

PALM PARTNERSHIP TRAINING™

Building a Partnership with Your Horse

"Working In Hand - Pivoting"

By Lynn Palm

Besides being important for showmanship events, working in hand is very beneficial to horses of all ages and disciplines. It teaches the young horse to be responsive to his handler and gives him skills necessary for work under saddle. In-hand work sharpens the older horse and provides alternative lessons when circumstances do not allow for ridden lessons.

If you are interested in showmanship, it is important that your horse clearly understands a maneuver called the "pivot." The pivot is similar to the turn on the haunches, where the horse's forehand pivots around the hindquarters, except the inside hind leg stays stationary during the turn rather than stepping up and down.

Once your horse is consistent with doing the turn on the haunches, turn on the forehand, and yielding, you can teach him how to pivot. I will explain how to do this maneuver teaching it from the horse's left side and asking him to move away by pivoting his forehand to the right. **Be sure to teach it on both sides.**

Position yourself between the horse and a wall or fence. Put your left hand on the halter, and your right hand on the point of the shoulder (the bottom or base of the shoulder). It is critical that the horse stay straight from his head through his neck and body for this maneuver. Use your hand on the halter to gently keep his head and neck in straight alignment with his body.

Using a pulsating pressure with your right hand on the point of his shoulder, ask the horse to move his shoulder laterally away from the pressure. He will keep the hindquarters pivoting if you can keep his head and neck in line with his body as he is moving laterally. Do only a 90-degree turn, and then walk forward out of it. Advance to a 180-degree turn and walk forward out of it. Repeat to teach the pivot in the other direction.

After the horse is responding in both directions to the 90- and 180-degree pivot, move further from the fence and advance to a 270-degree and finally a full 360-

degree turn.

The next step is teaching the horse to move away using only your body language as you move toward him, without having contact on his halter or shoulder. Re-establish your position between the fence and your horse. Hold the lead or longe line in your outstretched right hand so there is slack between it and the halter. Slightly bend your right arm so your elbow is close to the point of the horse's shoulder. This arm serves as a "block" to keep the horse moving away from you. When you are ready to start the pivot, slightly turn to face your horse and step closer to the point of his shoulder as you raise your right arm. "Cluck" to encourage him to move his forehand away from you. As you move toward and into your horse, do not let him turn his head. He must move his shoulder away from your body as you move towards him. Keep your contact with the lead loose at all times.

If he does not move away, use your right arm to push him on the point of his shoulder to the right as you encourage him to move with your voice. He should respond by moving his forehand away from you while his hindquarters stay stationary. If he tries to back, extend your right arm to encourage him to

stay forward. End the maneuver either by asking him to "whoa" or by walking forward out of the pivot.

A great way to practice the pivot is to do the maneuver in a box pattern. Lead your horse down a line corresponding to one side of an imaginary box or square. When you get to the corner, ask him to pivot to make the 90-degree angle on to the next side. Lead him down this side, then pivot to the next, and so on.

It is important that the horse understands to come to his handler with confidence. That's why at the conclusion of any pivot lesson, which teaches the horse to move away from the handler, I recommend ending with a maneuver that reinforces his obedience to come toward you on command.

This may be simply done by giving him the "come to me" command until he moves toward you. Or you can use a variation of the pivot maneuver, asking the horse to pivot on his hindquarters 90-degrees towards you.

To introduce a pivot on the hindquarters toward you, ask your horse to stand square. Position yourself so you are facing the side of his head. You must lift the head to encourage him to move toward you. Raise your right hand and give a slight upward pulsating pressure on the lead to keep his head up while asking him to come to you. Use the voice command to "come to me" or "come." Keeping his head up will help him maintain straight body alignment. As he moves his forehand toward you and pivots on his hindquarters, take backward steps to follow his motion. If he moves his hips, walk out of the maneuver and start over. If he swings his head toward you, push it back into alignment with his shoulders and body.

Be patient and praise your horse as he learns the pivot lesson.

If you need more help to perfect pivoting, the section in my **Longevity Training Series** title, "Working In Hand," gives clear instructions on how to introduce pivoting to a young horse.

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Lynn Palm and friends