

CHAPTER 11: SHOWMANSHIP AT HALTER

Showmanship

The presentation of your horse to a judge is called "showmanship" and this presentation follows a pattern. A pattern is a written description of a group of maneuvers that the judge wishes to see and how the judge scores you on your skill in performing this pattern. A single maneuver is known as walk, or trot, or back, or pivot. A typical pattern for showmanship is to lead, walk, trot, back, set up or pivot the horse, in any combination. See the *Colorado 4-H Horse Rulebook* for suggested patterns, rules and explanation of scoring.

Presentation of the horse has two parts. Part one is the appearance of the exhibitor and condition and grooming of the horse. The exhibitor should be dressed in clean, fitted clothes, with polished boots and a brushed hat. The exhibitor's hair should be neatly arranged away from the face. The horse is required to be clean and brushed, with a combed mane and tail. Hair that has been clipped or trimmed should have a neat, tidy appearance. The halter and lead should fit well, and be clean and in good repair (see figure 32).

The second part of presentation is the actual performing of the pattern. The exhibitor should display confidence and poise when showing. The horse needs to be responsive to the exhibitor's cues when performing the pattern.

In the Showring

Be on time when the class is called. If an individual pattern is used, the show management will normally post the pattern. If no pattern is posted, enter the ring at the direction of the ring steward and watch the ring steward for instructions on where to go. Remember, even though the ring officials may be checking entries, the judge may be sizing up contestants as they come in, so stay awake.

When instructed to line up, enter the line from the rear in the position indicated. Line up evenly with the others and stand up your horse. Stand your horse quickly then watch the judge. Do not crowd the other horses. Allow room between your horse and those on either side. When the class is lined up or leading head to tail, do not crowd the horse in front. The horse should set up quickly, stand squarely and move forward or backward freely. Pose the horse according to your breed standards.

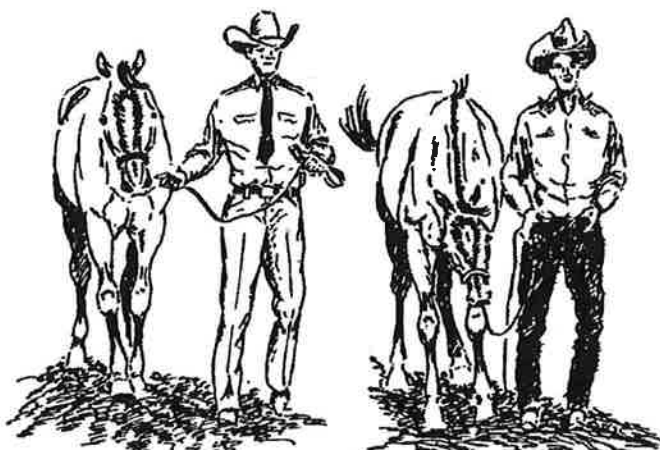


Figure 32. Note the clean, well-fitted horse and competitor on the left.

Training

There is never a substitute for training. No shiny halter, pretty new shirt or colorful hat will make you as competitive as the person who has consistently schooled his or her horse.

Training does not describe any particular way of teaching. As all horses think and act individually, training methods need to suit the individual's ability. A training method is generally acceptable as long as safety rules and humane treatment of the horse are practiced. See Chapter 17, *Horse Safety Guidelines*, for basic safety rules.

