

## Bolting

**Follow these tips to handle bolting on the trail.**

*By Micaela Myers*

Most horses bolt, or take off running, when they're scared or when they want to get back to the barn quickly. Bolting is a highly dangerous behavior that can unseat even experienced riders. If your horse is a chronic bolter, hire a professional trainer and don't attempt to reform him on your own. However, even solid trail horses may be prone to bolt once in a blue moon, so here are some techniques to handle a bolt if you should encounter this problem on the trail.

Prevent the bolt before it happens. "Learn what happens right before your horse bolts and do something about it—back him up, ask him to go sideways, move his hindquarters around—something to get his mind on you instead of what he is afraid of," Falcone says.

"Usually they'll get tense before they take off," Reynolds adds. "If you feel your horse tense up to where his hind end is starting to gather, you should bend him. Pull one rein in toward your stomach, then you can disengage your horse's hind end. You want to take away your horse's forward power," she explains. "If he's bent in half and he's turning toward your leg, he's not apt to take off."

Circle him if he bolts. If your horse does take off running, put your weight in the stirrups, and keep your feet forward so you stay secure in the saddle. Sit up tall, and try not to panic. Look for a place to circle your horse. It's always more effective to circle your horse to get him to slow down rather than pulling straight back on the reins. If you pull back steadily on both reins, your horse may brace against the pressure and keep running.

"If you're in an open meadow area you can start making circles, and make your circles smaller and smaller until your horse stops," Reynolds says. "If you're at a dead run you won't want to bend him in a really tight circle because he could fall over, but you can make a big circle and then smaller ones until he winds down into a stop." You may need to hold on to the mane or horn with one hand for security, while you pull the other hand back toward your hipbone. If you hold on to the horn, use it to push yourself down in the saddle; don't make the mistake of accidentally pulling yourself forward.

"If you're on a little mountain trail, you'll have to stay on until you can get control again," Reynolds says. Remember that steady rein pressure can cause your horse to brace, so try using a give and release. Don't attempt to bail off unless your horse is headed for a dangerous object or cliff.