



The Clockwork Exercise: Neck Reining & More

by Josh Lyons and John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

Why You Want To Do This Exercise: This must-learn exercise teaches your horse to neck rein, side pass, back up, move diagonally, spin, or do reverse-arc circles. It's also a great way to teach your horse to not drop its shoulder through circles.

How You'll Do It: You'll teach your horse to move any of his four feet anywhere you please using either of the two reins. The combinations are virtually endless and give you excellent control over the movements of your horse.

There are two ways to teach this exercise: You can begin by walking forward or begin by backing up.

To get started, stand up. Look to the left. Keep your head in that position and sidestep to your right. Now, look to your right and sidestep to your right. It was easier to move to the right with your head to the left, wasn't it? Your horse finds the same thing. That's why you begin teaching your horse to move to the left by using the right, or "opposite," rein.

Picture a rope laying on the ground. Imagine your horse walking on this rope with both front and back feet, like a train on its tracks. Now, picture two ropes laying on the ground parallel to each other. Picture your horse walking with its front feet on one rope and its back feet on the other rope, as if the engine of the train were on one set of tracks while the caboose ran on another set. That's what you'll teach your horse to do with this exercise – so when we say "move your horse's left shoulder to the right" we mean to push it off the track.

You'll need one more analogy before we begin: This is called "The Clockwork Exercise" because you need to imagine four very large clocks, one underneath each of your horse's feet. When your horse moves any leg directly forward that leg is "stepping on twelve o'clock." When any leg moves directly back that leg is stepping on six o'clock. Three o'clock is directly to the right, nine o'clock directly to the left, etc. All four legs can step on any of the twelve numbers.

We'll begin very simply. Move your horse off at a walk and pick up your left rein. (At this point this is not a two-handed exercise.) Stare at a very small part of your horse's right shoulder and think of nothing but making it move to the right. Hold your rein with whatever angle and amount of pressure it takes to encourage your horse to move the spot you're focusing on to the right.

It is vital to realize that your horse will not take a big step to the right when you first begin. Don't even look for it, not yet. What you should be looking for (and feeling for) is a very small, very slight leaning

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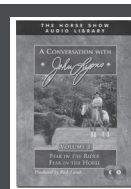
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"You need to imagine four very large clocks, one underneath each of your horse's feet."

to the right. The horse will either lean or slightly lift and lean. Horse training is all about taking small changes and building on them. So, when your horse leans, you let go – immediately. Go forward a few steps as you pet your horse. Repeat. It's also important to drop your reins and pet your horse in between requests. You might find it helpful to very briefly "check your horse back" or slow his speed, before asking for sideways movement in an attempt to divert his forward energy off to the side.

When your horse does finally move "off the track" to the right or left, ask yourself what number he stepped on. Get that number several more times. When you can get it consistently, begin toying with the angle and pressure you're using and begin "whittling it down" to the next adjacent number on the clock. When you can consistently get a one o'clock, for instance, you'll have the control necessary to step on two o'clock fifty percent of the time. When you get two consistently, you'll get three half the time and so on.

Tips:

- 1) You'll probably find ones and elevens the most difficult.
- 2) Your horse will have to actually stop his forward motion to get threes, fours, etc., so be prepared for that and work with it.
- 3) Try to not crank his head way off to the side. It's darned near impossible for him to step cleanly to the right with his head attached to your left boot – so do your best to keep his head (at most) 2-3 inches off to the side. If that seems like an impossible request, try using two reins: use your outside rein to pull the horse's head into position (that is, in front of his body) with his chin nearing his chest.
- 4) Don't ever bring your rein across the horse's neck. Try holding the rein closer to the horse's mouth or change your angle.
- 5) When you first begin sidepassing, you may feel as if you're tipping in the saddle one way or the other. That's natural. Your horse is dropping a shoulder. As it becomes more proficient, it'll learn to keep it elevated. (Or, another fix: Practicing this exercise will give you the ability to move that shoulder over, in effect "lifting it.")

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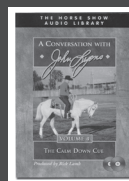


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"When you first begin sidepassing, you may feel as if you're tipping in the saddle."

While you'll see the benefits of this exercise quickly, mastering it takes a great deal of time: Once you can get the left rein to tell the front right foot to step on any number (any of the twelve), reverse it. Use your right rein to talk to the front left leg. Next, use your left rein to make the back right leg hit each position

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and vice-versa with the right rein. Finally, connect the reins to the legs on the same side: Pick up the right rein and get the front right to step on each number, then the back right foot. Do the same for the left side. Remember, when you're done, either rein can tell any leg to step on any of the twelve numbers.

A word of caution: Your horse will never get lighter than the lighter pressure you use. You need to constantly look for improvement. If your horse is consistently getting three o'clock, can he do so with less movement from your hand and with less pressure? Also, the longer you let the horse pull on the rein, the more the horse learns to lay on the rein. If he begins laying the rein, motivate him to find a release: squeeze or bump with your legs, disengage the hip, etc.

Here's an idea of what you can do with this exercise:

- Teach neck reining by simply teaching your horse to move away from the opposite rein. That is, teach him to move onto 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 with his right front leg when you apply pressure with the left rein

- Use your left rein to ask your horse to step repeatedly on "4 o'clock" with his front right foot and you've got a reverse-arc circle to the right.

- Use your right rein to ask your horse to step repeatedly on "4 o'clock" with his front right foot and you've got a reining spin.

