



ROUND PEN 101

This lesson shows you how to teach your horse to do outside and inside turns in the round pen and come to you when called.

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1) A well-constructed safe round pen measuring 20 metres across and 6 foot high with a sound, well drained surface. (This is the ideal round pen).
- 2) A lariat.

PREREQUISITES FOR THE HORSE

None. This lesson can be taught to the untouched horse or the experienced older horse.

WHAT – nose

WHERE – 1) away from me, 2) towards me

WHY – pressure from body language and use of the lariat

HOW – release of pressure and praise the horse

POINTS TO REMEMBER BEFORE YOU START

1. The round pen is a classroom. Try to explain things simply and clearly as any teacher would.
2. **Do not chase the horse.**
3. The round pen should be about 6 foot tall so that the horse never considers going over the top if you inadvertently put him under too much pressure.
4. It should be made of good quality steel with rounded edges to reduce the possible risk of injury to the horse should you make a mistake. **Never** use a round pen that is not solidly constructed, such as rope, or not high enough to prevent the horse from easily getting his head over the top.
5. An open round pen such as the one used in this DVD is preferable to an enclosed pen as the lesson will be more 'solid' with the added distractions the horse had to deal with (notice the dog on the outside of the pen in this video).
6. The pen should be at least 20 metres across so that the horse's joints are not put under too much pressure, the larger horse has plenty of room to turn and you do not need to get too close to the horse or make him feel trapped.

7. Remember the horse can exercise his flight instinct without ever getting any further away from you so if he is going faster than you would like you are probably chasing him unintentionally.
8. Anyone can chase a horse around a pen until it is so tired that all it wants to do is come in and rest – at best the horse has learned very little and it is probably more afraid of the handler now than it was in the beginning (despite standing with him/her).
9. A tired horse is not learning anything.
10. You are engaging the horse's brain – teaching him to learn in a way that you can continue his education – what (the thing on the horse you are going to move), where (direction of movement of that spot on the horse), why (pressure is motivating the horse to move the spot in that direction) and how (the release of pressure and praising the horse tells him he has done the right thing). This is exactly the same four principles for teaching your horse anything from simple outside turns in the round pen to flying changes under saddle.
11. The horse will reflect your emotional level. Stay calm and try to keep your movements deliberate and slow if your horse is having trouble understanding.
12. The best pace for this lesson, as a general rule, is trot. The gait is motivating enough to get the horse to look for an answer but not too tiring as to waste precious energy.
13. If your horse is cantering without being asked you are probably putting him under a little too much pressure. Try to stand more still, move more slowly and relax. With some horses (especially those that have been chased before, are older and not handled or have been badly handled) the simple 'emotional pressure' of your focus on their hindquarter will be enough to move them forward. Even walking a small circle in the centre of the pen may make the horse feel chased. If you feel that your horse might behave like this it is a good idea to practice on some other quieter horses first so that you can get an idea of both raising and lowering the horses' emotional level.
14. If your horse is only walking then you will need to put him under a little more pressure and push him up into trot. Try walking a small circle while concentrating on his hips or throw the lariat to land behind the horse. Remember that the amount of pressure required for each horse will vary. The DVD shows two young horses beginning the lesson with very different reactions to the pressure of both my body language and the use of the lariat but notice that at the end of the lesson they are both reacting to my body language cues and I rarely, if ever, throw the lariat.
15. Your aim, with any lesson, is always to reduce the amount of pressure required. Be aware of how much pressure you are using and work all the time to reduce this.
16. Clucking at the horse to move is also pressure. People often forget this and continue to ask the horse to move when the horse is already moving. Be aware of your cues – your voice, body language, proximity to the horse and lariat are all cues. If you are having trouble handling the lariat for example, you may find that your hands are quite high and your horse will probably be traveling a lot faster than you would like because he will perceive this as an increase in pressure (rather than a lack of coordination!).
17. A lariat is better than a lunge whip because the horse tends to get annoyed with the whip and you cannot touch the horse with the whip if you need to without getting very close to the horse and chasing him.
18. A lariat is also better than a soft rope because it will not get wrapped around the horse's legs.

19. Practise with the lariat, if you are unaccustomed to using one, before you go into the round pen. You need to be a fairly good aim so that you don't hit the horse unintentionally and you also need to be able to roll up the lariat while still working (concentrating on) the horse.
20. If your horse kicks out at you when you are doing the inside turns go back to outside turns briefly as you are safer here and the horse will soon realise that he is wasting his energy.
21. Always begin with outside turns so that you know that you can move the horse away from you if necessary.

OUTSIDE TURNS:

STEP 1

The first thing to do is to get the horse to move around the pen. Move the horse away from you and towards the rail. As soon as the horse starts to move around the pen, in either direction, concentrate on his hind quarters to keep him moving in that direction.

STEP 2

The horse should not change direction yet. Try to keep him moving 3 or 4 times around the pen in the same direction. If he slows from trot throw the lariat to land behind him.

If he is in canter try to relax and stand quietly until he calms down and is trotting again.

