**PIVOTS and CURVES and CIRCLES**

An important maneuver in presenting a halter or showmanship horse is the pivot.

Circling or traveling in a curve while walking or trotting will also be used in patterns.

Teaching the horse to travel in a circle will help him learn the pivot. Traveling in curves makes the horse start thinking about moving away or following your body. This is the movement needed to perform a pivot right or left. Maneuvering the horse in a circle requires the horse to move away or toward the handler.

As discussed in earlier lessons, the horse will move off of the handler’s body and not off of the lead.

To teach the horse to follow the handler, begin by walking with the horse in a halter and lead with the chain used under the chin, as in a showmanship class.

Walk in a brisk manner, with the lead coiled in a big loop held in the left hand. The right hand holds the lead opposite the ring on the halter. When holding the lead, do not have contact with the horse’s head. Keep your eyes forward as this both aids your performance when showing, and does not create a cue to the horse.

A training technique will be used that is similar to teaching a dog to heel. Begin by walking around the practice area and make gradual curves left and right. **You will have to change direction with your feet and shoulders first**, and then allow the chain to connect to correct the horse by pulling him with you or pushing him away. Avoid jerking the horse with the chain, as this will cause the horse to brace away from you. Instead use a steady pressure, and immediately release the pressure as the reward when the horse comes with you.

When turning or curving to the **right, turn into** the horse and bump into the horse to reinforce that he needs to move away from your body. Left turns are much harder and are covered in a later lesson!

Avoid using the chain under the chin and neck. Use of the chain for turning causes the horse to bend his neck. The horse must keep his neck straight and learn lift his shoulders for the turn, keeping them square. The horse should cross the front leg on the outside of the turn in front of the leg on the inside of the turn.

**It is important the horse does not bend his neck.** If the horse bends his neck and the shoulder drops into the turn the horse will not be able to maintain balance throughout his body, thereby allowing the hindquarters to swing out in the opposite direction.

If the horse does not understand how to move away from your body, use a tap or slap on the shoulder with the end of the lead. You must reinforce the idea that he needs to move away from your body. An easy way to do this is by exchanging the lead into your left hand and the loop into your right hand. With the lead switched it is easy to extend the right arm toward the horse’s shoulder and apply a tap. If the horse does not respond, become stronger with the correction, he will figure it out quickly.

Making large circles and curves is easier for the horse, as forward motion helps him maintain balance and gives him the opportunity to figure out what you want as he is not required to turn as sharply and promptly as in a pivot. When the horse is moving easily away from your body, he will not be feeling a pull or bump from the handler. This is positive reinforcement for the horse. Verbal praise and petting are certainly acceptable when the horse has responded correctly.

As you progress in the training of walking in curves and circles, throw in a sharp 90-degree turn to test your horse. At this point of the horse’s training, only make right turns. (The left pull turn is a more advanced maneuver and will be taught when the horse is farther along in his understanding of following the handler’s body.

The test will be – is the horse moving quickly away from your body, or is he still slow in his response? Are the horse’s shoulders lifted and square? Did he cross the front left leg over the right? If the answer is no – keep doing the basic curve training. If the answer is yes, it is time to increase the difficulty.

This is a great drill: use four cones set up to form a square. The cones should be 40 to 50 feet apart. Walk the horse around the outside of the cones. Walk the square to the right and to the left. When curving around the corner, try to stay as close to the cone as possible. This will help with your visual accuracy in creating the ninety-degree turn. Completing the corner correctly is important too. Be aware of over turning, or under turning.

After traveling around the square a few times, there will be a path in the dirt. Is it straight?

Using the cones in the square creates many practice exercises that help the horse prepare for the pivot.

Once your horse understands how to move away from your body, increase the difficulty by making ninety degree turns left and right around the cones.

When approaching a right turn slow down, bringing the horse almost to a stop, but maintaining enough forward motion to help the front left leg cross in front of the right leg.

