

# JOURNAL

THE AMERICAN QUARTER HORSE JOURNAL

## *The* **NEED** *For* **SPEED**



*Fine tune your barrel racing and pole bending patterns with tips from expert horsemen.*

*From the American Quarter Horse Journal library*

# CONTAINED *Lightning*

*Train your speed-event horse to remain calm until he's asked to run.*

**By Doug Leasor with Tonya Ratliff-Garrison**

YOU'VE BEEN WORKING FOR WEEKS WITH YOUR NEW HORSE, AND he's taking the barrel turns smooth and fast. You're comfortable with him and think you're ready to take him to your first show together.

You pay your entry fee and truck the distance to the show. As you warm up your horse he seems a little nervous but you're not worried. He worked so well at home, you know he'll be fine once he gets into the arena.

Your entry number is called and as you ask your horse to run through the gate, he begins to rear and refuse to enter the arena. You bring out the whip and after a few good smacks, he finally bolts through the gate. But he's not set up on the right lead and as you take the first barrel, your horse hits it with his shoulder, tumbling it over. You're able to get your horse under better control as you approach the second barrel but your turn is wide. Running to the last barrel, you make a better turn and then race for home and run through the gate.

You bring your horse to a halt but he's still agitated, dancing around and not listening to you. You can't believe it. You've wasted your entry fee, not to mention the cost of the gas to get to the event.

He was doing so well at home. Why is he so different at the show?

AQHA Professional Horseman Doug Leasor says horses that are agitated and overexcited at speed events need to learn when it is OK to run and when it isn't. He trains his barrel and pole horses to not set off at top speed until he has given them a cue to do so. No matter whether they are in the makeup pen, at the gate or in the arena, his horses remain calm and focused on him.



Teach your horse when it's OK for speed and when it's not.



By walking into the gate, Doug's horse is able to see whether it is running poles or barrels.

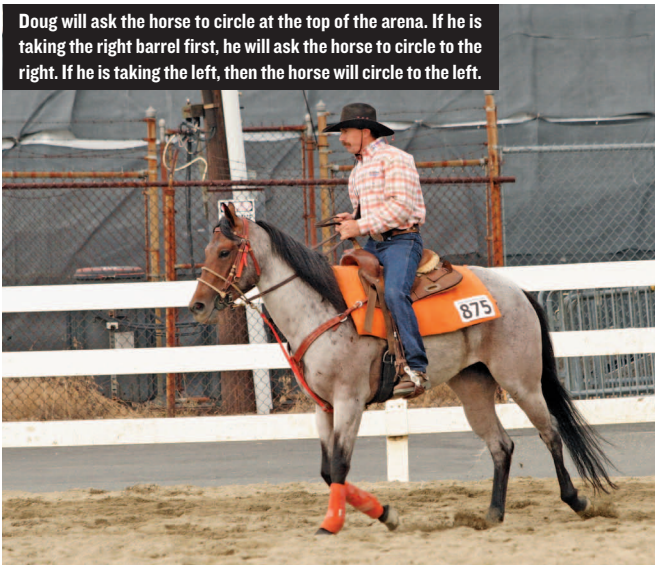


To help teach your horse to listen to you when they know they're going to get to run, he offers this advice.

## Quiet Speed

ALTHOUGH MANY PEOPLE RUN THEIR HORSES THROUGH THE GATE, I always walk my horses into the arena. It's safer and more productive. My horses walk in, look around, explode for the run and then settle right back down and walk out.

Doug will ask the horse to circle at the top of the arena. If he is taking the right barrel first, he will ask the horse to circle to the right. If he is taking the left, then the horse will circle to the left.



Horses are taught to do things. Like when you pull the right rein, they turn right. When you pull the left rein, they turn left. So there is no reason you can't teach one to run when he's asked to and not run when he's not asked.

My horses only run full-out when I give them the cue to do so. For my horses, I jiggle the inside rein as I'm making a circle. I lope my horse a couple of times in front of the barrel or pole pattern and then when he feels the jiggling of the rein, he knows he's going to run. If I don't jiggle the rein, then he knows he's just loping around.

## Training Calmness

I START MY HORSES BY COMING INTO THE GATE AT A WALK. I LET the horse see what he is going to do, whether it is barrels or poles. They are all colts, and most of the time when you run through the gate, a horse doesn't know what he'll be running until he actually gets into the arena. By letting him see it first, I'm able to set him up properly before he runs the pattern.

