

Sue's Snippet No. 19 How Horses Turn *Themselves*

It's dinnertime. The feeder comes to the pasture gate. Excited, the horses at the far edge see her and come tearing towards the gate. Ah Oh. The No. 2 horse in the social structure is ahead of No. 1. At the last second No. 2 plants his right hind leg and pivots to the right and throws his shoulders to the right to avoid the sharp bite on the butt he **knows** No. 1 will give him for daring to be first.

You all have seen that, and the great action picture by Kelly Moore (see picture and more about the artist below) that is with this story, shows it clearly. This works because his ribs are bent some to the left, his neck is softly curved right, and his poll is turned right.

Furthermore, his left front is in a direct line from the planted leg. This fellow has a wide chest so the strength of both of his shoulders is throwing his body around the turn. That's it. No bite on the butt for him.

Interestingly, I have seen slow motion pictures of differently built Grand Prix horses doing canter pirouettes. One, with a wide chest like this picture, brought his front end around just like this horse. The other, with a narrower chest, but great lateral fluidity of each front leg, used the reach around of the outside front limb, crossing it in front of the left, to motivate the turn. No matter. They too missed the butt bite!!!

But what if you are a beginner in dressage and the judge says to you "ride better corners" in your test. The standard is that you must ride the quarter of the arc of a 10-meter circle. As you come across the short end, especially for the tricky **second** corner, really attach your seat bones to your horses' back feet. If you ride THEM through the corner, you will feel 4 steps and it will be done. It does not matter the breed, height, gender or anything else. Horses need 4 rear end steps at the trot to do it well. At the walk it will be 8 and at the canter it probably will be 3 steps.

Riding into and through the corners is not natural for humans who are vertical/upright yet are seated on horses who are horizontal. Half of the horse is already almost through the corner before the rider and the turning back legs get there. Traditionally humans ride ahead with their eyes and sort of forget there is more to come. So, learning to start your leg aids to ask the inside supporting leg to step diagonally under the body of our horse **before** you get there, really helps. He then knows how he will get his front end around. At walk it will take 3 to 4 down and under presses of your inside leg to activate the supporting inside hind leg. One of the toughest challenges of dressage is to do the same thing every day all the time. Those corners come up **Really Quickly!**

To begin with, you need to ride a line that is a quarter of an arc of a 10-meter circle. As you go up the levels and get collection growing (the coiling of the

hindquarters) the requirement to ride a correct corner is a line that is a quarter of the arc of an 8 meter circle, and for the higher levels the corner should be a quarter of the arc of a 6 meter circle.

Which, by the way, is why the first letters on the long side after a corner are 6 meters from that corner. That is the guide for the smallest circles required.

Now that you know how horses turn themselves, turns on the haunches, walk pirouettes and canter pirouettes should be easier both to ride and evaluate. A prerequisite for these needs to be – can I walk on a small circle with my horse and get him to take a few steps to the inside with the hind legs. In fancy talk that will be a traver (haunches in) on a circle. But the point is to be able to move the hind end in while walking. The inside hind leg not yet planted needs to be thinking forward and not sideways.

Next you need to be able to swing the shoulders both right and left. The major idea is to use both reins in the direction you want to swing the shoulder. Swing left, both reins to the left and vice versa, swing to the right, both reins to the right.

The outside rein works a lot like a Western neck rein. With the addition of the riders outside upper leg on the shoulder, the horse easily will get it. The riders' inside leg will provide a little bend in the ribs away from it, and the inside rein will keep the horses neck softly looking in the direction of the turn. If the neck is stiff, so will the turn be.

When you practice the shoulder swings, have fun. Left, right and have a little dance! Then you can imagine that you can add quicker and slower, and larger and smaller.

So, when you and the horse understand turning with a little body bend, a softly bent neck and a flexed poll, you can begin to think about getting that inside leg to support the whole thing. As you approach the place you have chosen to turn, connect your left seat bone to that support leg, and let your half halts balance him momentarily on to it. Then both hands in the direction of the turn, legs as above and around you go.

A turn on the haunches comes from a working walk. Both back legs can make a circle one meter (3 feet or so) in size. A walk pirouette comes from a collected walk and should be more or less in place. One should see 6 to 8 steps behind in a canter full pirouette.

For those good scores as a rider and for harmony, just remember to smile and dance yourselves through corners, turns on the haunches and pirouettes because you know how your wonderful horse turns himself.



“Out of the Blue” by artist Kelly Moore

More about artist Kelly Moore

Horse crazy from the very beginning, Kelly tirelessly pursued her dream of owning and showing, maybe even breeding horses, since her first ride in 1978. She has successfully done all three, although on a small scale. Putting the horse's long-term soundness, mentally and physically, heavy showing was never her thing. She has enjoyed Dressage the most though, and after trying so many different horse sports, still focuses on the classical way of training and riding. Many of her best moments are at home riding alone, just her and her horse. She likes to carry this emotional connection into her artwork, which she started to take seriously in 2014. Always the one to doodle in her notebooks in school, the true DESIRE to create art didn't really hit her until that time. Sparked by a second year of participation in a casual chalk street art fair in a local small town, she purchased a set of pastels and pastel paper, painted a horse, and quickly sold it to a friend who insisted on purchasing the piece. The sale of the artwork along with much encouragement from friends and family, started her new journey in horses, but in art form. She has now ventured from pastels, and mostly enjoys painting, starting up with oils in 2019 and finding them very challenging and rewarding. Like riding horses, each piece of art teaches her something new. And each piece builds on the next. She hopes to bring that connection to the viewer, whether it be a kind eye, a powerful mover or just one of those beautiful, fleeting moments that true horse people experience while enjoying their most cherished equines.