

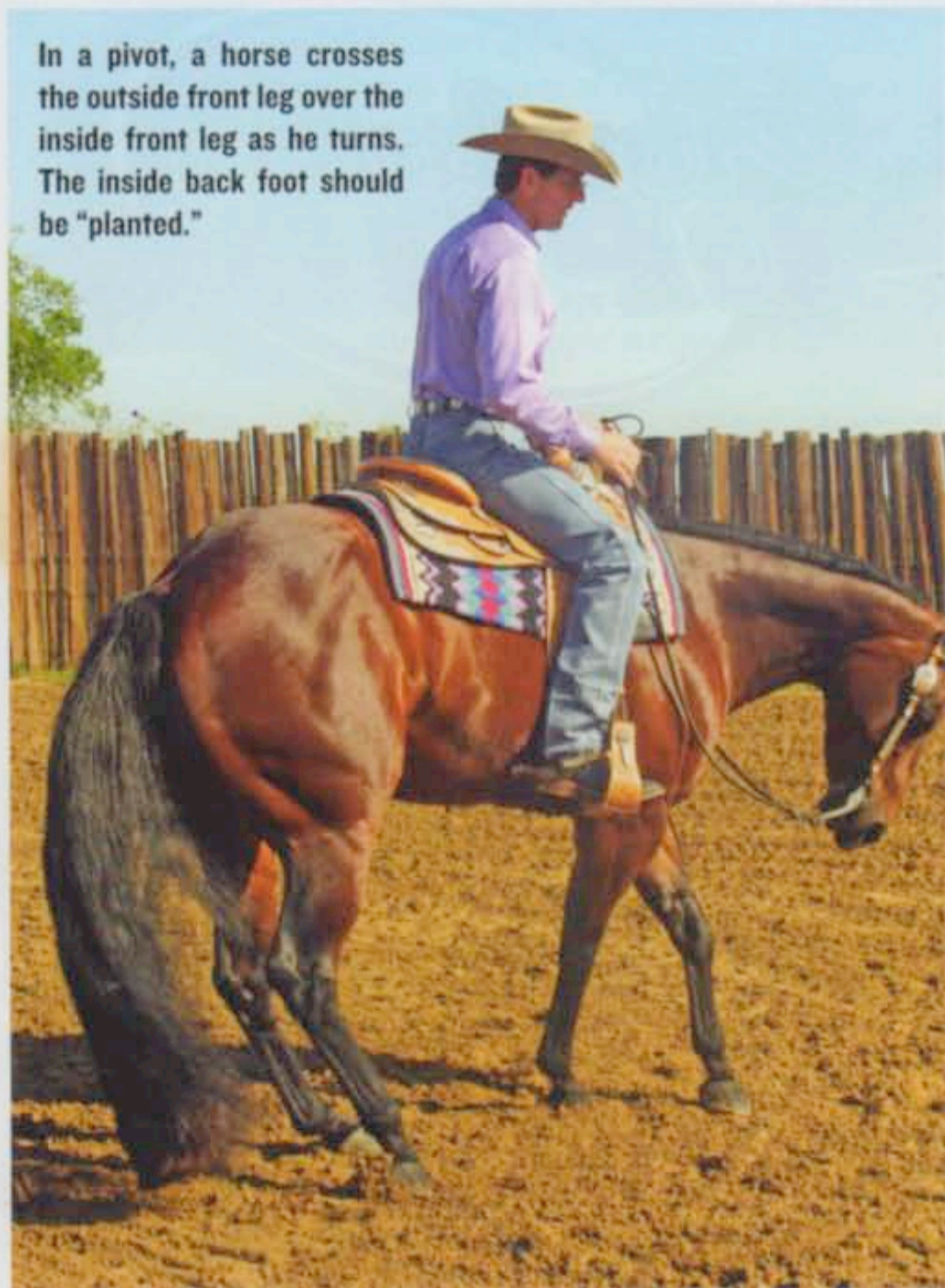
# Sit Square to Turn Around

*Use your legs, hands and voice to perfect your pivots.*

**By Robin Frid with Larri Jo Starkey**

**Photos by Larri Jo Starkey**

In a pivot, a horse crosses the outside front leg over the inside front leg as he turns. The inside back foot should be "planted."



SHOW HORSES NEED TO BE ABLE TO TURN AROUND. IT'S A foundation skill that they will use in all events, including showmanship, horsemanship, trail, equitation, reining, cutting and working cow horse.

You can improve your horse's pivot by sitting squarely and applying these principles every time you ask your horse to turn around.

## What's in a Pivot?

BEFORE YOU ASK FOR A PIVOT, YOU SHOULD KNOW HOW ONE works. A pivot is created when a horse lifts his back and uses forward motion to cross an outside front leg in front of the inside front leg as the horse turns around in a complete circle or more than one.

We look for a "planted" back foot, but it's not really planted, because a horse will shift his weight on that foot as he turns in a circle. What "planted" means is that the foot doesn't move as much as the other back foot, which is also shifting, though more visibly.

