alignment. Plus, if he's looking down, you may imitate his position, further depleting your ability to maintain straightness.

To correct this mistake, finesse your go-forward cues first. If your horse isn't readily responding to you, you're not ready to compete in showmanship. Seek the help of a trainer to polish your go-and-stop cues, until your horse is clearly listening and responding. Then, the hand pull-down mistake will correct itself. →

ON-LINE EXCLUSIVE

For tips on how to correctly stop at the judge, go to HorseandRider.com and click on "Timing Is Everything," as a part of Andrea Simons' showmanship Polish series.



THE CORRECT POSITION

In the front-view photo, the handler holds the lead at the correct length, with her fingers closed, but soft. Her elbow is near her waist at a 90-degree angle, and appears soft, agile, and functional. She stands upright while looking straight ahead, and both handler and horse have pleasant expressions.

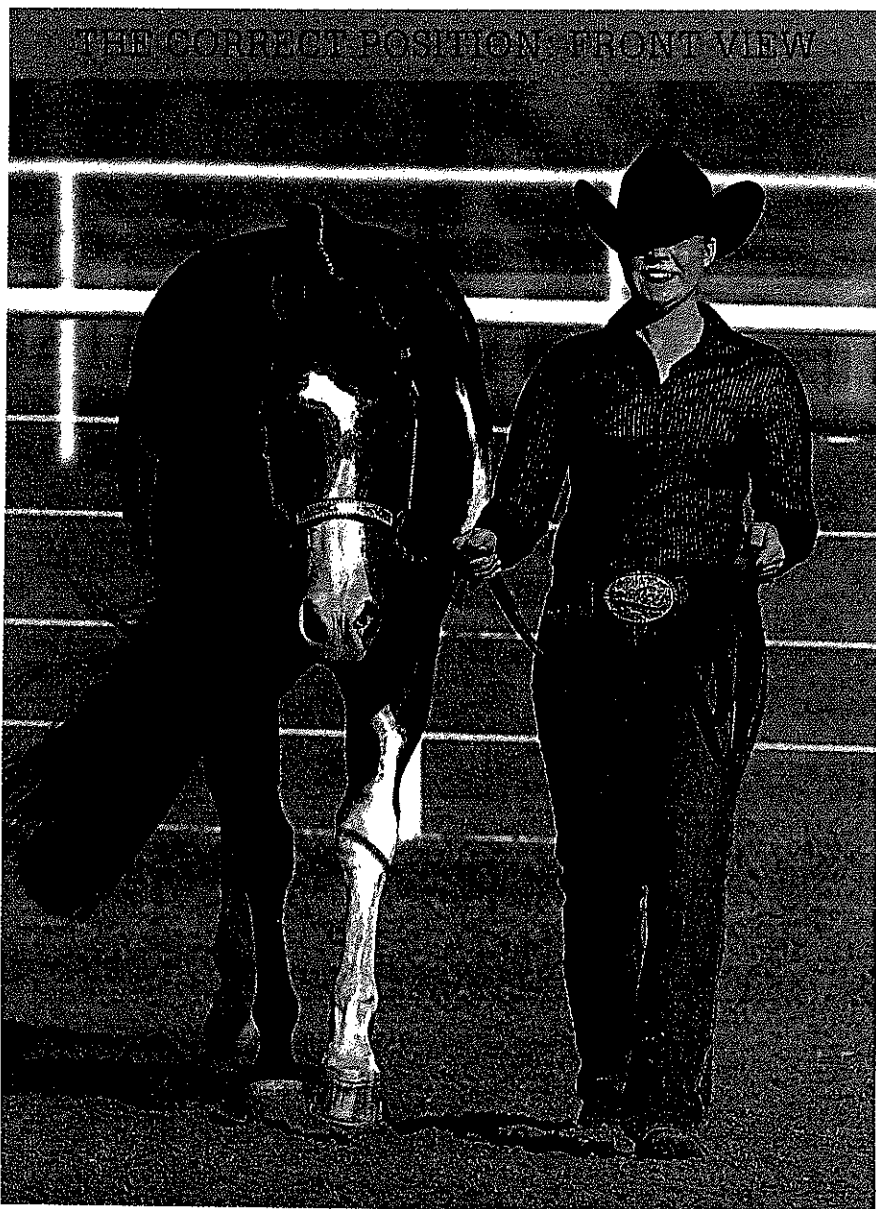
In the side-view photo, notice how the handler is walking between her horse's eye and mid-neck to best control his head. You can better see (versus the front-view photo) that she's looking straight ahead, is standing upright, and her horse is carrying his head and neck at his topline. She's maintaining an appropriate distance between her body and her horse's, so she can control him without compromising her safety or performance.

