

TURN LANE

Improve your horsemanship-pattern cornering technique with this simple turn-lane exercise from top trainer Robin Frid.

Event appeal: Horsemanship, equitation.

Goal: To learn to ride your pattern corners such that your horse remains in straight-body alignment—upright and balanced—throughout the turn, rather than leaning into or bulging out of it. You'll do so by using a "turn lane" consisting of ground poles.

Benefit: When your horse remains straight between your reins and legs through a corner, he'll be perfectly positioned to perform whatever maneuver comes next. That's key, because maneuvers tend to come up quickly on patterns, leaving little or no time to correct body-alignment problems. *Bonus:* You'll improve your timing on turns by learning to wait until your horse's hips are even with the cone before initiating them, so he can stay straight. By learning to wait for the correct point before starting your turn, you maintain balance—and control.

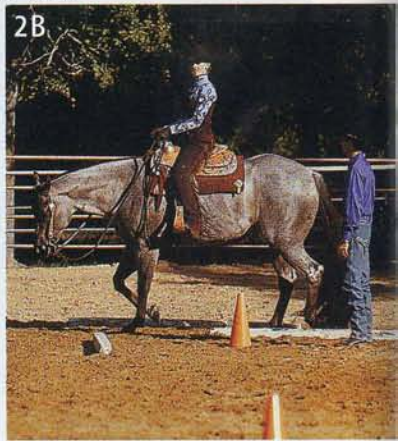
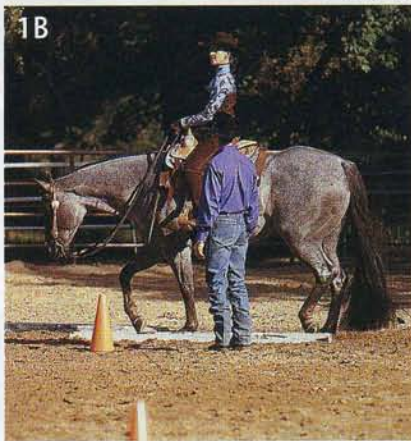
Most horsemanship patterns consist of a predictable set of maneuvers: spins, backing up, sidepassing, lead changes, and navigating a square or triangle. While guiding your horse around the corners of a square or triangle may not have the pizzazz of a spin or lead change, the ability to do so correctly, with your horse upright and balanced through the turn, is critical if you're riding to win. That's because any error on a corner, such as drifting outward or your horse leaning in, will likely haunt you through the next maneuver—and the next.

I'll give you an exercise you can use to improve your cornering technique on either squares or triangles. It'll teach you to keep your horse's body straight throughout each turn by using a "turn lane" consisting of ground poles. With repetition, you'll learn the proper timing for initiating the turn around each cone or marker—and develop a feel for when your horse is in proper alignment beneath you. I'll demonstrate it using a triangle (see diagram, page 25), as it has a longer corner than does a square, providing a greater opportunity for problems to arise. Practice the exercise, and watch your pattern skills improve.

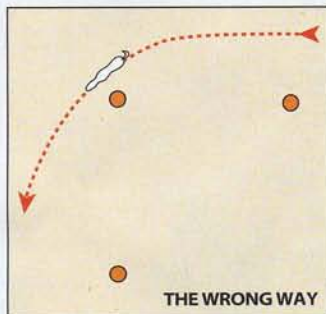
WRITTEN BY ROBIN FRID WITH SUE M. COPELAND
PHOTOGRAPHED BY KEVIN MCGOWAN



Use this month's exercise to improve your cornering technique on squares and triangles. It'll teach you to keep your horse's body straight throughout each turn by using a "turn lane" consisting of ground poles. With repetition, you'll learn the proper timing for initiating the turn around each cone or marker—and develop a feel for when your horse is in proper alignment beneath you.

**THE WRONG WAY**

1A. Here's how cornering errors happen. Our rider is jogging toward the first cone of a triangle with her eyes down, rather than up and looking at the marker. Her nervousness and inattentiveness have transferred to her horse; he's tipped his head slightly to the right and isn't looking where he's going, either. She's beginning to initiate the turn—and it's way too early. This is a common problem (usually due to nerves) that torches corners. Not only will cutting this one put her at risk of knocking over the cone (a points-off error), it'll force her to swing wide like a race-car driver—overshooting the correct line to the next cone—to successfully negotiate it.