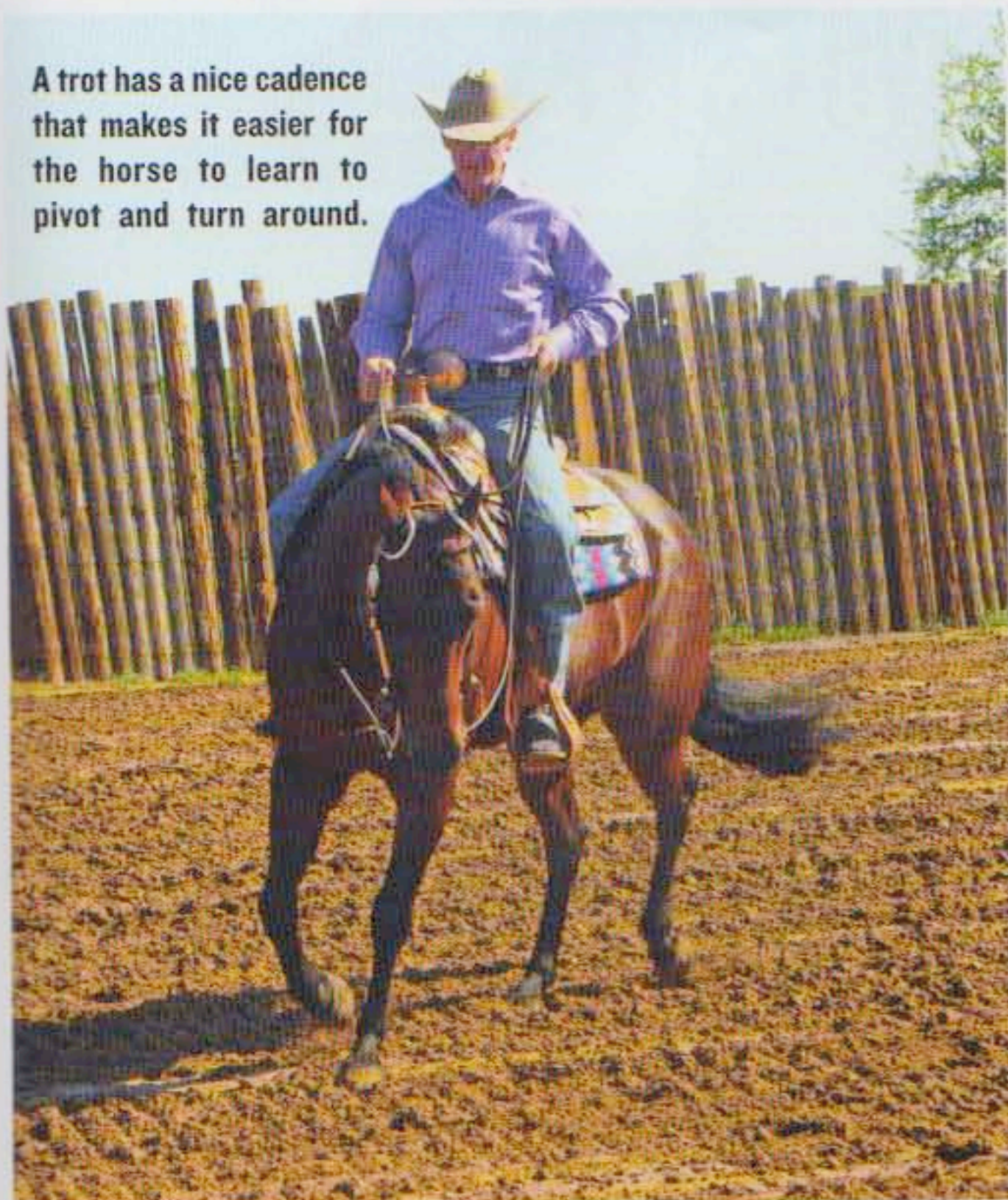
Ideally, the foot that stays "planted" should be the inside hind foot so that the foot that drives the pivot is moving forward, not backward.

The horse's body remains square. His head looks in the direction he's turning and the rider is square in the saddle. There's a tiny arc in the horse's body.

Every maneuver – except for backing up – is a forward maneuver, so the turn is a forward maneuver, which means forward momentum is essential to creating a good pivot.

When I teach the pivot to the horse, I begin at the trot,

A trot has a nice cadence that makes it easier for the horse to learn to pivot and turn around.