In both photos, she's not walking too fast; she's not pushing her horse's head away to avert disrespectful behavior; and she's not dragging him forward into a walk. Her position is helping her horse stay straight, nose-to-tail, contributing to an overall polished presentation.

HAND-POSITION HOMEWORK

Once you understand how and why these three mistakes occur, polish your hand position and control at home. It's difficult to assess your own position, so I suggest you recruit a trainer or a showmanship-savvy friend to help you. An observer can tell you what your position *really* looks like—your posture and eye-point, your hand on the lead, your elbow angle, tension in your arm or back, and what mistakes you're making. If you have access to an arena with a mirror, you can observe your own position—but another set of eyes is most helpful.

For an at-home exercise: Set up two cones (or other markers) so they form a straight line. One cone represents the starting point; the other, the judge. Before stepping off, glance back at your horse's spine to verify his body is straight, nose-to-tail. If he's not, use your lead to realign his shoulders with his hips.



After making any such changes, walk off toward the judge. As you're walking with your horse, the judge should barely see his hind legs because they're lined up perfectly behind his front legs. Your horse should be focused and attentive, and your eyes should be focused on the cone in front of you. For added polish, you and your horse should be walking in sync with the same leg leading (more on leg synchronization in Part 3 of this series).

As you complete walking the straight line, stop in front of the judge, leaving at least one horse length between your horse's nose and the cone. If I'm the judge, I'm not going to be impressed if you stop with your horse's nose on my clipboard. So, perfect your stops before you're faced with a real judge (for more info on stopping, see "On-line Exclusive" on page 60). Once you've stopped at the cone, look back at your and your horse's footsteps to assess your straightness. (Do this only when practicing; you may incur a penalty for doing it in the show ring.) If your footsteps more resemble a snake-like pattern than a straight line, continue this exercise until you've established a straighter walk-to-the-judge line. ■

SHOWMANSHIP POLISH

Part 2: Pivot Pointers

A smooth and precise pivot turn is an integral element for a polished showmanship presentation. Here, I'll explain why your pre-pivot position will make or break your turn's accuracy, and I'll teach you how to correctly cue your horse to encourage him to pivot on his right hind leg.

As a judge, I often see nervous exhibitors rush their horses into the pivot. The handler does this by either pushing her horse back, or by standing too far forward past her horse's nose in an effort to signal the turn. Such mistakes overly compress or stretch the horse's body, pulling his head askew, which in turn, ruins his straight alignment.

As you teach—or re-teach—your horse to pivot on his right hind, keep in mind the fundamental aspects of what makes a polished showmanship performance: fluid, controlled movements. Your maneuvers should happen with a purpose, but should not be overdone.

Overall, your showmanship pattern should appear like a fluid “dance” with your horse, in which everything

Event appeal: Showmanship at halter.

Goal: To improve the accuracy of your showmanship presentation by mastering the pivot. You'll do this by perfecting your position and pivot cues—thus, teaching your horse to pivot on the preferred, right hind leg.

Benefits: You'll maximize control over your horse's body, while minimizing excessive movements that will detract from the overall fluidity of your showmanship pattern. By mastering your pivot cues and a correct position, you'll teach your horse to maintain a straight alignment through the turn, which will carry over to other maneuvers in your showmanship performance.

smoothly blends together. To achieve this, you and your horse must know

each other well, and practice diligently. Hard work pays off in the show ring.

