

Build Speed for a Faster Barrel Racing Time

Champion barrel racer Marlene McRae advises how to condition for a faster barrel racing time.

Q: What are some exercises I can do to help build my horse's speed for a faster time in barrel racing?

A: Having a well-conditioned athlete is the first step to getting your horse to run to his maximum ability. I like to work my horse every day for the first eight weeks of training, and then decrease the training to four days a week. The distance I train and the pace I go are the secrets to a well-conditioned horse that has the ability to run faster during a barrel racing competition.

Condition your horse in long, straight lines whenever possible, as circles are physically hard on a horse. Here is my conditioning program broken down into each step:

Trot one mile
Lope one mile on one lead
Lope one more mile on the opposite lead
The fourth mile: Long trot the first half mile then slow trot the last half mile.

NOTE: Do not walk in between paces.

This totals four miles, which I feel is the optimum distance for building a well-conditioned equine athlete in barrel racing or any event. I want to keep the heart rate up and work it, then bring the heart rate slowly back down. Every third day, I sprint my horse after the third mile in a straight line for about 400 yards.

You will be impressed how your horse's muscle tone will change with this type of conditioning program. Before long, you will find that your horse feels like running and will be quicker around the turns and faster in the straightaways.