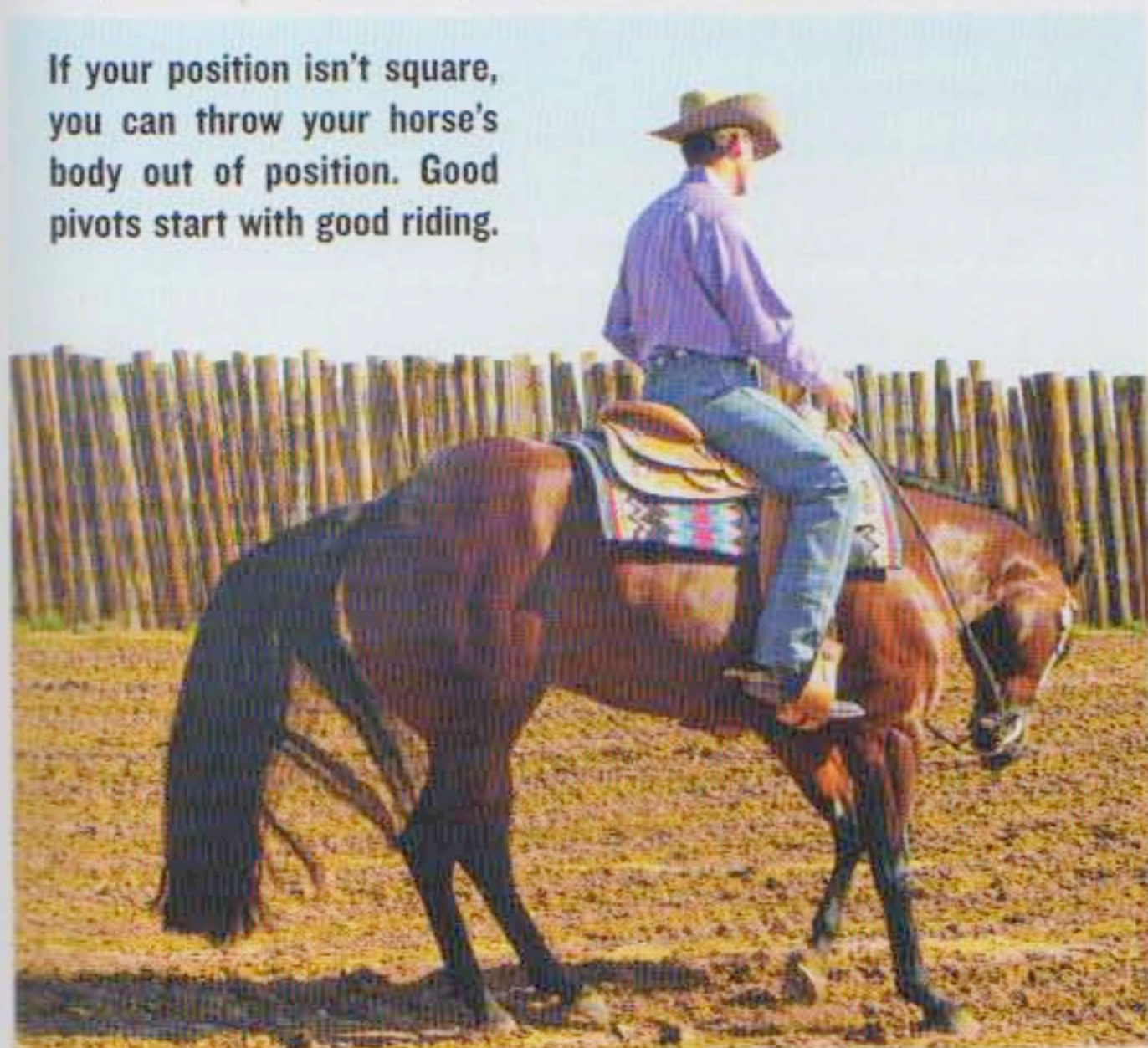
which has a nice cadence that makes it easier for the horse to cross his legs. I start working for one crossover step. After I get one step, I try for two. After I get two steps, I try for three. Going into the pivot, I want the horse to be athletic, to drive his hip underneath himself and to lift his back.

My goal is to make the true pivot the actual release. The horse has to use his body and back so much going straight that it is easier to come around in the pivot than it is to drive forward and really use his body.

When I enter a pivot, I make the horse collect and use his back, and when I exit, I make the horse collect and use his back. The pivot is the release. That's the sweet spot I'm looking for, so that the horse knows where he wants to be and will start hunting the pivot.

Repetition, repetition, repetition is the key. You have to

If your position isn't square, you can throw your horse's body out of position. Good pivots start with good riding.



pivot correctly with your horse 500 times to really make it happen once. If you do it one time incorrectly, your horse will remember it, because pivoting incorrectly is easier for him.

## Starting With You

PIVOTING CORRECTLY STARTS WITH THE RIDER. YOUR POSITION needs to be square. Your body shouldn't lean to one side or the other. Your shoulders should be square in the saddle, and your hands should be square over the top of his shoulders.

It's not fair to ask the horse's body to be square when your body is crooked. It's a partnership, and your part of it is that you're sitting square on your horse when you enter the pivot.

If you lean out, you push your horse's body the other way, forcing him to drop his stomach, which means he can't pivot correctly. If his stomach has dropped, then his back has dropped as well.

When you neck-rein, make sure your hands don't cross more than 1-2 inches past the horse's center line. Pulling harder on the outside rein will only put your horse's head out of position. If you start with a mistake like that, you're going to find it hard to get back into position.

Part of pivoting correctly is making sure your horse is in proper physical condition to pivot correctly. His back needs to be strong enough to lift and turn around. Even if a horse knows how to pivot correctly, he might need reconditioning if he has had some time off.

You can condition your horse by trotting him a lot and lifting with your legs, using leg-to-hand cues, driving your horse into the bridle, then stopping and doing it again. Trotting circles and changing directions, asking him to stop and do a rollback, and building his muscles will be more effective than asking him to do several pivots in a row. He won't be able to do it correctly, and you'll both become frustrated.

Build him up slowly.

## How to Pivot

IF I'M TEACHING MY HORSE TO PIVOT TO THE RIGHT, THE FIRST thing I'm going to do is lay the left rein against the left shoulder.

Then I pick up his body with my legs and hands and ask him to pivot. I'll add slight pressure with my outside leg and open up my inside leg to give him somewhere to go.

