

## Lead the Way

*By Micaela Myers*

For a fast and safe run, it's imperative that your barrel horse change leads between the first and second barrel. "It's actually scary for a horse to turn on the wrong lead because he's in a position where he has to turn, but he's not set up for it," explains champion barrel racer Julie Voigt. "By teaching your horse to change leads earlier in his training, you can help him set up for his turn and make it a lot easier for him."

A finished barrel horse will change leads automatically between the first and second barrel, and Julie says some of her horses wait until they rate for the second barrel to switch leads. However, if your horse doesn't automatically change leads, you'll need to step away from the cloverleaf pattern and practice Julie's tried-and-true barreland funnel circle exercise.

Once your horse understands how to body rate and perform perfect circles of varying sizes, as detailed in this article, you can tackle Julie's single barrel and funnel exercise incorporating lead changes. Set up a barrel in the center of your arena and lope toward it from one end of your arena. For example, if you're turning the barrel to the left your horse will be on the left lead. Ride a circle around the barrel, rating at the appropriate place, and leave the circle traveling in a straight line toward the other end of your arena.

While you're on the straight line, change leads in preparation for a funnel circle in the opposite direction. (Use a simple lead change by breaking into trot if you need to.) Lope your funnel circle to the right on the right lead, then approach the barrel again to complete a right circle around it; leave the barrel to change to the left lead and complete a funnel circle to the left.

The idea is to help your horse learn that he needs to change leads in preparation for a change in direction.

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