In the following photos, the handler demonstrates the incorrect and correct ways to cue her horse to pivot on his right hind leg. By paying attention to small details, such as your position and pivot cues, you'll boost your overall showmanship presentation, and resulting score.

CORRECT POSITION CHECK

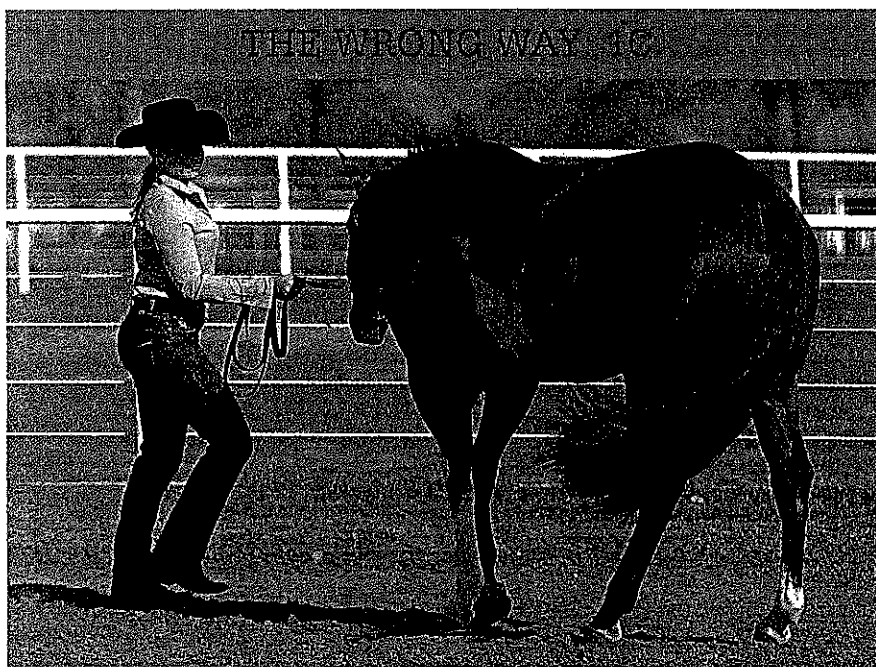
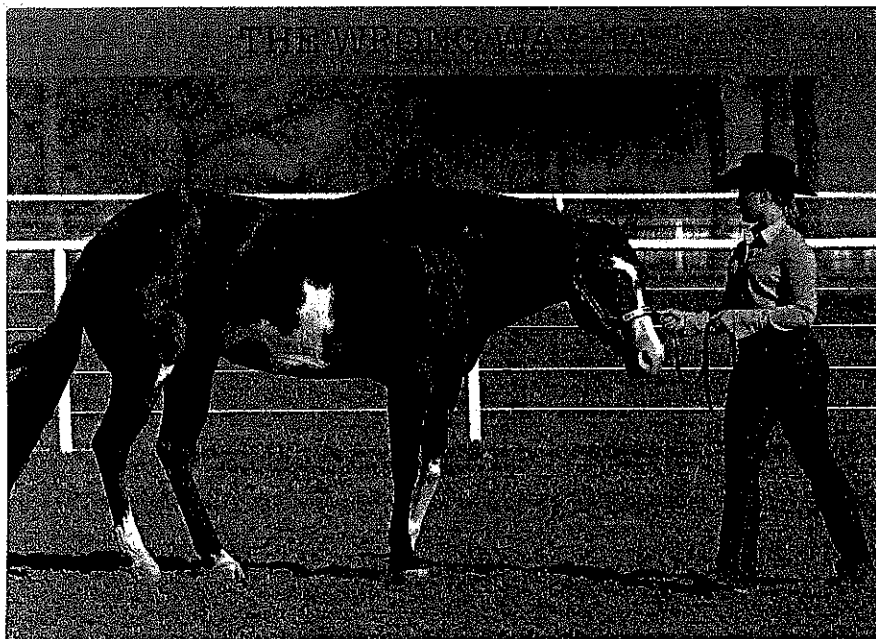
In last month's “Part 1: Hand Position & Control,” you learned how to walk on a straight line maintaining *your* correct position, which encouraged your horse to stay straight and balanced. Before you begin teaching your horse to pivot, do a quick position check. Your horse's movement is directly influenced by your position—if you begin correctly, he'll likely follow your lead for a precise pivot.

