

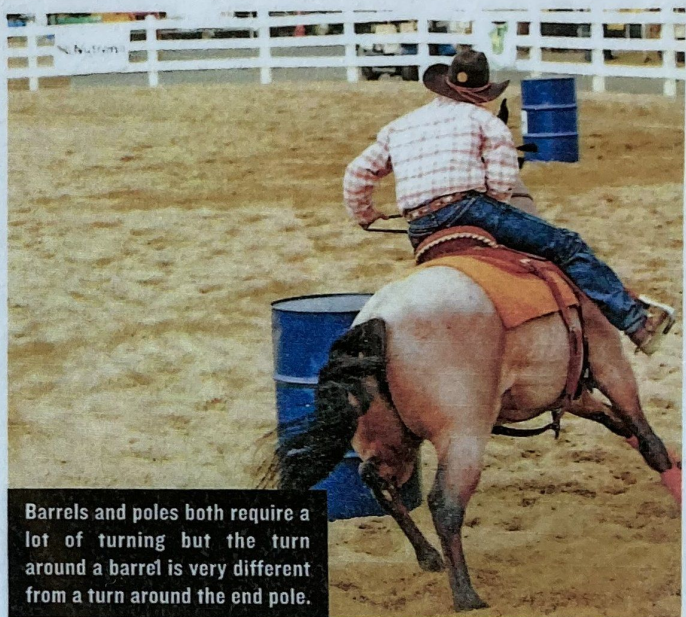
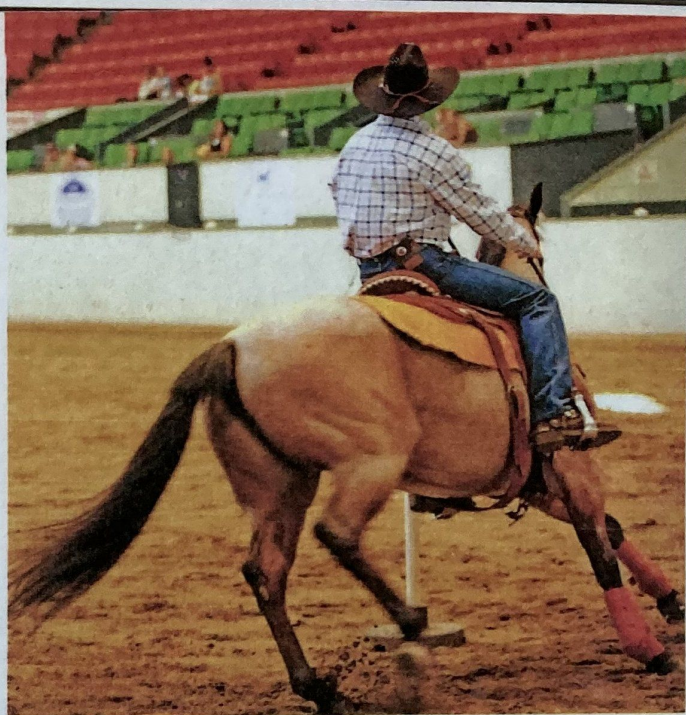
# The LAST TURN

*There's a big difference between turning the last barrel and turning an end pole.*

