

# Western Pleasure CALISTHENICS

David Dellin demonstrates an exercise to get your horse shaped up for the show ring. Part 1 of 3.

By David Dellin with Larri Jo Starkey

**THE PROBLEM:** WHEN A RIDER LOPES around a sharp corner in the class, his horse wants to drop a shoulder and speed up.

**The Exercise Solution:** The Indirect Turn

**How to Perform It:** Your horse should be in a snaffle bit for this exercise, at least in the beginning. As he becomes more experienced in this exercise, you might move to a leverage bit, but a snaffle bit is best to start.

To perform the indirect turn, as your horse turns in one direction, ask him to hold his head in the opposite direction, so that he's moving off your legs and not your hands.

Ask just for a little bend, the first time. Then apply your inside leg and ask him to step over. You should gradually get a little more bend and a little more until you get complete softness through the horse's head and neck while he's moving his shoulders in the opposite direction from his head.

If your horse backs up off your hands while you are trying to supple him, then bump with your turn leg to increase his forward motion until his neck softens instead of him backing up. The same principles apply if your horse tries to walk off when you want to turn: Just apply stronger pressure with your hands until he turns and softens at the same time. Once you have mastered this exercise at the walk, try it at the jog. Just keep working until everything gets totally soft and supple, and your horse can maintain a perfect cadence all the way around.

Be sure you're working both sides an equal amount.

If you do enough indirect turns in the middle of the arena, when you ride into a class, you'll be able



As I ask An Obvious Impulse to move to the right, I'm tipping her nose to the left. This is an unnatural activity for your horse, so be patient while she learns it.

to move your horse's shoulder out to the rail with just your inside leg.


**When to Do It:** It takes a lot of repetition for your horse to get comfortable with these calisthenics and build up his muscles to perform them. Start slowly and build up gradually. Practice the indirect turn every day, but don't expect your horse to be perfect instantly.

The indirect turn is a great warm-up exercise. I start teaching it 30 rides into a horse's training, and it takes about a month for a horse to get comfortable doing it.

An amateur at home should do this exercise and the ones I'll show you in the next two months every day. They're great exercises to do at home. You don't have to worry that you've done it too many days in a row. I ask all of my horses to perform these exercises daily.

I want my horse to be light enough that when I think about moving the

shoulder over, my horse does it almost as I cue. I want him to be so responsive that he beats me to the punch. That's when I know that I'm really doing a good job of getting the horse prepared. It can take months to get a horse to that point.

**Bonus:** The indirect turn is also a way to work on your horse's lateral softness. 



AQHA Professional Horseman DAVID DELLIN is an AQHA judge and western pleasure exhibitor. He showed One Hot Krymsun to world championships in 2-year-old, junior and senior western pleasure. With his wife, Julie, he is raising their two sons in Sanger, Texas, where David trains horses. You can watch David on AQHA's new DVD on western pleasure: "Western Pleasure: Showing to Win," available later this month exclusively through Quarter Horse Outfitters, [www.aqhastore.com](http://www.aqhastore.com).