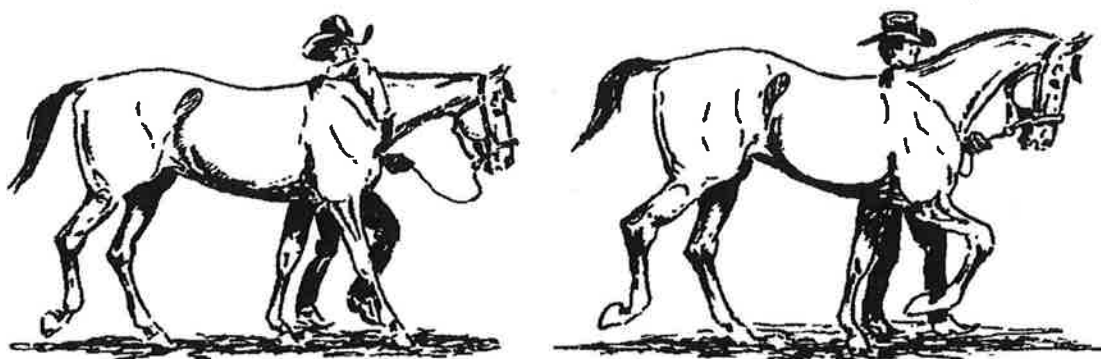


Figure 33. Be in control of your horse, hold the lead in your right hand and lead from the near (left) side. Note how the exhibitor on the left is not in control and the exhibitor on the right is clinching too tightly on the horse's head.

Three basic training rules

1. Patience
2. Consistency
3. Practice

Train at home until the signals you give are understood by the horse.

Note the safe zone areas in figure 34 on the next page. These are the safe areas for someone who handles a strange or unschooled horse. When using the safe areas, you are out of the direct line of a sudden lunge, strike from the front legs, or a kick from the back legs. Since a horse uses its head and neck to balance its body, the safe areas are the positions where maximum control can be exerted by pulling the horse's head to the side. This forces the horse off balance in hope of preventing further action if the horse becomes unruly.

Halter showing and showmanship customs today, especially in showmanship classes, encourage the exhibitor to move to either side of the horse. This is safe only if the horse is properly trained before entering the show ring. A horse acts independently on each side; therefore, you must train it to lead, stand and show from each side. Always handle a strange or untrained horse from the near (left) side since the majority of horses are started and handled from this side.

As a trainer, give your horse the chance to do the work right. If you do not work your horse with patience and consistency, he can become confused. This often leads to a cranky, stubborn horse. Practice makes you confident and the horse trustworthy.

To begin training for showmanship, your horse must do two things: lead willingly and stand quietly.

The most important part of any showmanship pattern is the set up for inspection. The set up is a posed position of the horse for inspection by the judge. To achieve this pose, the exhibitor must teach the horse to stand squarely on each leg and stay posed until asked to change.

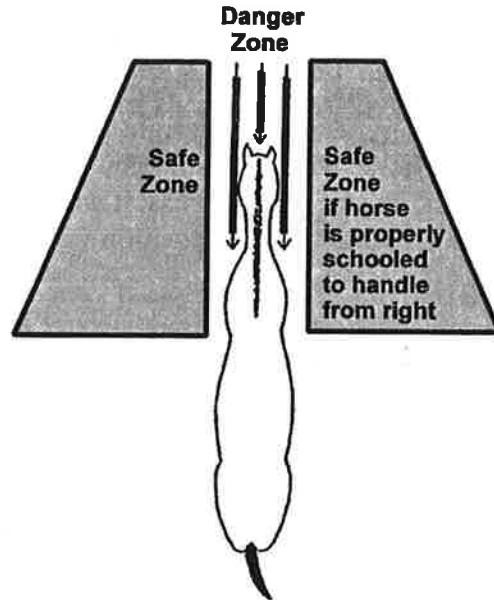


Figure 34. The shaded areas indicate safe zones for showing a horse from either side. Note the danger zone directly in front of the horse. Stand toward the front, not in the danger zone, and out of the direct line of action of a strike or lunge. It is permissible to cross the danger zone to get from one side of your horse to the other. Remaining in the danger zone is considered a fault. Use positions within the safe zones where both the horse and the judge can be observed.