Quick review:

- Stand upright with good posture.
- Look straight ahead with your chin slightly lifted.

Improve your showmanship scores by teaching your horse how to pivot correctly over his right hind leg, rather than his left hind.

BY ANDREA SIMONS, WITH ALANA HARRISON PHOTOS BY CAPPY JACKSON



- Hold the lead below the chain with your fingers closed (but not clenched).
- Keep your lead hand soft and flexible.
- Carry your elbow at your waist at a 90-degree angle, so it can be agile, soft, and functional (allowing you to correct a mistake quickly, if need be).

(Note: If you have difficulty assessing your own position, recruit a professional or a showmanship-savvy friend to examine you and your horse before you begin.)

THE WRONG WAY

In the following three photos, the handler demonstrates three common mistakes while her horse pivots over his left

hind leg, not what you want here. (Note: While there are occasions in which a handler is asked to perform a pivot over the left hind leg, the majority of showmanship patterns call for a pivot over the right hind. So, for the purposes of this article, I'll refer to a pivot over the right hind as correct.)

1A. This pivot turn is off to a bad start. Notice the horse's head and neck are out of alignment with his body, which will make it impossible for him to keep his body straight through the pivot. This likely resulted from a poor performance while walking a straight line (see last

month's lesson on hand position and control). Because the handler didn't stop correctly with her horse's body straight and balanced, she'll have to straighten his head and neck prior to turning, rather than stepping smoothly into the pivot. If she continues to pivot with her horse's body misaligned, she won't be able to finish straight, either. This certainly will cost her points, as the overall fluidity of her performance will appear rushed and choppy.

1B. Here, when the handler asks her horse to pivot, she steps too far back toward his shoulder, and as a result, she's pushing his head back. While it's not overtly obvious due to the photo angle, the handler's body is too close to her horse's shoulder (rather than near his eye), which prevents her from effectively cueing for the pivot on his right hind leg.

Because of her incorrect position, she'll inadvertently apply pressure to the lead shank, which will cause her horse to bend his neck and tip his head toward his left shoulder. As a result, he'll likely rock his weight onto his back left leg, which will force him to plant his left rear foot, rather than the desired right one, in order to balance himself to turn. And worse, as he's struggling to find his footing, there's a good chance he'll step out of the pivot to regain his balance.

1C. In this photo, the handler is stepping too far ahead of her horse (almost in front of his nose). Because she's directing his energy toward her, instead of laterally, her horse is forced to balance

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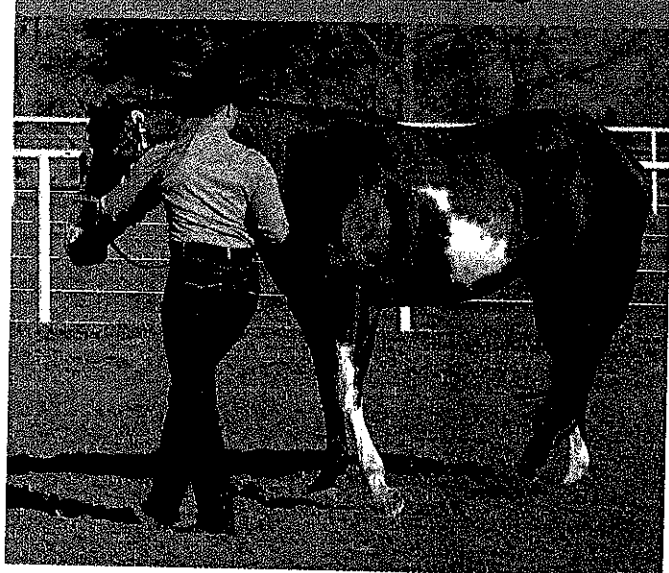
THE RIGHT WAY 2A