**By AQHA Professional Horseman Doug Leasor with Tonya Ratliff-Garrison**

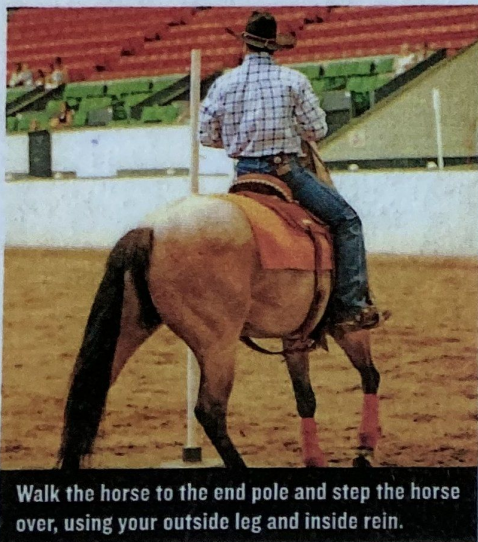
**Photos by**

**Tonya Ratliff-Garrison**

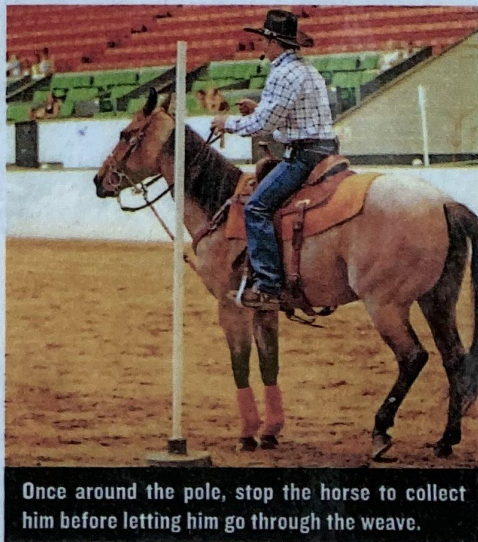


Barrels and poles both require a lot of turning but the turn around a barrel is very different from a turn around the end pole.

YOU CAN HAVE A HORSE THAT CAN DO BOTH BARREL RACING AND pole bending, but for him to be successful, you need to know the difference between turning around the barrel and turning around the end pole.



Walk the horse to the end pole and step the horse over, using your outside leg and inside rein.



Once around the pole, stop the horse to collect him before letting him go through the weave.

It's a lot tighter turn on the poles, and your horse has to step over quick. A barrel is bigger, and you have more room for the turn.

Because the barrels are round, I try to bend my horse around the barrel when turning. I build a path around it and actually make a bigger turn around the barrel than around the pole, leaving a little more room.

In poles, I try to make a turn similar to a rollback around the end pole. When you run down beside the poles, you stay 6 or 7 feet away from the poles. When you get to the end, you just snap right around pretty much in your same track. Immediately get your horse collected back up and get on the other side of the center line of the poles.

Here are a few simple exercises you can do at home to get your horse accustomed to the difference between the barrel and end pole turns.

## Pole Exercises

WHEN I START A HORSE OUT, I TROT DOWN to the end pole and stop. I turn the end pole and immediately step the horse over, using my leg and my rein, kind of like a sidepass. Once I get him over, I stop him again. Then I let him go through the weave.

By stopping him, you can teach the horse to stay collected around the end pole. You'll see a lot of horses run down, make that end pole and then hit the third pole up. The reason for that is that the horse is strung out. His feet are not gathered up underneath him, and his body is not collected. The horse gets really close to the pole, but then has a hard time getting past the next one because he wasn't checked and gathered before beginning the weave.

It's not a big time-consuming thing. It just takes a split-second for the horse to gather himself up, which will make the whole weave smoother.

The key to a good pole-bending run is to get that first turn down. Once you get that down, the weave comes naturally.

But if you are having trouble with the weave, continue the same exercise as you would with the end pole. The poles are always the same distance apart no matter where you are. Establish a rhythm for the horse. Initially, you will ask him to go two strides and stop, two strides and stop, etc.

It's just like dancing with a partner, automatic; as long as he hits the same spot at the pole every time, the weave is going to be easy for him.

I'm teaching him to rate down. I bend his body around the pole and I step him over, to get him on the other side of the center line. As soon as his hips get past the line, I stop him and I collect him up before letting him go again.

When he actually speeds up, he'll have learned the rhythm of the poles and to gather himself before he takes off.