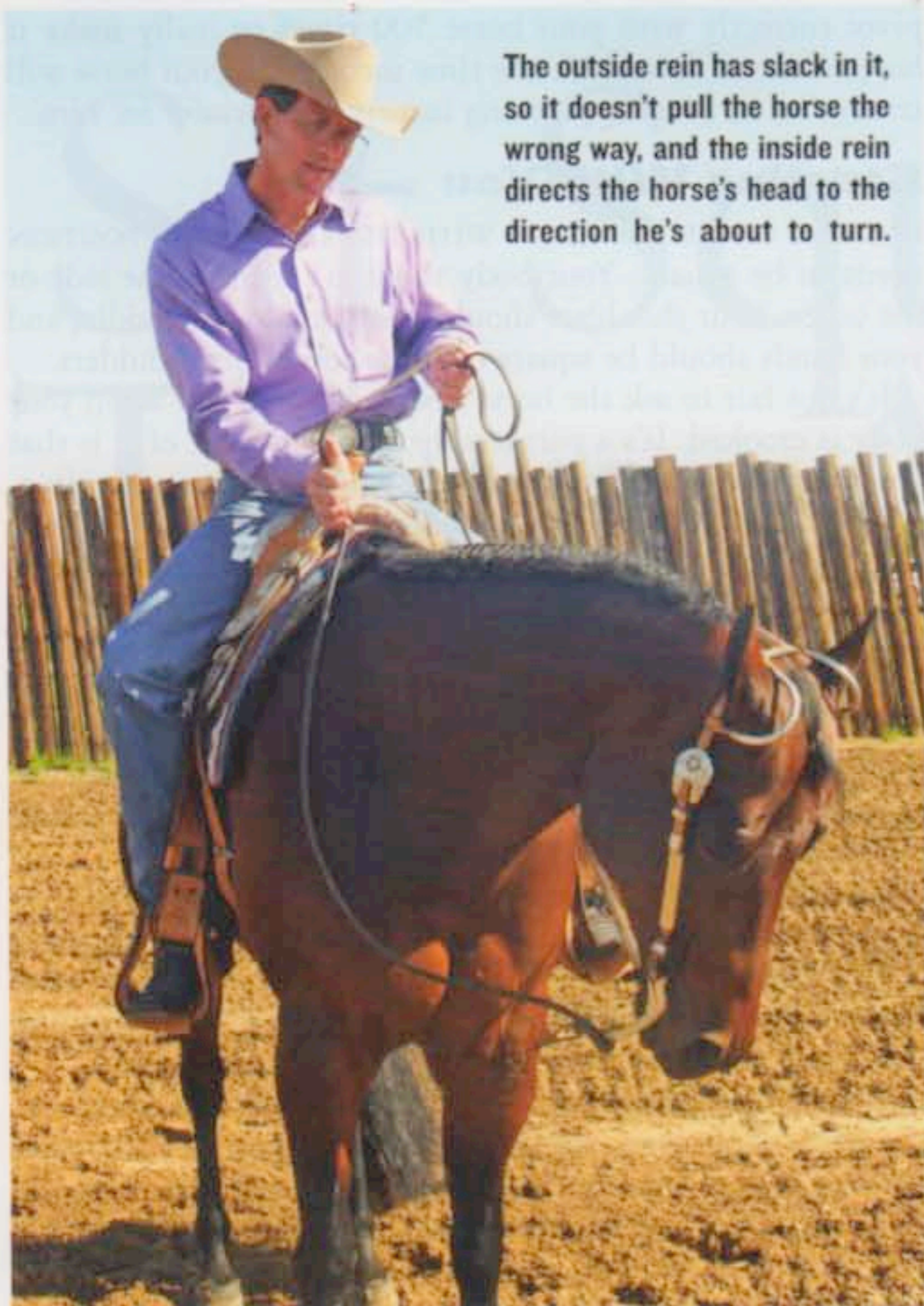
My horse looks to the right, where he's going, and his hip is underneath him. His back is square underneath me, and I'm sitting square on his back with my hips squarely under me.

Everything is leg-to-hand. You want the leg to be the first thing to move. So if I want to turn right, I close my left leg and open my right. I tell him I'm going right with my hands. I have my gas in my legs, I have my steering in my hands, and my cluck sends the horse around.

I use a lot of voice command. When I want my horse to move his feet, I cluck to him. If I want him to go faster, I cluck faster, and if I want him to slow down, I cluck slower. The horse follows my voice. I cluck every time a front foot moves. It takes practice with your horse to feel every time a foot hits the ground, but it's part of becoming a better rider.

The brake on the pivot is when my hand goes straight and I stop clucking and open my leg.

In the horsemanship, many patterns ask for speed control within the turnarounds. To me, if you push harder with your foot to make it happen, you might make the horse bend the wrong way.



The outside rein has slack in it, so it doesn't pull the horse the wrong way, and the inside rein directs the horse's head to the direction he's about to turn.

As a judge, let me emphasize that speed is not as important as correctness. I would prefer to see a horse spin a little bit slower and have proper form to function when he's doing things than to do things fast but incorrectly.

