



Pattern Analysis

AQHA Pro Horseman Matt Mills

walks you through reining pattern No. 9.

By Matt Mills

with Tonya Ratliff-Garrison

PATTERN NO. 9 IS A RUN-IN PATTERN, SO IN THE WARM-UP PEN, I typically practice stopping right before I go in. If I'm on a real quiet horse, I do some rundowns and make sure the horse is running nice and free.

More importantly, I work on my three stop cues: my voice, my legs and my hands. I individualize these maneuvers, mostly going around at a jog and making sure that the horse is dialed-in to those cues so I have a good chance of getting a good stop.

If the gate to the arena is right in the center and I am confident in my horse, I'll actually run through the gate on this pattern because I think it's easier to get the horse freed up and get him running the way I want him to.

If I am planning on doing this, I'll typically practice it the night before just to make sure the horse is comfortable running in. Sometimes if you haven't practiced it, the horse will run in and gear off to the side before you can get him lined up.

Another thing I do when I'm running in on pattern 9 is run just a little bit right of the center. That way, when I finish my left spins, I'll be in the middle of the arena. If you run right on the center line, by the time you finish spinning, you're actually going to be over the center line and you've shortened the amount of space available for a good lead departure.

Running through the gate, I stay as consistent as I can on that first stop. Through experience, I've found with that first rundown I can usually get away with really pushing the horse.

The horse's ability to back up will determine how far I run. The pattern only says to go past the center cone. But if you have a horse that backs up well, run past the last cone.

I back my horse's hip to the center cone. I don't want to back up to where his head is on the cone, because then when I start doing my left spins, I'll be off the center.

Now I'm standing in the middle after my run-in, stop and back up. It's a good place to let my horse stand and catch his breath to really show off the hesitation.

After you've hesitated and your horse feels like he's ready to turn, go ahead and turn him to the right as fast as he is capable of doing. But if you have a horse that is not a great turner, don't ask for something the horse doesn't have.

After the right spin is another good spot to hesitate. You want to sit there and be as quiet as you can. I'll take about four or five seconds before I start that left spin, not only just to show the hesitation but to also allow the horse to catch a few breaths.

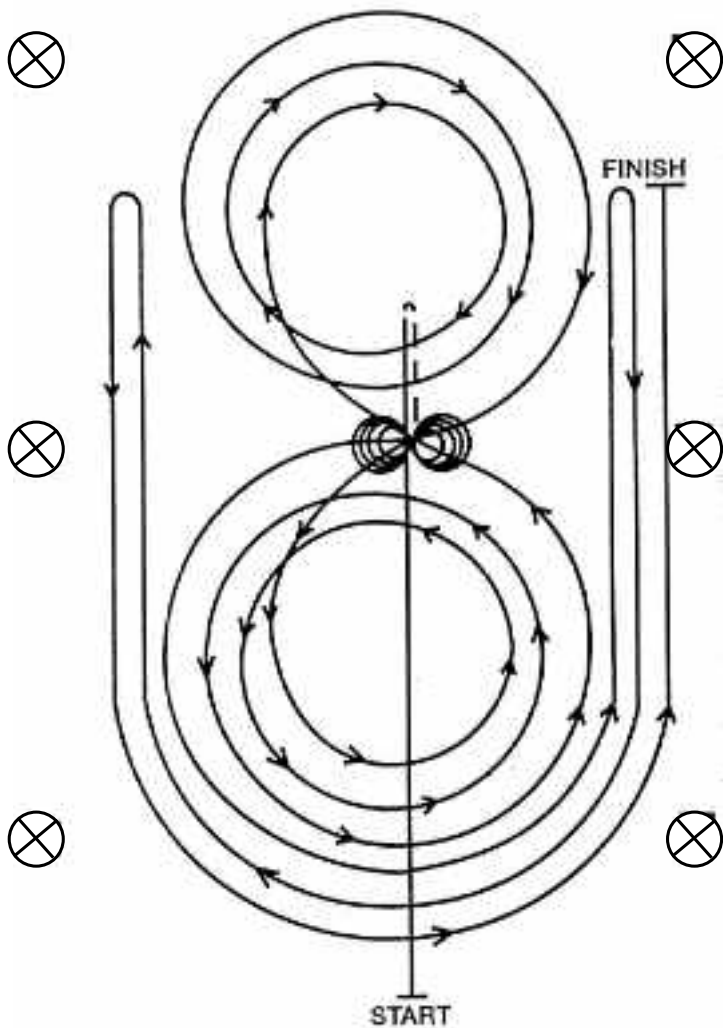
I do the same on the left spins, only asking the horse to give me what he is capable of. After I shut off, I'm going to stand there and let that horse catch his breath again.