I circle in the direction that I'm going to make my first turn. Most of my horses run to the right-hand barrel first, so I circle to the right. They make the left pole first, so I circle to the left. Doing this gives the horse the opportunity to get on the correct lead.

I walk in, let the horse see the arena and move into a circle at a lope. As I'm coming around the circle, I jiggle the inside rein, letting him know he's going to run. If I don't jiggle the rein, I continue to lope the circle and he maintains the same speed through the barrel or pole pattern.





As he circles, Doug will jiggle the inside rein to let the horse know he is being asked to run.

By mixing it up, the horse goes into the arena not knowing what he is going to do until I tell him. Many times, I take my horses to an open show and just do the run-ups at a trot or slow lope.

There are times when I show at an arena that is too small for me to circle. When there is no place to circle, I will circle at the gate and ride through the gate. I never let my horses go from downtown in the alley because the next time he will think that's where he's supposed to actually start.

After I've made my run on the horse, I walk him out the gate. I never take him and put him back in his stall or tie him to the trailer nor do I just sit on him. Instead, I walk him down until he flattens out. That way, he knows he is done. After he has mellowed out, then I will put him up.



Doug will then set up the horse for the correct barrel and push him for speed.

## In the Makeup Pen

WHEN I'M WARMING UP A HORSE IN THE MAKEUP PEN, I TRY TO keep him away from the horses that are acting silly. I don't want that horse running into my horse, nor do I want my horse getting tense and excited because that horse is excited.

After I have warmed my horse up, I usually stay in the makeup area. I'm not keeping my horse moving all the time. I stand over on the side and stay out of everyone's way until it's time for me to be on deck.

## Retraining a Horse

I'VE HAD MANY PEOPLE BRING ME HORSES WITH GATE PROBLEMS, and most of the time they expect it to be fixed in 30 days.

I tell them, this horse is 8 years old, and he's been running barrels since he was 3 or 4. So he's been running for four or five years, and he's had this problem for the same amount of time. You want me to fix it in 30 days? It's not going to happen.

It's a long process, and it's going to take my work plus your work when he gets back to you to keep him like that. A horse will revert back to old habits. All it takes is one little thing to set him off, and he's back to where he was.

A few years ago, a horse came to me when he was 3 years old. He had been through three different owners because no one could get him through the gate.

When I rode him at the house, he was fine. I would ride him out of the barn and into the arena. I would trot him, I would lope him and he was fine. But the first time I took him to a horse show, he stood up and tried to rub me off on the fence. He wasn't mean, but he wouldn't go forward. He would lie down or do whatever he could to keep from going into the arena.

I knew I had to get his trust back. In other words, somebody had done something to him, and I had to show him that it was OK to go into the arena and no one was going to harm him.



I got him to where I could trot him around the first barrel. I would stop him, get off of him and take him back out just to show him he's not going to get hurt when he goes inside the arena.

I did this for 56 horse shows. I would get a little further at each show. I could get him to where he would trot in and go around the first and second barrel.

Finally, I got him to where he was looking forward to going into the arena. Fifty-six horse shows later, he could go in the gate any time you wanted to take him in there. When he left, he would go in any time I asked him, and he wanted to work. But it took a year just hauling him to shows to get his confidence back.

If you have a horse with gate problems that needs to be retrained, remember it won't happen overnight. Take him and put him in the warm ups. Trot him into the arena, go around the first barrel and stop. Or trot to the second barrel and stop. You can feel and tell when he's getting tense when you're asking him for a little bit more than he can give. Then you back off on him.

You let him know it's not going to hurt him. And don't get too aggressive with him by using a whip and spurs. Be patient and take your time. Horses are smart animals, and he will eventually come around.

## Remember It's Fun

YOU RUN BARRELS OR POLES BECAUSE IT'S FUN, AND IT'S SUPPOSED to be fun. But when you constantly have to fight a horse that is frenzied and overexcited, it starts not being fun, and it can be dangerous. You don't know if you're going to get the horse in the arena, you don't know if you're going to make the turn, and you don't know if the horse is going to take your leg off at the gate when he goes through it.