If a horse has correct technique and is athletic, the speed will come easily. It's harder for a really athletic horse to spin slowly correctly than it is to spin fast incorrectly, because the athletic horse will have to focus on every step he takes.

A lot of horses we see in horsemanship these days are spinning around the middle of their bodies instead of on their haunches. It's fast, but it's not really correct. Make sure your form is proper before you add the speed. ■

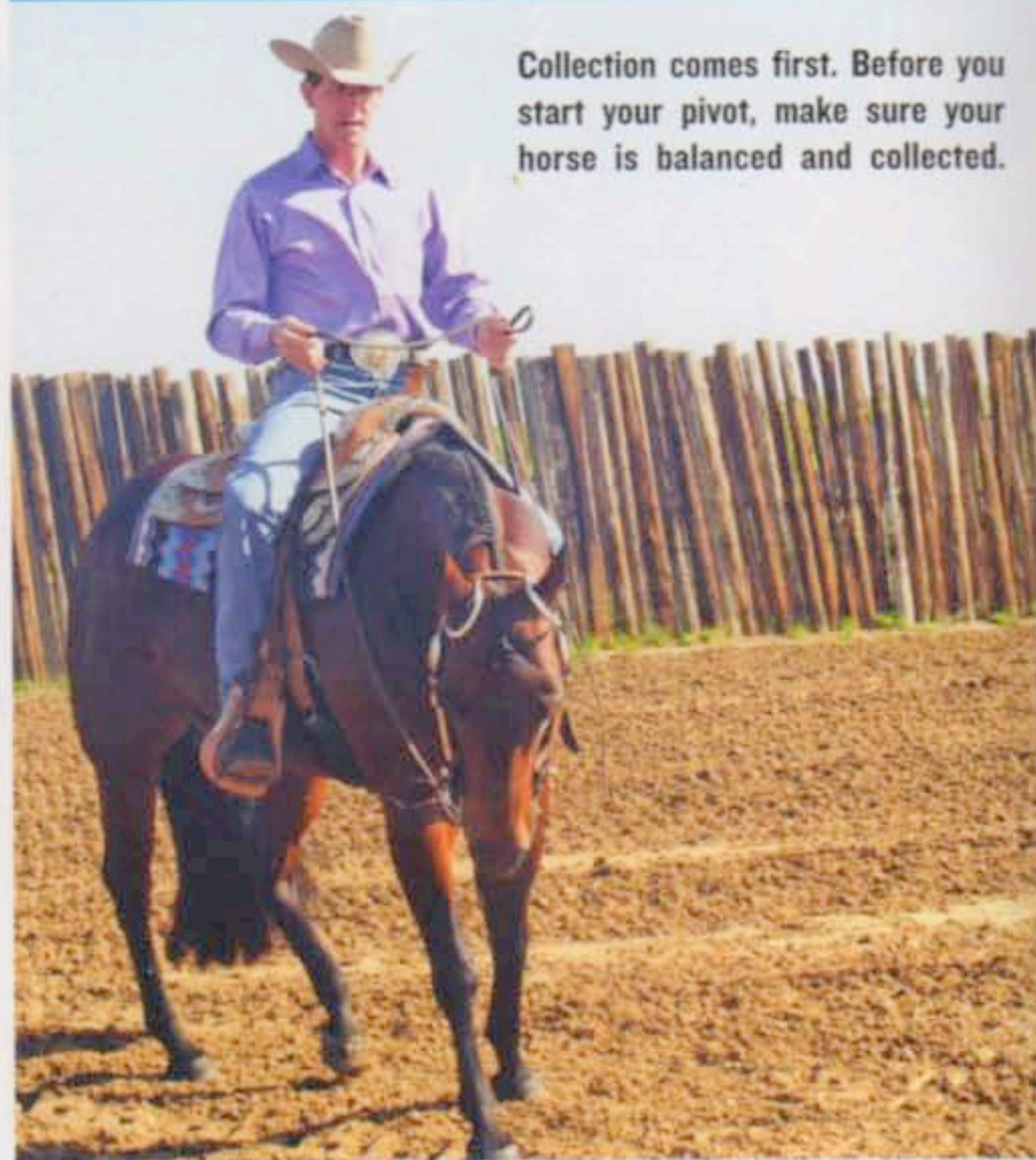
*Larri Jo Starkey is copy editor for The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to lstarkey@aqha.org.*

Cluck faster to increase a horse's speed in the pivot. Speed should always be secondary to correct technique.



# PIVOT STEPS

1. Collect your horse. Close your legs, push him into the bridle and lift him.
2. As soon as he lifts his back and collects, release to let him know he did it correctly.
3. Use your outside leg and your hand to indicate direction.
4. Cluck for the turnaround.
5. Stop clucking, release your legs and then collect again.



Collection comes first. Before you start your pivot, make sure your horse is balanced and collected.

