

LOOKING FOR STRAIGHTNESS

It's a good feeling

By Joe Wolter

“With a good horse between my knees.” That’s a line from an old Red Steagall song, but it describes the way I feel when I ride. I would like whatever horse I’m riding to be between my legs and reins at all times.

Now I know that doesn’t make any sense. Of course he’s between my legs. But what I’m trying to say is that I want his mind there, too.

Let me explain.

Have you ever noticed the difference in your horse when you’re riding him away from the barn, as opposed to when you are riding him toward it? Or how about when you are riding him into the roping box, or toward the herd in a cutting contest. After you pointed him toward the roping box or the herd, would he go on in there if you dropped the reins on his neck, or would he veer off to the side? But when you start back to the barn, you can lay the reins on his neck and he never wavers. He goes straight to the barn. You and your horse are together and you both have the same idea. That’s the feeling I want all the time, whether I am leaving the barn or going toward it.

Most of the time, when you ride back to the barn is when you sit the quietest, and that’s when it feels best to the horse. So along with the fact that the barn is where you unsaddle and feed him, and that’s where he gets rid of you, you are encouraging him to go

to the barn by sitting quieter every time you take him back. And that’s natural. You are through for the day, so you are more relaxed.

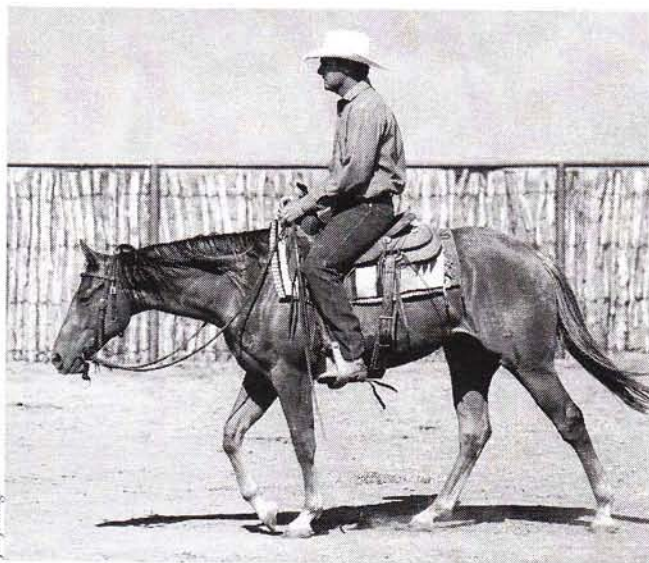
However, you need to be relaxed and sit quietly when you are leaving the barn. Transmit the same feeling to your horse going away from the barn as you do when you are returning.

What I want is for my horse and me to have the same idea, and you should aspire to that also. The best way I know how to ensure that is for you to provide resistance anytime he is not looking or traveling the way you want him to go. When he falls off line, help him back over with your leg or with the reins. What you are doing is showing him the path of least resistance. However, that also means that you must really turn him loose when he’s correct; take all the pressure off.

But you need to stay ready. Don’t wait until he has already turned and is headed south. As soon as he veers off, let him fall into pressure. Let him walk into you, and when he starts to come off, relieve the pressure. He might drift into the other side, but you do the same thing there. There is a spot in the middle where neither one of you weighs anything, and sooner or later he will find that spot and love it.

You need to start this at a walk, because the slower you go, the easier it is for the horse to figure it out.

Work on it when you are heading



Jim Jennings

Are they headed

toward the barn
or away from it?

back to the barn, but don’t go directly to the barn. Go at an angle. Your horse will want to veer off toward the barn, and when he does, apply the pressure. He’ll figure it out, and when he picks up the idea, it will feel as good to him as it does to you.

What I’m looking for is straightness. That’s what you get when their idea is your idea. And it’s a good feeling. ☼

Trainer on tour

One free clinic remains in Bayer’s Best Remuda Tour. The tour clinician is Joe Wolter, *America’s Horse* columnist and trainer for the Four Sixes Ranch in Guthrie, Texas. The final clinic of the series is September 23 in Medicine Lodge, Kansas, at the Working Ranch Cowboys Association-sanctioned rodeo.

The clinic is open to the public and will focus on improving a horse’s performance as well as starting colts on cattle and ranch roping. For more information, call (806) 376-4811 or see www.aqha.com (click on About AQHA, Programs/Uses, Best Remuda).

Four Sixes Ranch trainer Joe Wolter says that when you get straightness in your horse, it’s more fun for both horse and rider.

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