

The Sliding Stop

The first thing most people think of when they talk about reining horses is the sliding stop. It is the hallmark maneuver of the reining horse. It is the one ability that we cannot, as riders or trainers, teach or “manufacture”. The reining prospect either has the god given talent or not period. It’s what makes those really big fancy stops so special, you just can’t fake it.

With that said the only thing we can do is teach our horse to understand the cue for a halt. We get them quit all forward motion when we ask and then the rest is all up to the horse. It sounds too simple and that there should be a complex set of exercises that could make that horse into a stopper. I wish there was.

There are some things that the horse must learn in order to stop and that’s what I will talk about in this article.

The first thing the horse must understand as mentioned before, is the cue to halt. When you pick up the reins and take a light contact from any gait the horse needs to react by stopping all motion. When I start to teach this I don’t use any verbal command, I just want them to focus on my hands. When they have this down pat I will start to say whoa at the same time. This can a couple of days to a couple of weeks depending on the horse. I don’t ask my horse to stop from the lope if he doesn’t have sliding plates on, you can hurt them during the process. After a few months of practicing this when you do get plates on your horse he will start to slide a little when you ask for the stop from the lope.

At this point he understands the cue to stop now I need to teach him how to run straight and relaxed. I will start this by loping straight lines back and forth the length of my arena from fence to fence. This is what reiners call “fencing”. It takes a while for your horse to be relaxed loping up to a fence and you need to just let them roll up to it at there own pace until you feel they are confident with it. If you put too much pressure on them trying to make them “get up” to the fence too early it can take even longer to fix, so take your time. Lope to one end of the arena on one lead and lope back to the other end on the opposite lead. This way your horse will become more balanced. I

brake the speed of my run down into four gears. First gear is just a normal working lope, second is a bit faster, third gear is moving right along and fourth gear is a fast as the horse can comfortably go.

When your horse can go straight and relaxed in first gear to the fence then he is ready to stop on the straight line. Just say whoa take the slack out of the reins and stay out of his way and let it happen. If he misses it quietly back him up a few steps and repeat the process. As he becomes solid stopping at first gear take him up to second gear and do the same thing. And then on to third gear and so on. Whenever your horse feels like he is uptight



Photo courtesy of Valentine Reining