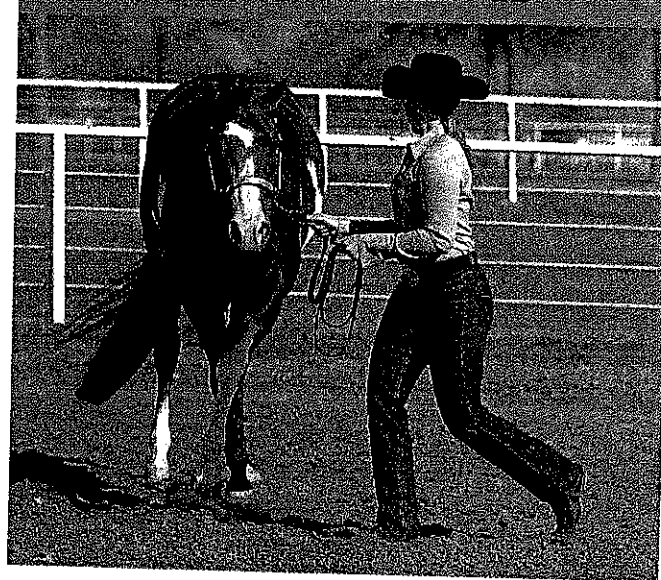
THE RIGHT WAY 2B



THE RIGHT WAY 2C



THE RIGHT WAY 2D



which will help him balance over his right-hind pivot foot and correctly cross his left front leg over his right front. As a result, you'll make it easy for your horse to execute the turn correctly.

2B. Here's the effective communication cue for getting your horse to pivot on his right hind leg: Taking the lead in her left hand (holding with the left hand allows for more control over the horse's head while teaching him to pivot, but only hold with your left hand as a learning or correctional tool), the handler gently pulls him forward by mov-

ing her body into the vicinity of his left eye, and takes a small, but confident, step forward. Don't rush forward, or make a sudden, dramatic movement. This could startle your horse, causing him to raise his head and neck, and step backward.

If your horse requires an additional cue, try adding a "kissing" sound to encourage forward movement. (Note: I teach my students to use a kiss to cue the pivot. This is just my way of doing things—you and your trainer need to determine what cues are most effective for *your* horse.)

As your horse begins the turn by crossing his left front over his right front, make sure you remain in the vicinity of his eye—don't allow yourself to lag behind so you're eventually standing at his shoulder. And don't step past his nose as you turn, or you'll risk causing him to step forward, out of the pivot.

Throughout the turn, your horse's head, neck, and shoulders should remain aligned. He must move his shoulder with his head as he turns, or it'll bow out to the left, unbalancing him to the point he's forced to step out of the

TEAM Horse & Rider

A multi-carded judge as well as a top trainer, exhibitor, and valued Team H&R member, Andrea Simons was tapped to judge the AQHA World Championship Show in 2005. She's judged for over 25 years in the U.S. and abroad, with assignments that have included the World Championship Appaloosa Show, Palomino Horse Breeders of America World Show, National Reining Horse Association Futurity, Italian Reining Horse Association Futurity, and numerous other shows in Canada, Italy, Germany, Belgium, France, The Netherlands, and Israel. Andrea has owned, trained, exhibited, or bred over 100 world and honor roll champions, and has served on the National Snaffle Bit Association's board of directors since 2001.

The Simons family has also left its mark as competitors. In 2005, Andrea's daughter, Jana, won four American Paint Horse Association amateur world championships, including the showmanship title. Her daughter, Sara, rode to two APHA world titles as an amateur. Both were aboard horses by the family's top Paint stallion, Zippos Sensation. Zippo's winning offspring have earned him a record five consecutive APHA Breeders Trust stallion titles. Andrea's Simons Show Horses is based in Aubrey, Texas.