Turn your body completely so you are facing the side of the horse’s muzzle. Lift the right hand slightly making contact with the chain in order to steady the head and prevent it from turning. This will also help shift the weight back onto the right hind leg.

The hand is not to be used in any way to turn the horse. Do not allow the hand to touch the horse’s head. The hand is only used to maintain straightness. In the finished turn the lift of the head is not needed, since the horse is so in tune to following the handler’s body, and will know to stay balanced. By practicing this frequently, the horse will catch on quickly and follow your body.

It is important to remember to stay on your path when making the turn. The horse has to see your body go into the direction first; this is the cue for the horse to turn. If you cue with the hand first, then the body, the horse will learn that the hand is the first cue and will wait to be given the hand cue.

It may be helpful to visualize a circle in the dirt, or even draw one. The circle will always be the same for each horse. When the horse is balanced, the horse’s nose will stay directly on the circle. If the nose passes across the circle the horse is stepping forward too much, if the nose moves to the inside of the circle the horse is rocked back too far.

When ready to ask for the actual pivot, do so, in small increments. Begin by asking for ninety-degree pivots. Start in the presentation position. Turn and face the horse maintaining body position directly in front of the horse’s nose. Switch hands on the lead. The right hand will hold the loop of the lead and the left hand will hold the lead close to the head to keep it steady and straight. Apply slight pressure on the chain in order to keep the horse’s head straight, and directly in front of his shoulders. Step toward the horse’s nose, when the horse does not move away tap the horse on the shoulder with the lead held in the right hand. The shoulder needs to move. The left front leg must cross in front of the right. The response needed is that the horse must start to move to the right when he sees your body move toward him.



If he does not move the tap on the shoulder will be applied. As the horse starts to move, slightly elevate the horse’s head to keep the weight shifted back. By watching the right hind leg you will know if the pivot is being performed correctly. Ask only for a few steps in the first attempts.

Stop and praise when done correctly.

The horse is in a trial and error stage of training. He really isn’t sure what you want, but if he gets praised when performing correctly he will figure out what is desired by the handler.

Continue with ninety-degree pivots to the right. **Remember to save left pivot work for later as they are more difficult and even though we have started a foundation in curve work, they need to be taught later in the horse’s training.**

As the ninety degree turn is perfected move up to half turns and then to three quarter turns, and finally, full turns or three hundred and sixty degree turns.

Go back to the square of cones. Walk from one cone and slightly past the next cone. Stop and ask for a ninety- degree turn around the corner. Trot to the next cone and stop. Now make a half-turn and trot back to previous cone. This exercise can be mixed up with many different variations. It also incorporates the previous lessons--starting and stopping at cones, squaring up, maneuvering around corners or circling a cone, changing direction etc.

**Showmanship in Hand**

Based on lessons by Cathy Hanson, but with some additions

By Kathy Troxler

**Quartering**

Once your horse is leading well at the walk and trot and knows how to stop and set up, it is now time to learn to step around the horse in order to present the horse to the judge. When presenting the horse to the judge, you don’t want to block the judge’s view of the horse so the handler will move from one side to the other. When moving from one side of the horse to the other side, the maneuver is called a “crossover”. The purpose of the crossover is to create a safe position for the judge while reviewing your horse. You must allow the judge the best opportunity to see your horse, and you must always be able to have eye contact with the judge.

This is called “quartering”. Why “quartering”?

The horse is divided into four sections. Imagine a line drawn down the center of the horse from his nose to his tail. Then imagine another line drawn across the horse just behind his withers, or through the heart girth. Those lines divide the horse into four parts or quarters.

As the judge is walking around the horse and stepping into these four imaginary sections, it is important the handler is in the correct position at all times to maintain eye contact, give the judge a full view of the horse and judge from a safe position.

When the judge is in a front section, the handler will be on the opposite side of the horse. If the judge is in the left front section, the handler will be in the right front section. When the handler is on the opposite side, the judge has an unobstructed view of the horse. When the judge is in a front section it is still easy to maintain eye contact with the judge.

