

COMPETITIVE EDGE

Pivot Pointers

Gain an edge in showmanship with Margo Ball's technique for a snappy, right-hind-foot pivot.

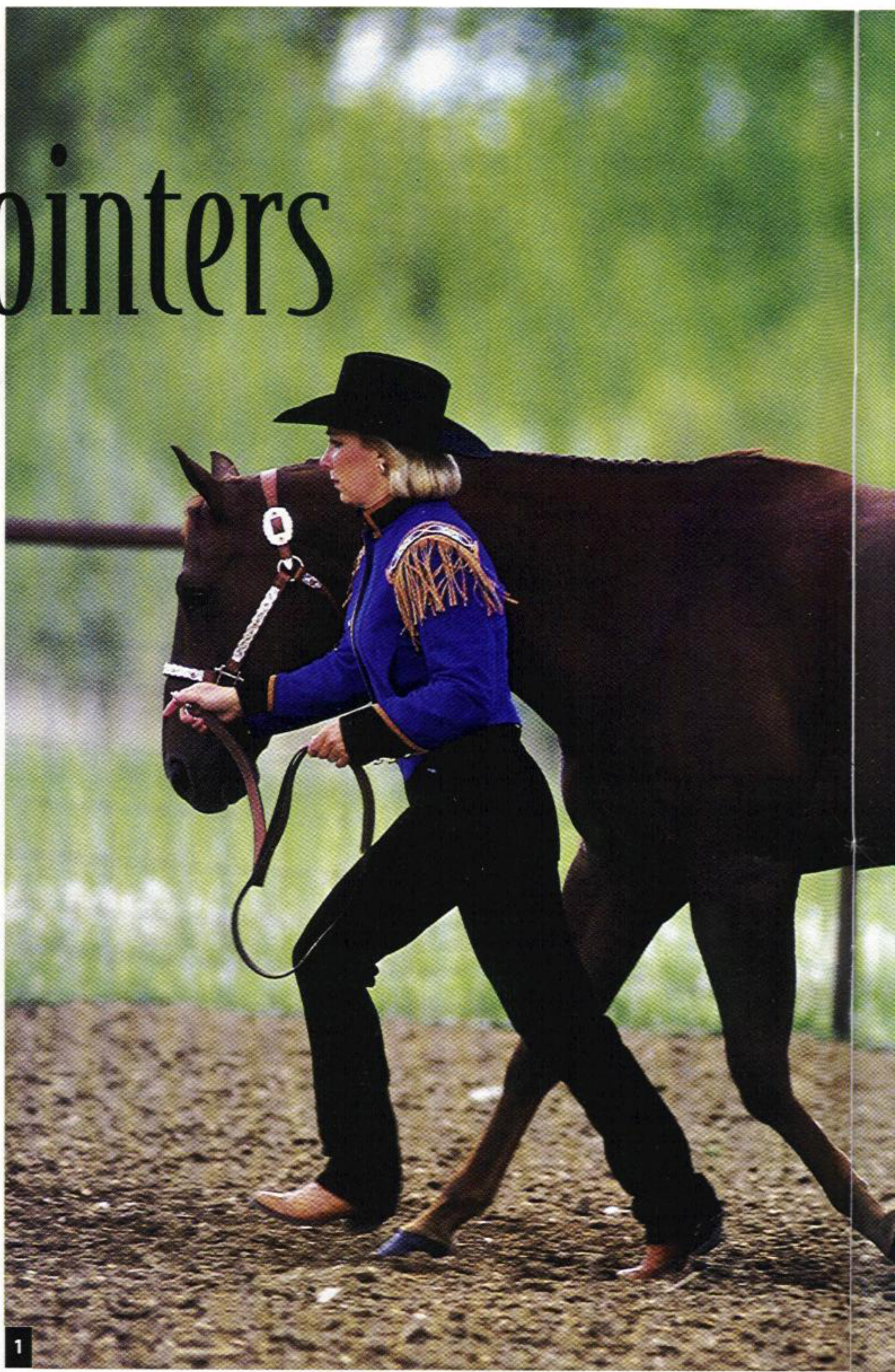
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Event appeal: Showmanship at halter.

Goal: To acquire the skills necessary for executing a correct, right-hind-foot pivot.

Benefit: You and your horse will learn the two critical components of a points-adding pivot: forward motion and correct body position. By gaining forward motion, your horse will learn to shift and firmly plant his weight onto his right hind foot. The motion, along with your hand and body cues, will guide him through the maneuver in one continuous movement.

Showmanship horses frequently pivot on the left hind foot, which isn't ideal according to many show association rulebooks. This problem usually occurs because the exhibitor doesn't establish enough forward motion (a term I'll use to describe impulsion and momentum) going into the turnaround for the horse to shift his weight onto his hindquarters and firmly plant his right hind foot. As a result, the horse steps out of the pivot and/or redistributes his weight onto his left hind foot. A left-hind-foot pivot isn't a disqualification; but, it could rank you lower than those competitors whose horses demonstrate the ideal. Practice this trot-pivot exercise at home (it's also a common combination at shows), and you'll learn to establish the forward motion and body position necessary to master this maneuver.



1. Begin in the leading position: Stand to the left of your horse's throatlatch, facing forward. Bend your elbows so your forearms form an angle slightly more than 90 degrees. Raise your right hand slightly higher than the left to help your horse balance. (Note: Don't drop your hands below hip level, or you'll be pulling your horse's head down and shifting his weight onto his forehead.) Ask him to establish a brisk trot by clucking to him once. (Tip: Don't use continuous voice commands, as it's distracting to the judge.) Step off with your

horse, not ahead of him. If you need to ask him for more forward motion, bring your right hand forward as I'm demonstrating. This should increase his pace without positioning you in front of him. I'm trotting my horse along a fence line to ensure his body stays straight. If he trots straight...

2. ...he'll stop straight, correctly positioned to initiate the pivot. I've cued my horse to stop by shifting my shoulders backward and smoothly and slowly raising the lead shank. This slight shank pressure should help



my horse shift his weight onto his right hind foot. Don't apply too much pressure too fast, or your horse may jerk or stop abruptly. Both will cost you points.

3. After you've stopped your horse, immediately ask him to pivot so you don't lose his forward motion. Raise your right hand, applying light contact on the lead shank to help him balance on his hindquarters. Step forward and turn your body so you're facing your horse's head. If you stand too far back, your horse may shift all his weight onto both hind legs and back up.

Smoothly and assertively step toward your horse. He should respond by moving away from you. (*Tip: If your horse doesn't pivot immediately, take the lead shank into your left hand, and tap his shoulder with your right hand.*)

4. Notice how my horse is redistributing his weight onto his left hind foot. To reset his right hind foot, I'm applying light, backward pressure on the lead shank, and am taking long, brisk strides.

5. Here, I'm moving my right hand slightly forward

(still lifting it) toward my horse's nose, asking him to increase his forward motion and step around with his left hind foot.

6. Since we've almost completed the pivot, I'm bringing my right hand back, but I'll keep lifting it until we're all the way around. I'm shortening my strides to return to the leading position, beside my horse's throatlatch. This way, I'll be ready for the next maneuver.