

## Cue Speed Between Barrels

### What can I do to get my horse to pick up the pace between barrels?

*By Julie Voigt*

**Q.** My 6-year-old barrel horse runs to the first barrel and home from the last barrel well, but between barrels she shuts off and practically lopes. I've tried kicking and even a crop and spurs to no avail. My vet was recently out, and he says she's in good health. What can I do to get her to pick up the pace?

**A.** To get your mare to run between barrels again, you must determine why she quit.

A thorough inspection by your vet, including a check of your horse's teeth, is the right place to start.

Next, you must look at yourself. You have actually taught your mare to quit running between barrels by continuing to ask for speed after she accelerates. The aggressive forward movement of your hands and body—kicking, spurring and use of a crop—ask for acceleration. Knowing when to quit asking is what's important.

It's best to practice acceleration away from the barrel pattern. Find a long, safe stretch of ground. Practicing acceleration is not about running a horse wide open; it's a training process that must be done correctly to be effective. Start at a relaxed lope, and then ask for acceleration. To do this, first use your voice (cluck, smooch, et cetera) and shift your weight forward, followed by leg pressure, and then a crop (if needed). Pay close attention each time you ask for acceleration: Don't use leg pressure or the crop if a simple voice cue will do. As soon as you feel her accelerate, stop asking for more. This is very important. Be satisfied with a slight acceleration at first. When her speed plateaus, just before she begins to slow down, ask again. Be sure to stop asking as soon as she accelerates again. Allow her to run free, and then ask her to accelerate one more time. After the third acceleration, relax, quit riding and gently transition to a slower gait.

When practicing the barrel pattern, be careful not to ask her to accelerate when she needs to be slowing down to prepare to turn the next barrel. It will only make her slow down faster. It's best to set up a barrel pattern at least five times larger than usual. If you don't have a large enough area, you can set the barrels in a single line on a track. The purpose is to have enough space between barrels to practice acceleration. Lope around your first barrel, and as your mare leaves ask for acceleration (as described earlier). Remember the important part: Stop asking when she begins to accelerate. Allow her to run free a few strides, and before she begins to slow down on her own, bring her down to a lope. (Don't ever run an entire pattern of this size at full speed!) Lope relaxed to the second barrel, and then repeat the same procedure leaving the second and third barrel. Soon, whenever you ask her to accelerate she will pick up the pace.

**Expert:** Julie Voigt was the National Professional Rodeo Association champion for seven years straight from 1997 to 2003 and now trains barrel horses on her ranch in Beulah, N.D., where she lives with her husband and two children.