STEP 3

You are now ready to ask the horse to make an outside turn and change direction. Move your focus from the horse's hind quarters to his nose and walk in towards his nose 'pushing' it away from you and towards the rail.

Walk directly into the rail in front of the horse but try not to get too close to the horse.

STEP 4

With these early turns it is a good idea not to let the horse 'run through' you. If he does he quickly begins to think that you want him to go faster and run past you because you are unable to correct him.

(The frightened horse - This is when you need to be very aware of your horse's emotional level. If he is going too fast then he is almost certainly frightened. You do not ever want him to be frightened. Try keeping him traveling in the same direction for a while and asking the horse to do walk-trot transitions. This will calm him down and help you learn to raise and lower his emotional level. This may take a few minutes or it may take 20 minutes and be the lesson for the day.)

If the horse is not listening and does not change direction then you need to move faster to cut his motion off. You should be facing in the same direction as the horse and walk straight towards the round pen in front of him.

Try not to get too close to the horse. If he does not turn you could throw the lariat to land in front of him.

STEP 5

After the horse makes an outside turn you need to relax your body language and allow him to trot around the pen before asking again.

Once the horse has made a few outside turns in each direction continue on and begin to make more outside turns with a little less trotting around between them.

Remember: Energy is your most precious commodity – the more running around the outside he does the less energy he has for learning.

STEP 6

When the horse is making outside turns when and where you ask him, you are ready to move on to inside turns.

Remember to give your horse plenty of short rests. This is often a good place to end the first lesson and come back another day to go on to inside turns. Your horse should definitely not be physically tired (even a very unfit horse) but he may be mentally tired. You will know this if you feel he was doing the turns better earlier and you are finding it hard to keep his attention.

INSIDE TURNS:

STEP 7

Ask the horse to make an inside turn by stepping across to get in front of him and opening your shoulders to invite the nose in to you. You are now in front of the horse and facing him – rather than facing the same way as he was when you were asking for outside turns.

Horses quickly learn to watch your feet so exaggerate the step to the side to make it easier for him.

STEP 8

The horse will probably turn outside because you have just been doing these turns and he will anticipate another. Try to turn the horse back in the original direction as soon as you can. If the horse makes this mistake, and he almost certainly will, you need to keep him under pressure so that he knows that his answer was not right, and then ask again.

When the horse turns back in the original direction give him a few strides to relax before asking for the inside turn again.

STEP 9

The horse will probably make the same mistake several times in a row.

Remember: The horse learns from the release of pressure so as soon as you see the horse move towards the inside, or even think of moving towards the inside, release the pressure.

STEP 10

Once you can get the horse to move his head to the inside his feet will follow. You then need to focus on his shoulder and 'push' it out towards the rail so that the horse is travelling in the new direction.

STEP 11

Continue to practice the inside turns, making your big step across both deliberate and slow to give the horse the best possible chance of recognising the difference between the two turns.

As you step across be aware that you also need to give the horse plenty of room to turn – stepping across and back, while looking at the horse, is often the best way to teach this. You have just been moving the horse away from you and now you want him to move towards you – giving him plenty of room will help you achieve this.

STEP 12

Continue with the inside turns until your horse is doing them when and where you ask for them.

STEP 13

If you have made your cues quite different and obvious the horse should now be able to do both inside and outside turns on cue. Practise with this, always knowing well in advance which turn you are going to ask for and correcting him when he gets it wrong, until the horse is comfortable with both the turns.

COME-TO-ME:

STEP 14

Your horse is now ready to learn the 'come-to-me' cue.

Come-to-me is half and inside turn and then stop. Put an obvious cue on it to make it easier for the horse – I tap my hip and whistle to the horse, this always gets his attention and tells him this is something different. It is also the cue that I use in the paddock later.

STEP 15

Ask the horse for an inside turn and tap your hip and whistle at the same time. The horse may turn and face you and wonder what you are doing. If so, see if you can walk up and pat the horse on the head or the neck and then back up to your original position.

If the horse completes the inside turn you must turn him back in the other direction.

Remember: Only teach come-to-me from one side at a time. If the first time you asked the horse was going around to the left then make sure that each subsequent time you ask he is also going around to the left, if he is not then inside turn him.

STEP 16

Each time you send the horse out again do a few inside turns before asking him to come in again. You should notice that the horse is taking more and more steps towards you each time you ask him in.

Tip: If you want the horse to come in faster, then have him travelling faster around the pen before you ask him in. This can be done quite easily once your come-to-me cue is well established.

OTHER LESSONS AND DVDs THAT MAKE USE OF THE ROUND PEN

- 1) Advanced Round Pen Techniques
- 2) Long-lining
- 3) Desensitising (working with various objects including clippers)
- 4) Establishing the Canter
- 5) 1st Saddling
- 6) Flying Changes
- 7) Roll Backs and Haunch Turns
- 8) Foal Handling
- 9) Working with the Yearling
- 10) Working with the 2 Year Old
- 11) Starting the Young Horse
- 12) Tricks