Bring your horse into the set up with the foot fall of the right hind foot. When you bring your horse from a walk to halt, the right hind becomes the base of your set up. Do not move that foot. Next is the placement of the left hind foot. Setting the hind feet generally is the most difficult chore in the beginning of training. Work only with the hind feet until you get a response. Use of a short whip or prod to touch the hind foot will help the horse to move its foot more readily, at the same time pulling forward or pushing back on the lead shank. Response is movement of the foot or shift in weight when you pull or push on the lead shank. This beginning movement probably will not be correct in its placement but once your horse understands to move a foot on cue, keep asking the horse to move his foot until the horse places it correctly or anywhere you wish it to be. At first, you may have to pull hard as the tendency of a standing horse is not to move. Once the horse moves, relax the lead. This is his reward. Horses move their feet in a diagonal pattern: Right hind/left front or Left hind/right front. As horses become more trained they will move each foot independently.

The front feet are treated a little differently. The foot most out of position—or not square—is moved first. Moving the front feet is generally done with side to side motion of the lead, with the lead held under the chin. Again, when a front foot moves, release the pressure. With patience, the horse will become sensitive to any movement of the lead shank. In time, a slight push or pull on

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the lead will cause the horse to move a foot. Eventually, the horse will anticipate your cues and stand correctly. Remember to always point your toes toward your horses opposite front feet when squaring them up.

Trot off

To demonstrate your horse's natural movement and soundness, the judge often asks you to trot your horse. If your horse does not trot beside you, he must be taught to do so. Begin teaching the trot from the walk. Your body position at the walk and trot should be midway between the horse's head and shoulder. Your shoulder should be in line with the O-ring on your halter. Always start off with your right leg and right hand pushing forward; if you start off with your left leg your horse will be behind you and you'll be dragging him. He/she should watch your shoulder; as you lean forward, it will alert your horse to move forward. Once you and your horse can walk together in this position without any pulling on the lead shank, pick up the pace of the walk.

Vary your speed at the walk to test your training. The horse should adjust his speed to match yours; if it does not, continue practicing the walk. Practice stopping and starting off with your horse along the fence to prevent it from swinging its hips off to the right. Remember to take two steps after saying, "Whoa," because it takes a couple of seconds to go from your horse's ears to its feet. Don't pull the horse on top of you. When you ask for the trot, ask with the same sound or cue you use when riding or lunging. Walk briskly and cue the horse to trot just as you begin to trot yourself. If the horse does not trot, use a whip held in your left hand to encourage the horse's forward motion, tapping at the hip. Continue this routine until he trots.

Pivots

Patterns quite often require a pivot or turn on the haunches. The pivot usually is described as a quarter or half turn (90 or 180 degree turns) and sometimes a full, or 360-degree, turn is asked for. The turn is always to the right or away from you when it is a quarter turn or more. To begin the training, start with the right hind foot. This is called the pivot foot. Position your right hand at the corner of the horse's mouth as your body stays at the muzzle. Teach your horse to get off of you by using the lead shank to bump his cheek. Hold the lead in your left hand and gently push against the face with your fingers, while simultaneously pushing against the rib and shoulder with your right hand and stepping forward.

The rib and shoulder must move before the head. If you turn the head or push too hard with your left hand, the horse will bend in the neck. To help move the rib and shoulders, cautiously use a crop or prod. Try to keep the horse as straight as possible. This movement is difficult for the untrained horse. To move his rib and shoulder, begin the pivot. The horse must step around with his front legs and cross the left over the right, while keeping its right hind foot, the pivot foot, in place. He will most likely take a step back, or take a step out to the right with the pivot foot. If he does, simply pull the horse back around to the start position and begin again. When you begin your training, ask only for one step and reward the horse by stopping. Training the pivot is a challenge, so one small step done correctly is great progress.

You may need the help of a friend or adult to keep track of the pivot foot's position and keep the shoulder up and moving so you can stay where you need to at the head. Give the stick to your helper and they can move the shoulder over while you keep the horse from moving forward. If you can see the pivot foot, you're in the correct position; it can be difficult to see when standing at the front of the horse.