When the judge is in a hind section, the handler must be on the same side of the horse as the judge. In this position the handler will never lose eye contact and can protect the judge in case the horse misbehaves. If the horse were to kick out toward a judge, the handler can easily see the potential problem and pull the horse toward herself, thereby moving the horse’s hindquarters away from the judge.

The handler begins in **presentation position**.

Presentation position places the handler on the horse’s left side, standing angled between the horse’s eye and muzzle with the handler’s legs and feet together and toes pointed toward the horse’s left front foot. The handler will be standing to the side of the horse’s head and slightly ahead of the horse.

To move to the right side of the horse there are two different foot patterns you may use—a three step or a four step.

The three step will begin with the right leg crossing in front of the left, followed by the left foot stepping left with a turn of the toe pointing to the horse’s right toe, and then the right foot stepping into presentation position next to the left foot. The handler will now be on the right side of the horse in presentation position.

To move back to the left side of the horse, cross the left foot in front of the right. The right foot then steps into presentation position with the toe turning the horse’s left front foot. The left foot then follows stepping next to the right.

The three step move requires a big step in order to crossover far enough to the other side of the horse. This step works for handlers with long legs. The four step, of course, does not require as large a step, so it is easier for small children, youth or people with shorter legs.

Begin in the same presentation position. The first step of the four steps will be the left leg moving to the left, and then the right leg crossing over and turning the foot toward the horse. The left leg now makes the third step, moving behind the right leg. The final (fourth) step is the right leg being placed next to the left. To cross back the right leg leads, the left crosses in front turning the toe toward the horse, the right foot steps behind and the left is placed next to the right.

The last step must be a definite step. Sliding the foot into position next to the other foot is not acceptable.

While executing the crossover, the steps must look smooth and comfortable. Practice both types of cross-overs and then choose the number of steps you can make smoothly and easily. Once you have chosen, practice, practice and practice until it becomes second nature. You do not want to have to think about which foot you need to move. It is desirable to have a confident look, and knowing where to place your feet will allow you to concentrate on other areas of the performance.

Now it is time to enlist the help of a friend who can play the part of a judge. The judge or friend will walk around the horse, and the handler must crossover at the correct moment.

For example, the handler has just walked up to the judge, halted, squared and is now presenting the horse from the left side. The judge steps to the right side of the horse (right and left is known by the direction in which the horse is standing) and is now located in the front right quadrant. The handler stays on the left side. The judge then walks toward the hindquarters of the horse, crossing the line at the horse’s heart girth, so the handler must now cross over to the right side of the horse. As the judge steps directly behind the horse, the handler will stay in position, since the judge has not crossed the division line yet. Once the judge has stepped to the left side of the horse, the handler may then step to the left side of the horse as well. As the judge crosses the heart girth area, the handler steps back to the right side of the horse. The judge will now be in front of the horse once again. The handler will stay in position until asked to perform the next maneuver, and then at that time the handler may step back to the left side of the horse.

**Quartering DO’S AND DONT’S**

Do – keep your eyes and chin up when crossing over.

Do – lead with your hip when stepping across.

Do – Spread your collar bones, keeping the shoulders back and down.

Do – hold your stomach in and stand tall.

Do – lengthen the lead slightly when crossing over, so you do not accidentally pull the horse’s head.

Do – check your horse periodically to make sure he is still set up and squared correctly.

Do – practice with a western show hat to become comfortable moving around the horse while you are wearing a wide hat with a wide brim.

Do not – twist the feet in the dirt when crossing over.

Do not – alter your steps. Always do the same number of steps. Symmetry is important in showmanship.

Do not – touch your horse when crossing over.

Do not – cross over until the judge has crossed into a different quadrant.

Do not – get ahead of the judge in the crossover. Wait until the judge cross over into the next quadrant.

Do not - become overly animated in your steps. Take natural steps.