My theory is if you want to do it for recreation or fun, make it enjoyable. That's why my horses are taught when it is time to run and when it isn't. 🐾

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After running the pattern, Doug will halt the horse inside the arena and stroke his neck to let him know his run is over.



**DOUG LEASOR** operates Leasor Quarter Horses in Holland, Massachusetts. Doug is an AQHA Professional Horseman who has trained barrel racing and pole bending horses that have won the All American Quarter Horse Congress, been reserve at the Ford AQHYA World Championship Show, qualified for the AQHA World Championship Show and earned AQHA high-point titles. Doug works with all levels of horses and riders to help them to better their times and achieve their goals. He also gives lessons and clinics year-round. Besides training speed-event horses, Doug is an expert farrier with more than 16 years of experience. He shoes all of the horses he trains and competes on.



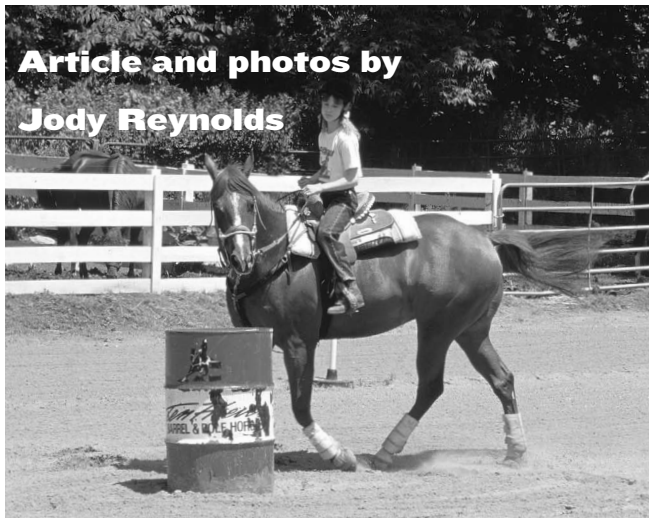
Doug and the horse will then walk calmly out of the arena.



# Too Many Turns

*Learn to barrel race without burning out your horse.*

**Article and photos by  
Jody Reynolds**



WE'RE ALL HUMAN. IF WE'RE ASKED TO PERFORM THE SAME TASK again and again, that task will eventually become mundane, no matter how exciting it was when we first learned it. Most seasoned barrel horses share our viewpoint. The cloverleaf pattern at break-neck speeds was a rush of excitement the first hundred or so times. But how can you blame them? It gets old!

That's why today's top barrel racers rarely practice the cloverleaf pattern with their seasoned horses. They save the "fun stuff" for when it really counts — in the arena.

Herein lies the problem for novice barrel racers: How do you learn to be a great can chaser without practicing the pattern again and again, making it a dreaded chore for your horse?

AQHA Professional Horseman and Team Wrangler member Jim Ten Hoeve of Montague, New Jersey, offers this advice to

get you started:

## **Limit your pattern work**

The old saying, "practice makes perfect," doesn't apply to barrel horses. Running the pattern too often ruins the fun for them, and they need to enjoy their jobs. If the barrel pattern becomes a task, they won't work well for you.

Strictly limit the amount of time you spend on the cloverleaf pattern. It's OK to walk or trot the barrels a few times each practice session. But don't drum on the pattern, and don't lope it over and over again, especially if your horse is performing correctly. If you overpractice, your horse will sour on you.

You can run the pattern once or twice a week, but make sure you run the best pattern you can and end on a good





Walk and trot the barrel pattern at home, saving your fastest speeds for horse shows. Running the barrels at home can quickly lead your horse to burnout.

note, so you won't have to go back and run it again.

### Ride controlled circles

Rather than worrying about the barrel pattern, concentrate on improving your horsemanship skills by riding circles, figure-eights and sidepasses. Circling helps you get to know your horse and improves your balance. If you and your horse don't have balance, you won't perform properly around the barrels.

When you're circling, tip your horse's nose to the inside and keep its body rounded. Sit back on your horse and lean into the circle a bit, keeping the horse underneath itself. Start out with medium-sized circles at a trot, then vary your circle sizes by bringing your horse in with the inside rein, then pick up your inside rein and push out to a bigger circle with your inside leg. When you can perform symmetrical, controlled circles at a trot, try the exercise at a lope.