Last month: Hand position and control.
Next month: How to synchronize your legs with your horse's.

HorseandRider.com: Perfect your stopping cues for a smooth and precise stop in front of the judge. (Go to HorseandRider.com and click on Andrea Simons' Showmanship Polish series.)



himself by splaying his back legs apart. With his next step, he'll have to cross his left front leg behind his right front and his back right leg behind his back left—resulting in a pivot over his back left, albeit a poor one. Because his weight is distributed unevenly, it's caused his body to be misaligned, which will likely cause him to fall out of the pivot.

THE RIGHT WAY

To teach (or re-teach) your horse to pivot around his back right leg, break the turn down into small increments, called "pull-turns." This way, you won't be overwhelmed with executing a "perfect" pivot throughout a complete revolution, which will likely cause you and your horse to become anxious and insecure. Focus on moving just a few lateral steps at a time in the rotation of the turn, while keeping your horse aligned and maintaining your correct position.

Continue with small pull-turns around the pivot, reevaluating your position and your horse's alignment, one phase at a time. After you've mastered the pivot in small increments, put them together for a fluid turn.

2A. Here, the handler and her horse demonstrate the correct starting position. Before positioning yourself, confirm that your horse is standing perfectly straight from nose to tail. His weight should be balanced squarely over all four legs, and his legs must be perfectly aligned, so if you were looking at him from the front, you wouldn't be able to see his back legs (or very little of them).

Once he's set correctly, position yourself so you're facing your horse with your torso directly opposite his nose. Hold your right (lead) hand about 12 inches from his nose; bend your elbows at 90-degree angles; and keep your lead-hand fingers closed—but not tight enough to apply pressure on the shank.

If you begin a pivot in this correct position, your body will literally push your horse's head around the turn,

pivot. As you practice, look over your shoulder to verify his body is aligned—and he's pivoting on his right hind (not his left!). Eventually, you'll develop a feel for the maneuver, and you won't need to look back. Or, if you do, it'll only be a slight glance.

2C. Here, the handler has initiated a pull-turn by asking her horse to take a few lateral steps in the direction of the pivot. (Remember, you will teach your horse to pivot through a series of pull-turns.) Notice that she's still guiding her horse with her left hand (to make her cue more obvious) by applying light pressure to the lead shank. She's looking back at her horse's body to confirm he's straight from his nose to his tail, and to direct his energy in the direction of the turn. Her horse has moved his shoulder with his head and neck, preventing it from canting out to the left.

After a few successful pull-turn steps, stop your horse and let him take a break as a reward. While stopped, reevaluate your and your horse's position: Your torso is still opposite your horse's nose; your horse's neck should be straight and level, and in alignment with the rest of his body; he should appear relaxed, but attentive. Be patient, and don't rush into the

next pivot pull-turn until your horse is straight, or you'll risk his head turning without the rest of his body.

2D. This final photo illustrates the ideal position—of both horse and handler—while stepping into the pivot. The horse's body is perfectly aligned; his weight is balanced on his back legs as he squarely crosses his left front over his right front. The handler is guiding him in the correct position: She's not too far in front of him, nor too close to his shoulder; she's looking over her right shoulder to confirm his body is straight; and she's moving forward with a confident, but not exaggerated, step.

If you strive to impress the judge with your pivot, this photo represents your goal. And, once you and your horse master these positions and the other tips I've provided in this article, your pivots will be smooth, precise, and boost your overall showmanship scores.