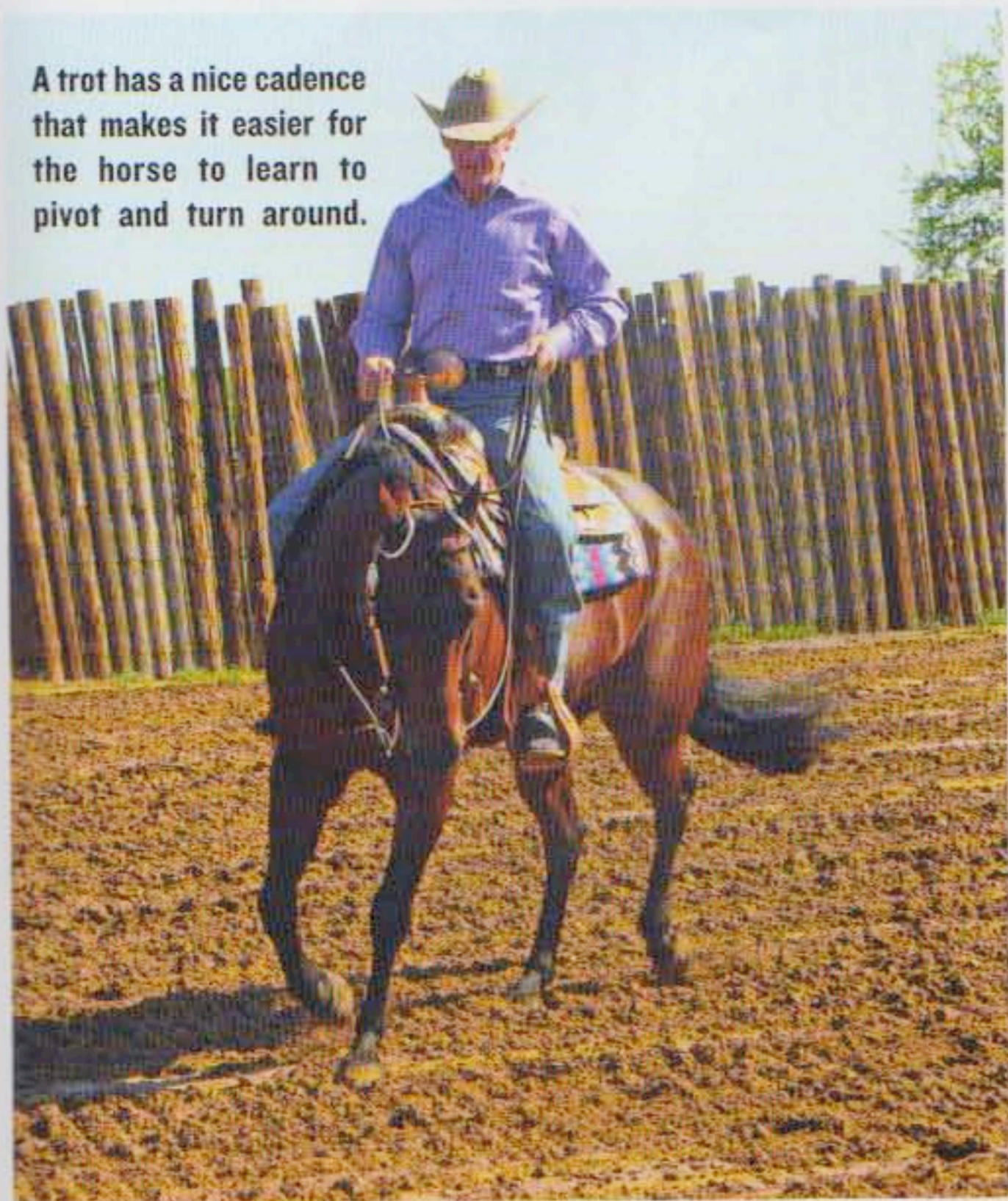
## BIO

ROBIN FRID began training horses in 1991, specializing in all-around events. He became an AQHA judge in 2007 and is a Category I judge for the National Snaffle Bit Association. He serves on the executive board of the Texas Quarter Horse Association and as a tri-chairman of the Texas Classic, the largest Quarter Horse show in Texas. Robin and his wife, Jenny, currently train and teach in Denton, Texas. Robin Frid's video, "Road Map to Success," is available at [www.robinfrid.com](http://www.robinfrid.com).

His demonstration horse for these photos is Deelivered by Dee Invitation, a 10-year-old gelding owned by Courtney Jetolina who has been in the top five at the All American Quarter Horse Congress and the AQHA World Championship Show.



