

Turn, Turn, Turn

How to ride turns on the haunches and walk pirouettes

By Kathy Rowse

Turns on the haunches and walk pirouettes are considered “non-brilliance” movements, meaning that they aren’t dependent on the extravagance of the horse’s gaits. Any horse with a clear four-beat walk should be able to get high marks for

horses that get behind the rider’s aids. In this article, I’ll give you some pointers on improving these important movements.

Prerequisites and Definitions

First and foremost, the demands of the pyramid of training concerning rhythm, contact, activity, and straightness (see illustration below) must always be demonstrated.

As the United States Equestrian Federation rule book (online at usef.org) explains, “For younger horses that are still not able to show collected walk, the ‘turn on the haunches’ is an exercise to prepare the horse for collection.” Both turns on the haunches and walk pirouettes are exercises performed on two tracks, with the horse’s forehand moving around the haunches. The horse is slightly bent in the direction of travel, and all four feet continue to step in a correct walk rhythm.

According to the USEF rule book, the TOH should be executed out of the medium walk while prepared by half-halts to shorten the steps a little. The TOH can be executed on a diameter of approximately one meter (3 feet, 3 inches). The walk pirouette is the more advanced version of the exercise and is ridden in the collected walk, with the horse’s forefeet and outside hind foot moving around the inside hind foot, which returns to the same spot or slightly in front of it each time it leaves the ground. So, simply put, the differences between the TOH and the walk pirouette are the degree of collection of the walk and the size of the turn. TOH is required at Second and Third Levels while walk pirouettes are shown at Fourth Level and above, in which collected walk is required.

Riding and Judging the Movements

Both TOH and walk pirouettes should be light, fluid, and harmonious and require suppleness and balance. Your horse needs to react immediately to your aids in the walk. In practice, the reaction to the aids is often diminished in the walk, where there is no impulsion and the walk often lacks sufficient activity. In training it is important to use progressive exercises to master both movements, but always keep in mind that the basic quality of the walk must never be sacrificed. If your horse loses the walk rhythm, becomes “stuck,” or—even worse—steps backward, the score will be 5 or below.

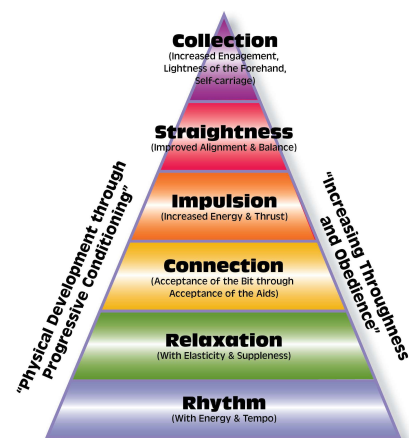
Ideally, your horse will be obedient to the aids, stay on the bit, and maintain his position to the inside, thus remaining well-connected back to front and laterally supple. Losing these qualities will cause additional problems with the biomechanics of the movement, which will lower your scores. Common problems include stepping too far forward with the inside hind leg (making the movement too large), losing balance, not completing the turn, stepping out behind, crossing the hind legs, losing the bend, or finishing poorly with a leg-yield or a half-pass instead of a proper TOH or pirouette turn.

Judges frequently see riders focus too much on getting the horse to step sideways with the haunches while forgetting to ensure that the shoulders turn correctly in advance of the hind legs.

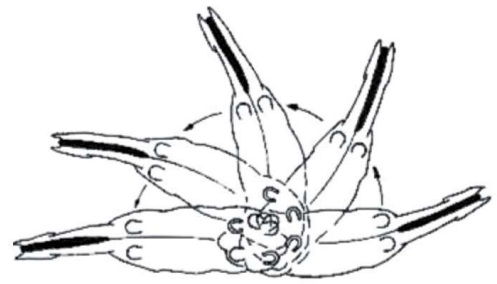
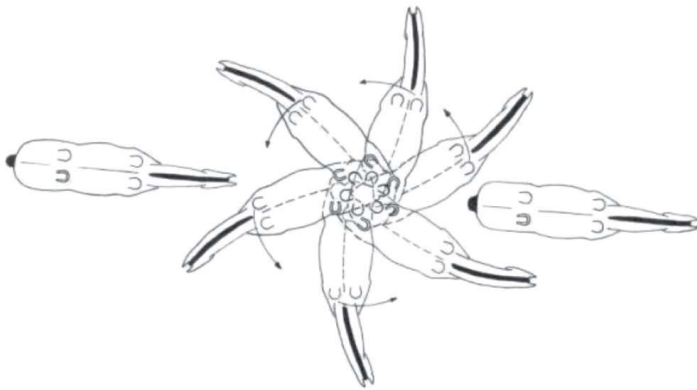