Bonus Tip: While you certainly won't have points taken away for a slow (but fluid) pivot, you can further impress the judge by adding a little speed. *But*, if you sacrifice accuracy, correct positioning, and smoothness to add speed, you won't be ahead in my book. ■

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SHOWMANSHIP POLISH

Part 3: Leg Synchronization

You're in the show ring, and your pattern has been flawless—so far. You're on the homestretch, and then, your heart sinks as you feel your horse step on your foot. Has this happened to you? How frustrating, to have a perfect pattern, only to lose precious points due to a bump or an out-of-place hoof! The best way to prevent such unfortunate mistakes is to master leg-synchronization with your horse.

Before I teach you how to coordinate your steps with your horse's, I'm going to explain how leg synchronization can boost your showmanship score.

CORRECTING (OR PREVENTING) ERRORS

If you're completely green at showmanship, you'll need to learn the basics first. But, if you consider yourself a more advanced competitor, you can add this tool to your showmanship-savvy arsenal to nix those common (but easily pre-

ventable) faux pas that could send your scores plummeting. These common errors include: 1. Horse tends to stumble

or heel; 3. Horse is not straight or balanced, and, as a result, tends to bump you while walking.

Event appeal: Showmanship at halter.

Goal: Prevent careless errors and refine your presentation by teaching your horse to step forward with the same leg you do at a walk and trot.

Benefits: When you and your horse move forward with your left and right legs in unison, you'll greatly reduce your chances of making careless mistakes, such as your horse bumping or stepping on you, or his stumbling while walking or trotting. Plus, leg synchronization will help you create a picture of harmony, adding an extra degree of polish to your overall presentation.

while moving forward; 2. Horse is careless with his feet, or is unbalanced, and therefore, prone to stepping on your foot

POLISHING YOUR PERFORMANCE

When judging several well-maneuvered showmanship patterns, I typically score the horse-and-rider team that has added extra polish to their performance by synchronizing their steps higher. In-sync steps put you and your horse in rhythm with one another to create a picture of harmony—the ideal in showmanship. Horse-and-handler leg synchronization is, however, a polishing touch for more advanced showmanship competitors. (It's not for beginners.) So, if you've perfected the main showmanship elements, get in-sync with your horse and boost your score.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Accurate set-up equals success: Before you teach your horse to step off with the front leg you're cueing, accurately set him up so he's straight, and his weight

Polish your showmanship performance by synchronizing your leg movement with your horse's—and you'll be sure to leave a lasting impression on the judge.

BY ANDREA SIMONS, WITH ALANA HARRISON PHOTOS BY CAPPY JACKSON

January '08: Hand position and control.

Last month: Pivot pointers.

HorseandRider.com: Perfect your stopping cues.

is balanced evenly over his four legs. He should carry his head and neck at, or slightly above, his topline.

To effectively communicate with your horse, *you* must also maintain an ideal showmanship position. If you're sloppy or out of alignment from the get-go, you're setting yourself up for failure. (For a brush-up on your position, see "Correct Position Check" in last month's Part 2.)

HOW TO CUE YOUR HORSE FOR SYNCHRONIZED STEPPING

At this point, your horse should be a pro at recognizing and responding to your go-forward cues. If he's not, perfect those skills before attempting leg synchronization.

Because synchronized stepping isn't easy to master, you'll make it as natural for yourself (and your horse) as possible by first practicing stepping off on the leg you, or both of you, prefer. Once you and your horse are walking with your legs in unison, you can make adjustments in the size of your stride to match that of your horse.

1. Left-leg step off:

- Stand so you're facing your horse, as if you've just completed an earlier maneuver; hold the lead line in your right hand, the slack in your left. Then, gently rotate your hips to the left (so you're turning yourself to be in line with your horse), and slightly pull your horse's nose to the left (toward you). This action will shift the horse's balance to encourage him to step off with his left leg.

Tip: In the early stages of training, you may need to exaggerate your cues by pulling your horse's nose more to the left than you will, once your horse has mastered the maneuver. This way, your request will be more obvious to him. But...

- ...don't overdo the pulling action. If you pull his nose and head too far to the left, you'll pull him too far off balance. His hindquarters will cant to the right, while he leans on his left shoulder and leg—not the ideal picture of straightness.