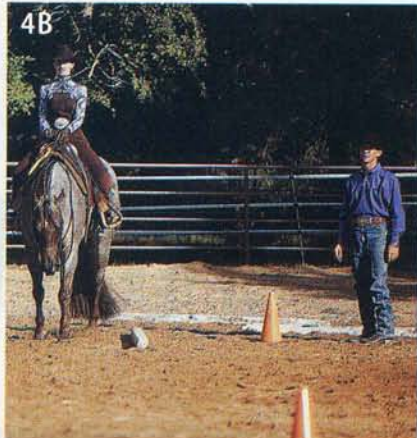
2A. Look at how close her horse's hind legs are to the cone. He's only about 6 inches or so away from it (rather than the correct 6 or so feet). His front end is well past the cone but he's still not facing in the new direction, which broadcasts a "bad turn" warning to the judge. And, her horse's head remains tipped toward the outside, meaning his shoulders are leaning to the inside rather than remaining upright.

3A. This photo proves that turning early doesn't get you to that new line sooner, but rather delays your arrival. The horse is almost completely past the cone, and his shoulders are still 3 to 4 feet away from being in line with his hips. He's not on the new line at a point at which he should be heading straight toward the second cone. His rightward head tip has dropped his weight squarely on his left shoulder, meaning he's out of alignment—and balance.

4A. The horse is now past the first cone, but his shoulders remain farther from the new line than his hips. While our rider may be able to salvage the next corner by straightening him before she gets to it, the judge can penalize her for faulty horse alignment (not to mention a bad turn). Plus, horsemanship is all about fluid riding. If each corner has a different shape, your pattern will lack flow. That can mean the difference between winning and being an also-ran.

THE TURN LANE

1B. Set up your turn lane by placing four ground poles as indicated on the diagram on the opposite page. This "chute" will guide you and your horse along the correct corner track: You'll wait to initiate the turn until your horse's hips are even with the cone; he'll lead the way through the turn with his head, staying straight and upright with his shoulders, rib cage, and hips. Such a configuration enables your arc around the corner to be slightly tighter when you close the turn than when you initiated it. This enables you to reach the line to the next cone as soon as possible, giving you the maximum amount of time to prepare for that corner—or any other upcoming maneuver.



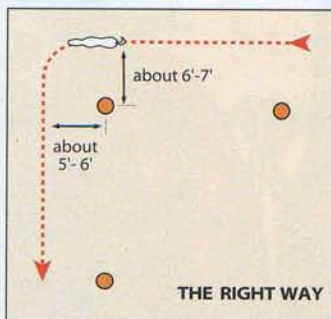
Here's how it works: The poles are helping our rider keep her horse straight between her legs and reins as she's forced to wait before asking him to turn. **2B.** As her horse's hips approach the cone, our rider looks up toward the next cone with a slight twist of her head. (If she were to turn her head too far, she'd twist her shoulders, which would tip her weight into her left stirrup and throw her horse off balance.) She's a step away from initiating the turn... **3B.** ...and when she does, she guided her horse's front end around his hind end as his head leads the way around the corner, which will help keep his shoulders even and upright. The ground poles reinforce this straight-body configuration. **4B.** The pair is almost finished turning the corner. Compare this horse's position here with that in the "Wrong" Photo 4A. In that photo, this horse is past the cone and still w-a-y out of alignment, with his shoulders steps away from moving back in line with his hips. Horse and rider also had to swing w-i-d-e of the new line because they cut the corner. Here, the horse has nearly completed the turn and he's still beside the cone (and about the same 6 to 7 feet away from it as when he started). That will give him additional strides on the new line to prepare for whatever happens next.

THE RIGHT WAY

1C. Practice using the turn lane, and you'll soon be executing corners like this one. Our rider has her horse positioned about 6 feet away from the cone, and is waiting to initiate the turn as her eyes are up, seeking the new line.

2C. She's following the same path as when the poles were in place, initiating the turn when her horse's hips are opposite the cone, then guiding his head around his hind end so he stays in perfectly straight alignment.

3C. The payoff? Her horse has nearly completed the turn before he's halfway past the cone on the new line. Does that give them the competitive edge? You bet it does. ♦



ABOUT THE EXPERT

Robin Frid knows a thing or two about teaching winning horsemanship. He coached student Jason Atkinson to the 2001 AQHYA horsemanship world championship, and student Samantha Cooper to that same title in 2002. Samantha also rode to a youth horsemanship (15 to 18) championship at the 2002 All American Quarter Horse Congress aboard Somewhat Shady Zip. He guided Stephanie Pullen (shown here aboard her gelding, Frosty Impulse) to the 1999 and 2001 AQHA amateur horsemanship world championships. Robin trains out of Pullin Ranch, in Conroe, Texas.