TEST OF YOUR TRAINING: *Any horse with a clear four-beat walk should be able to get high scores for turns on the haunches and walk pirouettes*

well-executed turns on the haunches and walk pirouettes. However, these movements are very dependent on the correctness of the training and therefore are problematic for inexperienced riders, horses with incorrect basics, or



The pyramid of training



THE MOVEMENTS: *The turn on the haunches (left), included at Second and Third Levels, has a diameter of approximately 3 meters and is ridden from the medium walk. The walk pirouette (right, shown as a half-pirouette) is ridden "on the spot" or close to it and is introduced at Fourth Level.*

Occasionally we see the opposite problem: The shoulders turn, but the hind legs step out. In both cases, the horse is out of balance. A correct TOH is performed from a slight shoulder-fore feeling at the start, with the haunches stepping away from the rider's outside leg and the horse's shoulders turning in advance of his haunches. A turn with too much sideways movement will receive a lower score, and a "turn on the middle" (similar to the movement in a reining spin, with the horse rotating around his

midsection) will score even worse. Judges award high scores for a turn that stays in balance, with the shoulders coming in advance of the haunches.

In riding the TOH, many riders think that smaller is better; but if you try to go too small and produce any of the above faults, you will get a low score! It's beneficial to always ask yourself whether you have maintained the basic quality of the walk and then whether you have performed the movement in balance and on the aids with the correct turn-

ing of both the hind legs and the front legs. If you do all this, most likely the turn will be the right size. A TOH does not have to be a walk pirouette in order to get a 10. If a good walk pirouette is performed at Second or Third Level instead of the required TOH, we certainly won't penalize you for making the turn smaller than required. The problem lies when you attempt to do a walk pirouette and it is badly performed.

Another common mistake is to overbend the horse with the inside

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rein, which causes him to fall on his inside shoulder. Sometimes riders incorrectly bend the horse to the outside to try to get him to turn his shoulders more quickly. It is important to maintain the same usual inside-leg-to-outside-rein feeling, which will maintain the correct bending to the inside.

When you ride a TOH or a walk pirouette, sit on your inside seat bone and use your inside leg to maintain the activity of your horse's inside hind leg. If you overuse your outside leg while taking your inside leg and inside seat bone off, you will lose the correct feel of inside bending.

Riders often appear to rush through these movements. Going faster won't hide the problems from the judge! In your training at home, break the TOH or the walk pirouette into small segments, always maintaining the quality of the walk so that the precision, degree of shortened steps or collected walk, and the turning aids all come together in a logical, smooth, and uninterrupted way. If it feels this way to the rider, most like-

ly it will also look this way to the judge.

Judges should all have a scale that they work from, and ideally our scales are all similar. The scale I use in scoring the TOH and the walk pirouette is as follows:

- 7-10:** correct rhythm and size, with active steps (more activity usually means a higher score)
- 6:** too much sideways and not enough forward; tendency to be on the large side; one step against rider's outside leg
- 5:** stuck one step; several steps against rider's outside leg
- 4:** stuck several steps
- 3 or lower:** going backward; "turning around the middle"; resistance to the rider's aids.

These movements also should figure into the collective marks for submission and rider effectiveness.

A Test of Your Training

Although the TOH and the walk pirouette may not seem very exciting, they

are a real reflection of your training and your horse's ability to stay on the aids, even in the walk. They require practice time and are well worth the effort, as they are in almost every test from Second Level to FEI. And as non-brilliance movements, they present a valuable opportunity for any competitor to add points to her dressage score. ▲

Kathy Rowse is an USEF "S" dressage judge from Suffolk, VA, where she and her husband, Mike, run Silverleaf Farm. Kathy has earned her USDF bronze, silver, and gold medals and has coached numerous students to their medals, as well. She is a faculty member of the USDF "L" Education Program and a member of the USEF Youth Committee.

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WHAT IS TDF'S TWO-TEMPI CHALLENGE?

Riders who have horses capable of doing two-tempi changes are invited to participate in this national and regional competition to raise money for TDF, while having fun with their friends! Supporters in the audience can pledge any dollar amount per successful two-tempi change completed by the horse and rider team. The pledged donations will be used to support TDF's nation-wide educational programs and grants.

HOW CAN YOU GET STARTED?

Riders (and stick horse riders!) are welcome to organize and compete in a Two-Tempi Challenge. The Challenge can be held at a show, during a clinic, or even at your local barn with your friends. Visit www.dressagefoundation.org/two-tempi-challenge for information and forms to get you started!

WHAT CAN YOU WIN?

TDF will announce winners and award prizes at the end of the year for the riders who successfully completed the most two-tempi changes in a row, nationally and regionally. Prizes will also be awarded for stick horse champions and for the top two groups that raised the most money in pledges for TDF.

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Your participation in the Two-Tempi Challenge will provide important financial support for annual grants available for youth, adult amateurs, instructors, judges, high performance teams, and equestrian organizations.

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