

Circle Tips

by Mimi Busk-Downey

Q: How do I teach my horse to do a better circle?

A: The first thing to teach your horse is to stay between the reins, which is the same concept whether you are using one hand or two hands. You do this by rewarding the horse for the good behavior. When he does a correct turn, be sure to pat him and speak to him. If he is pushing outside the two reins or not responding, he may need more time in Bozal or the rider may need to examine his body cues to make sure he is giving a clear message.

If your horse is fading outside on turns, (making the circle bigger than you want) then you need to use your body to help him understand his parameters. If a horse is leaning to the inside on the turn or cutting the corner, it is usually because this is the “path of least resistance”.

The horse knows that the turn is coming and is anticipating it, wanting to get there as quickly as possible. The rider and the horse must be in balance. If the rider leans into the turn, the horse is more likely to fade to the inside. If the rider concentrates on staying more upright, the horse will be in a better position to complete the turn in balance and keep weight on the outside rear leg. Keeping your cues consistent is the best way to help the horse. If you are unsure of how you are riding, have someone take a video of you and watch it carefully to see what you are doing that may be affecting your horse’s performance.

To keep the horse in balance, the rider can practice large circles and encourage the horse to stay balanced by using the inside knee to reinforce the rein and body position. Remember that this work should only be done for a limited time. When the horse shows he is getting the idea, reward him with a nice ride out in the field so his mind will stay fresh and his performance relaxed. ❁