I'll then take off for that first small slow. When you lope off, keep in mind that the horse is used to doing a fast circle first. There are only a couple of patterns where you start off with a small circle. So when I initiate that lead departure to the left, I'll shorten my inside rein maybe an inch or two to tip the horse's nose to the inside and really cement in his mind that we're going left.

Right when I lope off to the left, I look left and keep my outside leg close to the horse to make sure he's committed to the small slow. Once I get halfway through the small circle, I loosen my reins a little. Once I get back to the middle of the arena, I look up and push the horse into that left set of circles. I'll run my two large fast circles, being as aggressive as I can. Just short of the center after my second large fast, I let off the gas pedal a little bit. My body position doesn't change, and nothing should look different; I'm just not going to be driving the horse as hard. The horse will start to coast a bit, like if you were in the car driving 90 mph and took your foot off the accelerator. You start a gradual deceleration.

When I get to the middle of the arena, I ask for the lead change before asking for the slow down. If you try to do it all at once, it's a higher degree of difficulty but too big of a risk for penalties to occur.

After I've changed, I sit all the way down on my horse, keep my outside leg, which will be my left leg, close to the



horse's side, and steer immediately into my right small circle.

If your horse doesn't slow down, don't panic. Just pick up the reins and with a steady pull, slow the horse down. The rulebook says the horse has to be willingly guided, so the judge is not expecting you not to have to handle your horse. It's OK.

I see some riders where the horse isn't slowing down at all and they just put their hand down and let the horse run as fast as he wants. They are thinking they don't want to touch the horse's mouth because the judge is going to look down upon it. But I think it's better to pick up, slow the horse down and get him back under control. Sure, that degree of difficulty is a bit lower, but I think it looks a lot better than allowing the horse to get away from you at any point. What that does is set up bad things to happen later on in other maneuvers.

About halfway through my right small slow, if I can, I loosen up on my reins a little bit, maybe show off the change of speed some.

When I move into those two large fast on the right, again that's another spot where I'm going to be very aggressive. I don't have to worry about slowing down because the next thing I do is run and stop. I think this is a good pattern to really show off your fast circles.

After I finish my second large fast to the right, I like to keep my speed up until I've passed the judge's chair. That's

about the time the judge is getting ready to go to the pencil and I want to finish strong. I will follow through on that circle and really make an impression on the judge that I'm confident and have my horse bowed in and with me.

After I pass the judge, that's the spot where I sit down and try to throttle the horse. It's a good spot to see if the horse is paying attention. If he is, then when you sit down, he's going to slow down and be right there with you.

Occasionally, though, your horse will be a little excited because you just finished five maneuvers. Once you pass that judge, you've got a little stretch in there before you turn to run down and that's where you can get your horse back under control. So if you pick up and nobody's home, that's a good time to maybe shorten your reins a little and use whatever cue you have to get your horse back under control.

As I come around the corner to turn, I look down and pick a target to run to. You always need to run to something, otherwise you have no clue where a straight line is at.

I turn the corner and wait just a stride or two before I accelerate. Then I run that horse down there and always try to go past the last cone. Always shoot for that. It's a higher degree of difficulty and will also increase the longevity of your horse in the show pen. If you run short all the time, sooner or later, that horse is going to be hard to get past the middle cone.

I'll run nice and long to the stop, let the horse hesitate and then explode out of the rollback.

After rolling back, it's a good time to loosen up your reins a little, relax and get your horse under control again. Check and make sure he's paying attention to you. Coming around on the right lead, again looking for a target down at the end of the arena, run down, stop, hesitate again, and roll all the way through 180 back to the left.

Coming around the left lead, I'm again going to be looking for a target again.

On the last rundown, the horse is going to be running out of gas because it's an eight-manuever pattern, so you want to be really aggressive with your body and send that horse down there as hard as you can and try to get a nice stop.

Then let that horse stand and settle before you walk off and head out of the arena. ■

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BIO

AQHA Professional Horseman
MATT MILLS began riding horses at an early age and had a successful career as a youth rider, before entering a five-year internship with Dell Hendricks. In early 2002, Matt established his own training operation in the Phoenix/Scottsdale, Arizona, area. Today, he coaches several successful non-pro and youth riders, and trains reining horses. He became a National Reining Horse Association judge in 2006.