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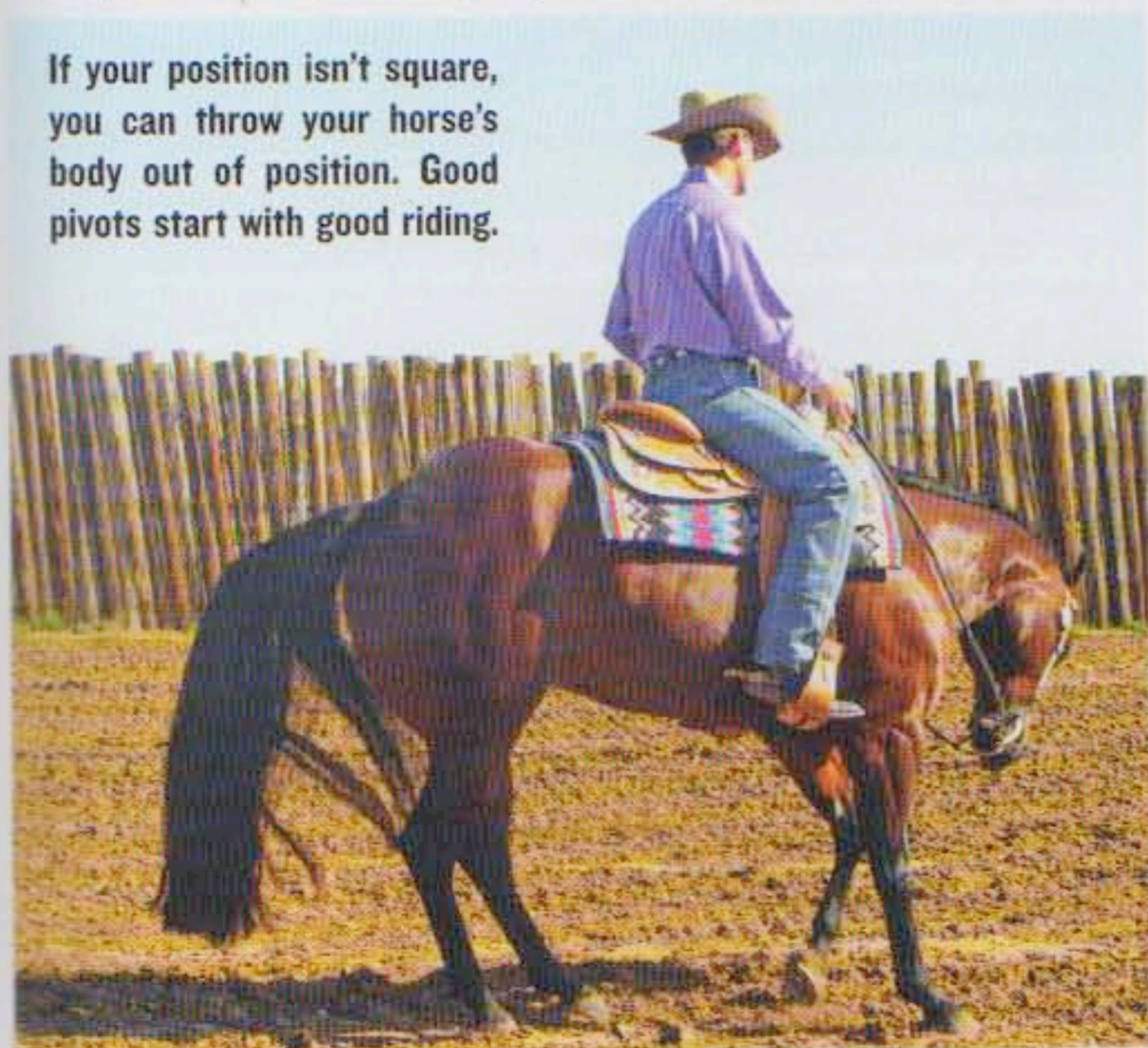
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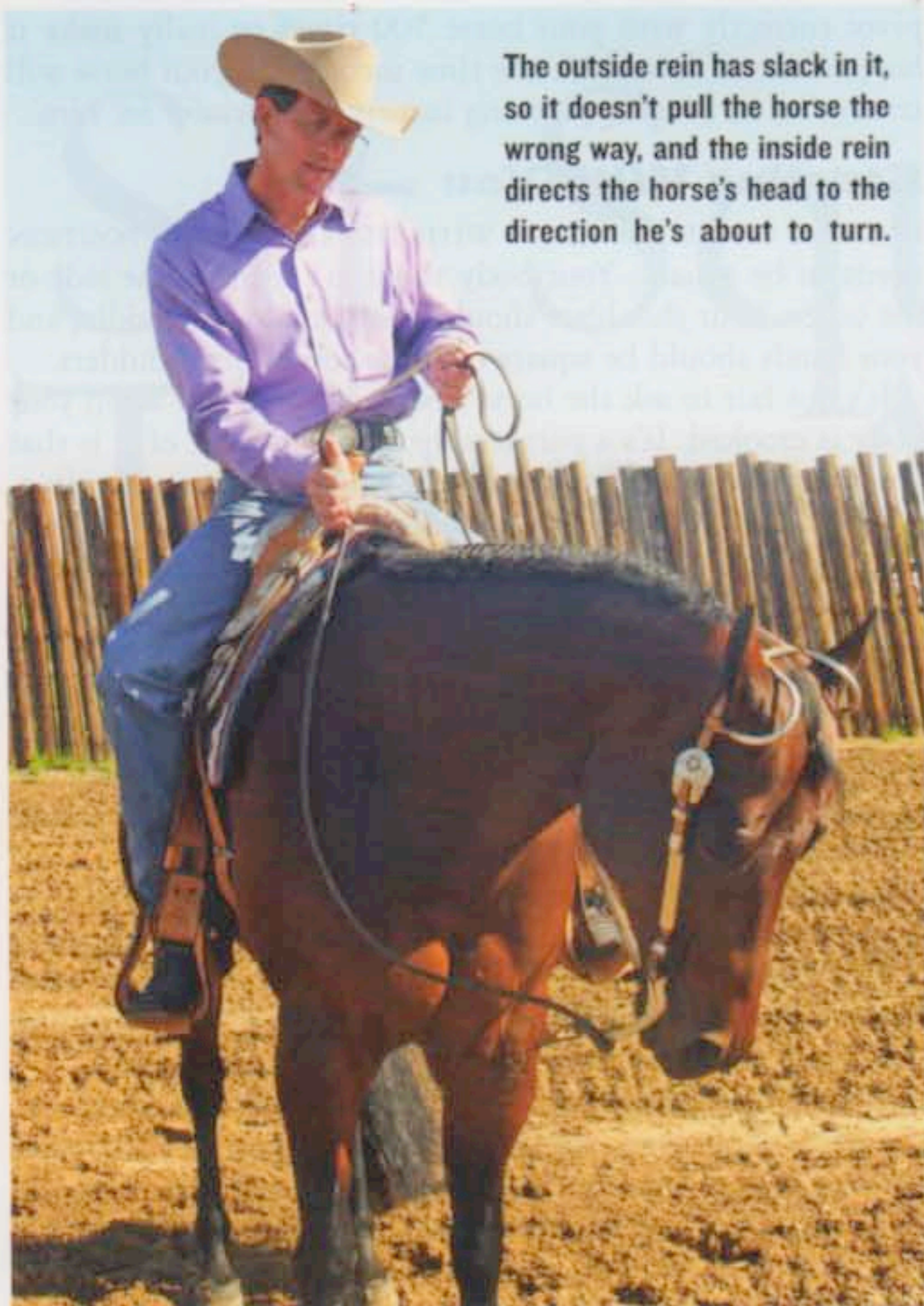
