

Article author Kenda Lenseigne keeps both sides of Justin in balance. Here she competes at the 2011 CMSA Worlds in Amarillo.

Photo by Ken Amorosano

# Building Better Balance

Getting the best from your horse requires a dominance of both sides.

by Kenda Lenseigne, CMSA World and National Champion

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of well balanced horses in our sport. With various direction and lead changes in most of our stages, it is essential to have a horse that is sculpted and powerful on both sides. In this case, the word 'balanced' means a horse that has built up symmetrical muscle strength and is equally dominant traveling in either direction. Think for a minute about your horse; does he travel one direction more freely than the other? Does he favor one lead over the other? If your answer is yes, now is the time to make changes to your everyday work program to build up the weaker side.

Why: Balance is key in running efficient patterns, executing

course strategy and getting the most out of our horses on the stage as we make our turns.

How: Most of the time, we create unbalanced horses without even realizing it. Have you ever noticed which direction riders are circling most of the time in the warm up arena at a shoot? I'd put money on the answer being to the left. Most of us are right handed, meaning we hold the rein with our left hand. Traveling to the left is easier to rein the horse because we don't have to cross over our bodies to make the turn. This causes a ripple effect in the way our horses are subconsciously trained in every day work, unless we make a conscious effort to ride in both directions with equal emphasis.

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This is a drill that helps build balance and form. I use it on all of my horses; from the newbie to my seasoned veteran and find it an effective way to strengthen the skillsets of both horse and rider.

#### 4 Barrel Drill

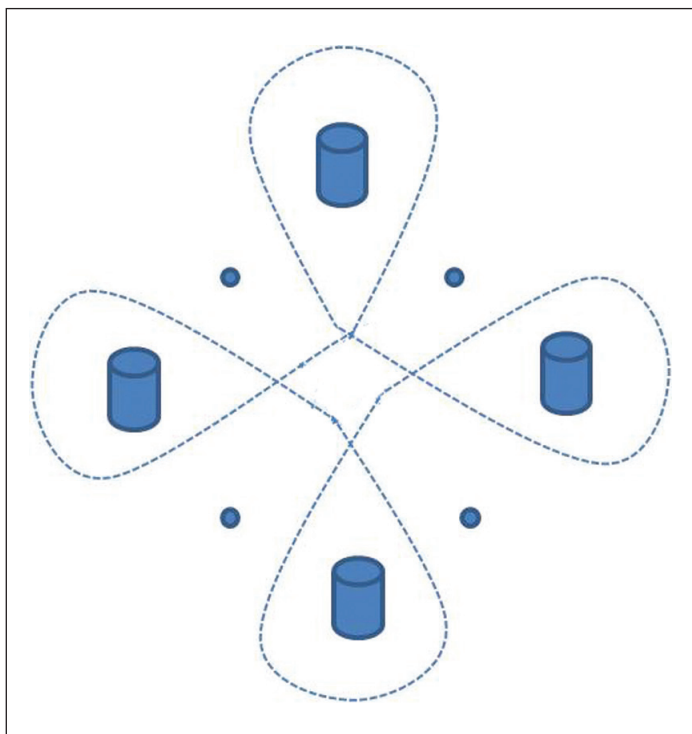
**Purpose, for the horse:** To help perfect barrel turns, keep the horse moving freely in and out of the turns, build balance and muscle strength on both sides (right and left lead).

**Purpose, for the rider:** To guide your horse through with as little rein pressure as possible. To emphasize efficient gun changes without looking down for your holster.

Start out on the left lead to make all left hand turns. Dry fire each gate as you approach the barrel taking your cross side first. After the turn, change guns. Repeat at each gate/barrel set.

Once you have run the drill to the left, repeat the same steps to the right. Dry fire each gate, taking your strong side first.

It's important to release the rein as you come out of each turn, so as to not over correct. A smooth line coming in and out of the turn is essential to set you up for the next barrel - think of it as like releasing the steering wheel of your truck as you come out of a curve. 🐾



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