Finally, after all the training and practice, it is time to meet the judge and perform the pattern. The function of showing with the quarter system is to allow the judge an unobstructed view of your horse to evaluate conformation, fitness and soundness. To keep the judge's view clear, the exhibitor must move from one side of the horse to the other. The showman chooses his side depending on the position of the judge. The following examples of the quarter system will explain the movements.

The Quarter System

The four quarters can be visualized by an imaginary line drawn down the center of the horse's body extending from front and rear to divide the horse into left and right sides. Another line drawn across the horse at the base of the withers, extending out from both sides at right angles to the first line, divides the horse front and rear. This is shown by the dotted lines in figures 35 to 38. Visualize the judge moving in a clockwise direction around the horse or around the class of horses as you move from figures 35 through figure 38.

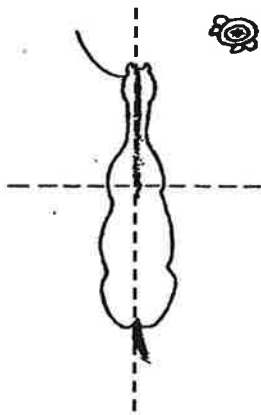


Figure 35. First, the exhibitor is in the basic position—safe zone at horse's left—and the judge at the horse's right front or in the right front quarter.

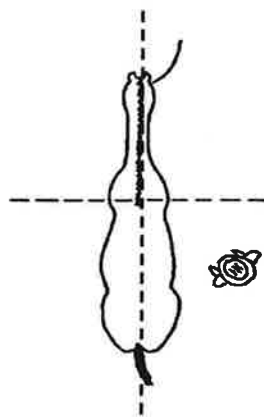


Figure 36. Second, as the judge moves across the imaginary line to the right rear quarter, the exhibitor steps across to the horse's right side.

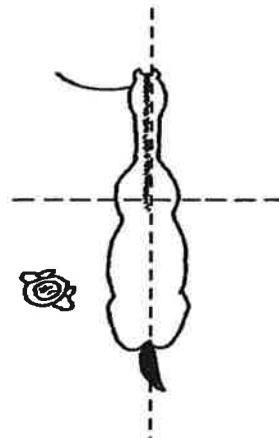


Figure 37. Third, the judge moves into the left rear quarter, and the exhibitor steps back to the left to be on the same side as the judge.

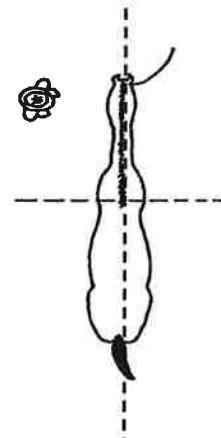


Figure 38. Fourth, as the judge moves to the left front, the exhibitor steps back to the right to avoid blocking the judge's view.

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The exhibitor should stand angled toward the horse in a position between the horse's muzzle and eye, toes pointing toward the horse's opposite front foot, holding the lead with enough slack to allow movement under the chin as the handler changes position when the judge moves. Hold the lead flatly between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, near the muzzle, but not touching the horse. The excess lead is held in the left hand in a manner comfortable for the exhibitor. Relax arms and slightly bend the elbows. Do not change hands on lead shank; always work with your right hand, holding the excess in the left. When backing your horse, turn to face the horse and ask the horse to back with minimal contact on the lead shank. Do not stand directly in front of the horse because of the safety hazard. Pulling the horse left or right will make the horse's hip shift one way or the other. Try keeping the horse straight from nose to tail when backing a line. Different positions are often required to allow for the height of the exhibitor.

When changing sides, remember to step across, step, together. When going left, come across with your right leg over the left, step with the left, and bring your right together facing the opposite front foot. When going right, start with your left foot crossing over the right, step, and bring the left together. Check example on page 85. Step to the point in front of the nose, step to the corner—the horse's eye—toes facing the opposite front feet. Stay out far enough to see the judge as he crosses the shoulder line. Always be where you can have eye contact with the judge.

Remember that showmanship is a safety and courtesy class and, when done properly, is fun and should be practiced when the farrier and vet work on your horse.