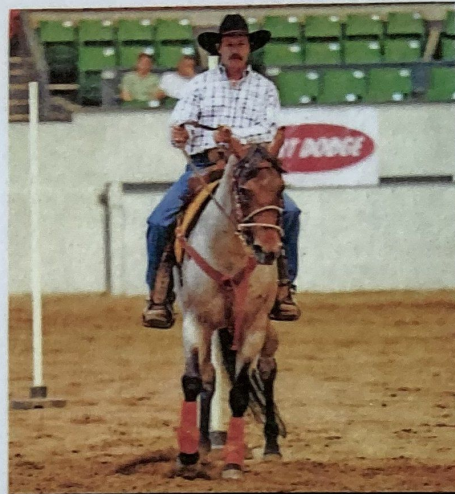
## Barrel Exercises

DOING THIS EXERCISE, I START AT THE WALK BEFORE MOVING TO the trot and finally at a run.

In the barrels, I try to get my horse on the correct lead as soon as I can.



Like at the end pole, walk your horse in the weave, pushing him around the pole with your outside leg and inside rein.



Between the poles, stop the horse and collect him before moving to the next pole.

When I go into the first barrel, I'm going to be on the right lead. I pick up the nose and push my right leg into his rib cage to make a bend with his body. As I'm finishing the turn, I release my right hand and leg and pick up my left hand and leg to step the horse over. When he steps over like this, he'll take off in the correct lead, which will be the lead to make the next turn.

I've been told that my horses run pretty because they are smooth, are flat and are not jerking around. Many times, you'll see horses run right into the barrel and you've got to lift them up to make them swing out.

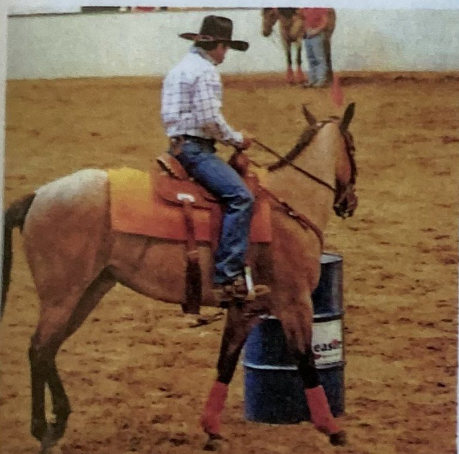
I ride two-handed, except for in my turns. In the turn, I drop my outside rein, grab the horn, and as I'm on the back side of the turn, almost done with that turn, I pick up that outside rein again and move the horse over. I go right back to two-handed.

It's a good idea to hold onto that saddle horn when making a turn. When the horse leaves the barrel really hard, it throws you back, and your hands come up looking for something to hold onto, and you'll grip on his mouth.

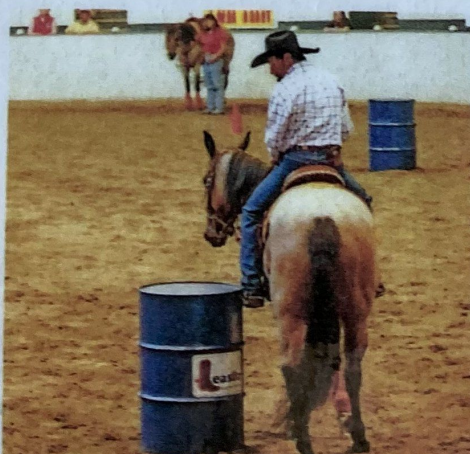
## Practice, Practice, Practice

WHETHER YOU'RE RUNNING BARRELS OR POLES, IT ALL HAPPENS really, really fast. But if you practice slowly and do it enough times correctly, it becomes easy. Before long, you'll feel like you can do it with your eyes closed. ■

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When first teaching your horse to curve around the barrel, do it at a walk.



Make the horse bend his body around by using the inside leg against his rib cage.



**DOUG LEASOR** operates Leasor Quarter Horses in Holland, Massachusetts. An AQHA Professional Horseman, Doug

has trained barrel racing and pole bending horses that have won the All American Quarter Horse Congress, been reserve at the Ford AQHYA World Championship Show, qualified for the AQHA World Championship Show and earned AQHA high-point titles. Doug works with all levels of horses and riders to help them to better their times and achieve their goals. He also gives lessons and clinics year-round. Besides training speed-event horses, Doug is an expert farrier with more than 16 years of experience. He shoes all of the horses he trains and competes on.