Circling is a great way to calm and relax your horse.

### Create fun fitness options

Keep your horse in good physical and mental shape by exer-

## GLOSSARY

**Pocket** - path of the cloverleaf pattern about 8-12 feet from the first barrel and 4-6 feet from the second and third barrels, where you ask your horse to set.

**Rate/Check** - sitting deep and pulling back on the reins enough to collect your horse's stride and slow its hind end as you approach the barrel.

**Set** - when your horse shortens its stride, in response to your rate, in preparation for the turn.



Instead of running the barrel pattern, trot and lope circles, using your legs to push your horse and make the circles larger and smaller. Focus on your balance and keeping your horse's body rounded toward the circle. Loping circles is great exercise and will keep your horse relaxed.

cising away from the arena and barrels as much as possible. Ride outside in fields or on trails to keep your horse's mind sane and willing. Open areas offer endless opportunities to improve your riding skills, so use the space to trot large circles or straight lines to build muscle and strength. Do some controlled loping to build your horse's lung capacity. Also, do a lot of walking to keep your horse calm and relaxed.

### Use horse shows to practice full-speed cloverleaf patterns

Practice the pattern at slow speeds at home, reserving your top speeds for the show arena. Sign up for the lower divisions or go to an AQHA all-novice show, which are great places to learn. Accept that your first several shows might not be in the money, because you won't have too many fast patterns under your belt. Your patience will pay off in the long run because your horse will maintain a willingness to work hard for you from show to show.

## Turn and Burn

NOW YOU KNOW NOT TO PRACTICE THE BARREL PATTERN full-speed more than a couple times a week. So perfect your can-chasing skills by walking and trotting the barrel pattern at home. Ten Hoeve shows you how:

### Take a stand, then have a seat

Stand up in the saddle and head to the first barrel at a trot. Lean forward, pulling yourself up in the saddle and over your horse's front end. As you come into your pocket, check your horse by tugging your inside rein, sit down and walk your horse around the barrel. Pick up a trot and head to the second barrel and repeat the turn at a walk.



"People say you only get one good horse in a lifetime," says AQHA Professional Horseman and Team Wrangler member JIM TEN HOEVE.

"That's not true. We've had lots of good horses, and we have good horses right now."

The speed-event trainer lives with his wife, Sandy, and 13-year-old daughter, Tasha, in Montague, New Jersey, hauling to East Coast shows nearly every weekend. Among his accolades during his 53-year barrel racing career are numerous AQHA high-point top-10 awards. His older daughter, Dawn, lives in New York and runs barrels.







At each barrel, Tasha Ten Hoeve visualizes her pocket and rates her horse for the turn. Then she sits deep, grabs the horn and turns around the barrel, leaning slightly into the turn and keeping pressure on her stirrups. Then, she looks ahead to the next barrel, leans forward in the saddle and offers her horse rein so it can propel out of the turn.

Get comfortable with knowing when to sit down and when to pull yourself forward. Sitting becomes a cue to your horse to get under itself for the turn. If you're too far forward and over your horse's carrying point, you'll force your horse to turn on its front end rather than its hind end, which isn't as efficient. Sit down, and your horse will sit down, making the turn faster and easier to ride.

#### **Lean on**

Lean slightly into the barrel, not away from it. You'll have better control of your horse and will be less likely to slide off the side. Bring your weight in toward the barrel as you change your hand to the inside rein.

#### **Feet inside for the ride**

Put your feet far into your stirrups and keep pressure on them with your toes down and heels up. During your turns, make sure most of your pressure is on the inside foot. When you

lean forward and leave a barrel, return pressure to both feet and keep your feet in front of you at all times. Wide stirrups are great for keeping your feet from slipping out.

#### **Hold on!**

Hold the horn, even during slow practice patterns, to get yourself in the habit. If you're not holding the horn, you won't direct your horse where it belongs because you won't be able to keep yourself balanced. If you lose your balance, your horse loses its balance. Move your horse in or out with your inside rein, and hold the horn with your other hand.

#### **Find a seasoned senior**

Pair yourself with a solid, well-trained barrel horse that knows its job in case you make mistakes. If your horse has a lot of experience, it'll teach you more and take care of you without being as aggressive and unpredictable as a young horse in training. 🐾



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