

# BORRQW A TRAINER

*Try the reverse-arc turn warm-up.*

**By AQHA Professional Horseman Andy Moorman**

**with Marina Herbert-Schwarz**

**Illustration by Jean Abernethy**

IS IT TOO HOT OUTSIDE OR TOO COLD TO GO FOR A GOOD workout with your horse? Are you just plain short on time and need to get a good ride in as you prep for the big show that's just weeks away? Or have you finally made it to that big show and now everyone is crowded into the warm-up ring at the same time and your first class is just minutes away?

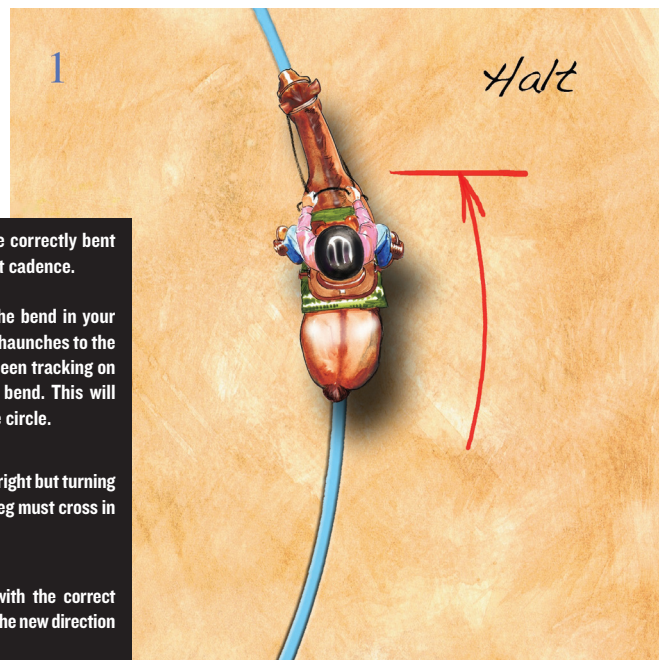
In any of the above situations, I coach my students to make use of the reverse-arc turn warm-up. It is a powerful training tool that lightens your horse to aids, increases flexibility, can be accomplished in limited space and time, and is an excellent workout and/or warm-up technique. Bottom line: It helps build communication with and responsiveness in your equine partner and that's a benefit for all riders at all levels. It's a great warm-up for any discipline.

## Starting Out

FIRST, ESTABLISH A GOOD, CADENCED, forward walk with your horse on a circle no smaller than 30 feet in diameter and no larger than 60 feet. Move the horse forward, bent correctly so you can just see his inside eye. Make sure that you keep riding using all of your aids from the inside leg and outside rein, inside rein and outside leg.

Remember that your reins control the horse's shoulders forward and

your seat and legs control everything behind the shoulders. When riding the circle, use your inside leg at the girth to control the rib cage and inside shoulder, keeping the horse's weight evenly distributed and not falling toward the inside of the circle. While you see your horse's inside eye by keep-



- Ride a circle with your horse correctly bent and balanced with consistent cadence.

- Halt on the circle, reverse the bend in your horse's body and turn on the haunches to the inside of the circle you had been tracking on while maintaining your new bend. This will reverse your direction on the circle.

- In this turn, the horse is bent right but turning left, so the horse's right foreleg must cross in front of the left foreleg.

- Ride forward on the circle with the correct bend in your horse's body for the new direction of travel.

ing a slight bend with your inside rein, your outside rein prevents too much bend by holding the outside shoulder. As you ride, your inside leg moves the horse's shoulder onto the feel of the outside rein. Your outside leg keeps the horse's hips on the circle, creating a head-to-tail curve and maintaining forward motion.

When you feel that the horse has quietly and easily performed the circle with consistency of gait and bend, halt softly on the circle.

Now, change the bend in your horse's body to the other direction so that the side that was on the inside of the circle now becomes the outside of the new bend in your horse's body. Shift your aids accordingly (make sure your inside leg is at the girth and you can see the inside eye of the horse).

Perform a turn on the haunches to the inside of the circle you had been tracking on – this is not a typical turn on the haunches, because the horse's body is bent away from the direction of the turn, in a "reverse arc." Close the outside rein to keep the bend even from head to tail, and hold the outside shoulder. Use your inside leg to encourage the bend and the turn, while the outside leg holds the outside hip. If your horse is arced to the right, turning to the left, his right front leg should cross in front of his left front, stepping forward and across.

Immediately upon completing the turn, go forward at a walk, maintaining that same bend and continuing on the same circular track, now going in the other direction. When you complete the reverse-arc turn, the horse should be balanced for a proper departure into the walk.

### Step It Up

IN THE TURN, REMEMBER THAT THE HORSE SHOULD ALWAYS step forward; never allow the horse to step backward during the turn. Continue to push with the inside leg to keep that arc and keep the horse's inside hind leg activated, continuing to use your outside leg aid and encourage forward motion. You turn and urge the horse to come forward in the same movement. The more your horse steps forward, the nicer he'll turn.

It's difficult for riders to learn to move a horse off the inside

leg against the outside rein, as you have to do in this reverse-arc turn. Riders tend to overbend their horses' heads and necks with the inside rein and not do anything with the outside rein. You need to use the inside rein just enough to see the inside edge of the horse's eye then move the horse off your inside leg and up into the feel of your outside rein. When riders learn to do that, horses move under them much better. It gets the horse's inside hind leg engaged.

Starting out, you don't need to fight with your horse, just work on it until you get the right feel from your inside leg to your outside rein – you have to ease into it and think about what's happening underneath you so you can convey that message to your horse.

When I ask my students to do this, I want the rider to be able to bend the horse and get the horse to move off the rider's leg and rein aids. When you see that start to happen, then reward the horse and go on to something else.

### Advanced

YOU CAN PERFORM THIS EXERCISE AT THE TROT OR JOG, AND work up to the canter or lope. Be methodical and strive for a consistent rhythm and balance at whatever pace suits you at the time. Repeat this exercise several times each way at each gait.

After having completed this exercise several times at all gaits, you will find that both of you will be sufficiently warmed up and in tune with each other to compete effectively. If this is all you can do during those hot or cold spells, you will certainly maintain your level of communication. 🐾

*Marina Herbert-Schwarz of Bradenton, Florida, returned to riding after a 20-year absence. She began writing down Andy's lessons to remember them. To comment, write to [chamilton@aqha.org](mailto:chamilton@aqha.org).*



AQHA Professional Horseman **ANDY MOORMAN** of Venice, Florida, has more than 40 years experience training and coaching horses and riders in the American Quarter Horse industry in everything from barrel racing to western and English pattern and over-fences classes. She was the 1998 AQHA Professional's Choice Horsewoman of the Year.

