

Set to Spin

How do you train a horse to spin?

By Dale Rudin

Q. We have trained a phenomenal reining horse, but we're having trouble getting a consistent spin. How do you train a horse to spin?

A. Your horse's unsteady spin is most likely a position problem. Proper form is critical for a spin to be consistent and high-quality. To get your horse's spin off to a good start, put him in a correct poll-to-tail arc so that from nose-to-hindquarters his body resembles a subtle version of the letter C. Shorten your inside rein to create the inner boundary of the arc. Your outside rein will create the outer edge of the bend and restrict your horse's forward motion when you ask him to lock down his pivot foot. Now walk your horse on a medium-sized circle at an energetic pace. Hold your hands evenly and slightly in front of and just below the height of the saddle horn. To keep your horse balanced laterally, apply even rein pressure to both sides of the bit. Gradually increase the bend and guide your horse into a smaller and smaller circle, while keeping his walk as energetic as possible.

As your circle tightens, your horse will have to work harder. He might slow down or pop his shoulder out of alignment. If he slows down, go back to a larger circle to re-establish his pace. If he pops his shoulder (his head will tilt and you'll be able to feel uneven contact in your hands), add outside rein pressure to bring it back into line with his neck and rib cage.

During a spin, your horse's hind end should become stationary while his forehand continues to move. Once he anchors his pivot foot (his inside hind), help him cross his front legs and turn clean by leading him with your inside rein held about 2 inches away from his neck. Also take your inside leg away from his side and turn your hips slightly into the turn. Your outside rein and hand stay put, but if you feel your horse shift his weight forward, alternately take and release on the left and right reins (or whichever rein on which he's the heaviest) until he shifts his weight rearward, centers his weight and carries himself lightly between your hands. Use your outside leg to encourage your horse to keep moving after he's taken one or two steps into the spin, otherwise your horse may be confused and step out of the spin.

Don't add speed until your horse's form is solid, or he'll make mistakes that will affect his confidence. Take it one step at a time, and your horse will have a great spin to add to his reining repertoire.

Expert: Dale Rudin teaches her "Performance Through Partnership" techniques near her home in Tennessee and offers clinics nationwide. She also authors "Western Lessons" in *Young Rider* magazine.