- Use your left rein to ask the front right foot to step on three, then the back right leg to also step on three. When you get the back leg stepping at the same time as the front, you've got a sidepass.

- If you've got a horse who refuses to back up or go forward, pick another number that you can get consistently. For instance, get a three, then four, then five – and finally a six to get your back up.

- When you're circling and your horse drops its shoulder and leans in, you can pick up your rein and ask the front feet (and hence the shoulders) to stay up/in place. So you wouldn't have to pull his head "more into" the circle which would have the effect of throwing his entire body off of the circle's arc.

Alternatively, you can teach this exercise by backing up. We teach both methods simply because we find in our clinics that some riders prefer or excel using one method versus another. If you've got a horse that really wants to stop and stand still, you'll probably want to stick with always moving forward. Asking that same horse to back repeatedly and then move forward might prove too big a challenge for some riders.

To teach the Clockwork Exercise by backing, begin by backing up on either one or two reins. If your horse seems to drag through the back up, try disengaging the hindquarters first or backing at an angle. After a few backward steps, squeeze and drive your horse forward and to the side – away from the direction he's looking – for one step. Drive forward till he softens his nose, then release and let go. Use less rein pressure than you think. Be patient. Once you pick up the rein, the horse know you want something. He can only go six directions (forward, back, up, down, right, left). Motivate him to move with pressure from your legs, then wait till he "stumbles upon" the direction you have in mind. This entire exercise goes more smoothly when you think about what you're doing and don't try to outmuscle your horse.

"If your horse drags, try disengaging the hindquarters first or backing at an angle."

When we say “drive your horse forward and to the side” what we mean is this: Squeeze with both legs and apply the pressure/angle necessary to get your horse to move off the track (as discussed previously) and to the side. Try to get the horse’s entire body to move to the side and onto two o’clock (or ten). Better yet, begin by asking the hip to move forward and to the side first, which then pulls the shoulder over. This extra step encourages the horse to lift and move his ribcage, an added bonus.

Some riders find this method easier (then the “always forward” method) because disengaging and backing your horse helps put your horse in a position that sort of “encourages” him to move to the side.

If your horse begins tossing its head, reacts negatively to other horses or otherwise acts like a butt head, disengage his hindquarters. Do it until he’s quiet and wants to stop.

If you back your horse using your left rein, then ask it to move forward and to the right – but it just sort of turns to the left, (instead sidestepping to the right) then immediately return to backing up. Make sure that you encourage the horse to drop his head and stay soft through his neck: Once he understands the movements, don’t release until his neck (going either forward or backward) is soft. You may need to make a few exceptions when first teaching the lesson. In other words, “pick your battles.”

If you use this method to teach your horse to back, then you’ll be best served by asking the horse to back up at least five or six steps each time, not just one or two. Backing one or two steps will cause the horse to lurch out of the back up, while backing longer will encourage him to find a smooth cadence. Don’t release out of the back up until the horse softens his neck – and never when the horse is moving “slower,” only when moving “faster.”

Remember, your legs tell the horse to move, your reins tell the horse which direction. So, to get your horse moving through the back up, think “back,” bring your reins back slightly (about two or three inches) and add pressure with your legs. If he really wants to stiffen up, disengage to get him moving, then again ask to back. When you think different,

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“Remember, your legs tell the horse to move, your reins tell the horse which direction.”

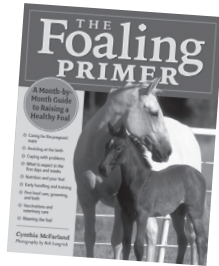
you are different. Thinking about backing will cause you to unconsciously move your seat and legs. (Your legs will move slightly forward, your pelvis will tilt.) Your horse, which has been a prey animal for eons, is very good at picking up small signals and can read this with enough repetition.

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If you'd like to push this exercise to the next level, try it at a trot. Note that the steps are a bit different at a trot. First, trot forward. Next stop your horse and sidepass a few steps then immediately trot forward. Repeat. Always ask the hip to move more than the shoulder. That'll have the effect of keeping the shoulders engaged and the hindquarters up underneath the horse. Also, don't drive the horse out fast (forward) from this back up because they'll begin to anticipate going forward. If he anticipates going forward, he will slow his back up. You just want to move out (forward) smoothly; don't rush it.

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Trailer Training Horses

by John Lyons Certified Trainer Keith Hosman

An excerpt from Day 1 of 5:

"Is this you? On a good day your horse will get in the trailer after a few minutes of cajoling. More often than not, it's about fifteen. Today you're headed to a riding club event and the group leaves at 10am sharp. You're running a bit late, but as you lead your horse to the trailer, you're figuring you'll make it fine if the horse is having a "good-to-medium day." If he loads by 9:15; you can drive the speed limit and stop for coffee. If not, you gotta do 80 – past Starbucks. You "like" your horse at this point. Problem is, your horse has gotten up on the wrong side of the manger and he's thinking "I'll die first and take you with me." Insert your own worst nightmare here. Forty minutes later you're thinking things like "It's just a stupid trailer," "I'll drag your butt in" and "Your (expletive deleted) mother was the same way."

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Excerpted from "Trailer Training Horses," a 5-day course from Lyons Trainer Keith Hosman. Get the full course at Horsemanship101.com/Courses.

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"Your horse is very good at picking up small signals and can read this with repetition."