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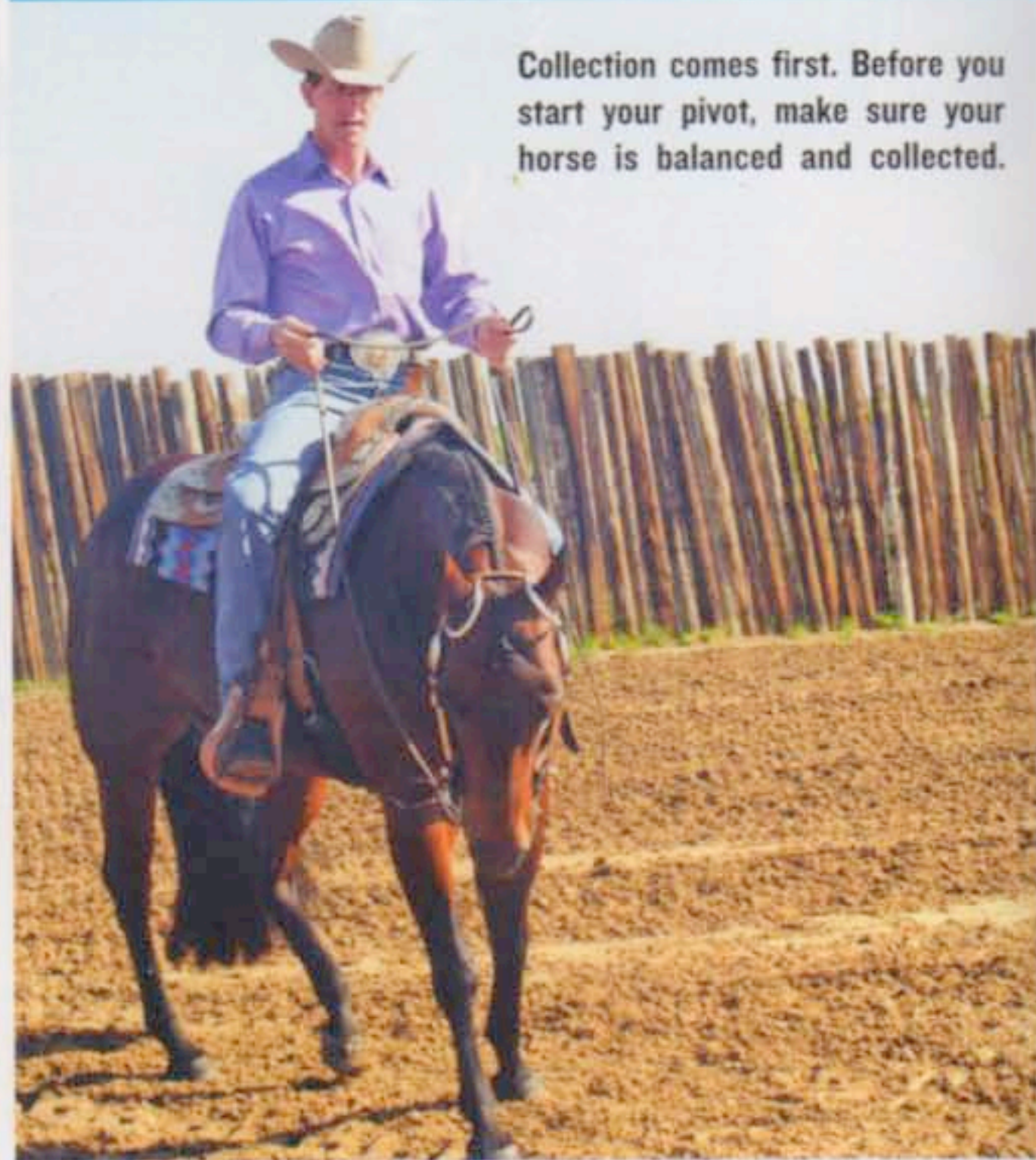
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