- As you employ the left-leg-first cue, simultaneously step forward with your left leg. Ideally, your horse will follow your lead, and step off with his front left leg. Once you've taken the first few steps, cease your right-hand pull cue to

straighten your horse's alignment.

- If your horse ignores or doesn't understand your left-leg-first cue, stop, let him take a short break; then, repeat the steps above. If you continue to have difficulty, stop, ask him to back up a few steps, then walk forward again without cueing him for a particular leg. As you walk, adjust your steps, so you're eventually walking with the same leg going forward. (To do this, you may have to step double-time, or skip or slow a step.) And, as a result...

- ...your horse will get the "feel" of walking in unison with you. It may take several practice sessions for him to understand and respond to your cue. Once he does, by reliably stepping forward with his left leg, gradually reduce the exaggeration of your hand-pull to the left.

2. Right-leg step off:

- Once you've rotated your body so you and your horse are facing the same direction, push his head slightly to the





step forward. While it's not overtly apparent in the photo, this horse is about to stumble while stepping forward with his right leg. Notice how his right hoof is dragging along the ground. You'll also see that he's not walking in-sync with the handler. She's stepping forward with her left foot, while he's stepping forward with his right. By teaching your horse to synchronize his steps with yours, he'll be more attentive to your cues and more careful about his foot placement, which will reduce his chances of stumbling.

WALKING IN-SYNC SIDEVIEW

5. Correct:

In this photo, horse and handler are walking together in-sync: Both have stepped forward with their left legs, and are simultaneously preparing to step forward with their right legs. The handler is leading her horse in a correct position, which naturally encourages him to keep his body straight. If you were to watch them in action, you'd clearly see (and hear) a synchronized rhythm of one, two; one, two; one, two...and so on. The overall picture is fluid and harmonious—and will definitely impress the judge.

6. Incorrect:

Here, the team is walking out-of-sync. The horse has already stepped forward with his right leg, while the handler has stepped forward with her left leg. This presentation lacks balance and overall harmony. These two look as if they're walking on two entirely different planes. If your performance resembles this picture, you'll need more practice at synchronizing your steps and establishing a consistent one-two rhythm at the walk and trot. After practicing, I'll bet you more resemble Photo 5. ■



right (away from you) while stepping forward with your right leg. (Keep in mind that you may have to exaggerate this cue at first.) This will shift his weight to encourage him to step forward with his right leg when you do.

- Once you're confidently walking in-sync with him, release the right-push cue to straighten him.

- If your horse doesn't understand what you're asking, or ignores your cue, stop and try again—this time, exaggerating your push motion to a degree slightly more than that of your previous attempt. Repeat this several times, until your horse confidently steps forward with his right leg.

AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS

The following photos illustrate how common mistakes can occur in the show ring if you and your horse are walking out-of-sync with one another.

3. Horse bumping or stepping on you:

Although the horse and handler are both stepping forward with their right legs, notice the handler is looking down to verify their leg synchronization. (It's OK to slightly glance down to determine correctness while practicing, but looking too far down, for too long, will cause you to lean down and forward, simultaneously causing your horse to do the same.)

In this photo, the horse-and-handler team is so out-of-sync that one tiny misstep could easily cause the horse to bump or step on the handler. Not only will this appear sloppy and result in a significant point deduction, it'll also hurt!

4. Horse prone to stumbling:

Some horses are more careless with their leg movements. This often leads to stumbling—the horse tags the tip of his hoof on the ground while attempting to

TEAM Horse & Rider

A multi-carded judge as well as a top trainer, exhibitor, and valued Team H&R member, Andrea was tapped to judge the World Championship Quarter Horse Show in 2005. She's judged for over 25 years in the U.S. and abroad. Andrea has owned, trained, exhibited, or bred over 100 world and honor roll champions, and has served on the National Snaffle Bit Association's board of directors since 2001. Andrea owns top Paint stallion, Zippos Sensation, at her Simons Show Horses in Aubrey, Texas.