

**I'm a professional. Don't try this at home.  
(At least not very much!)**

I'm referring to that exercise which is usually preceded by the word "dreaded"—the turn on the center. Now, first of all, you had better be sure you can make legitimate turns on the forehand and turns on the haunches at will—YOUR will, not your horse's. [Refer to this archived Question of the Month as necessary: [Is there an easy way to keep the aids for those two movements straight?](#)]

"Legitimate" is key. Sluggishly drifting through the movement doesn't cut it. Your horse has to be prompt, sharp yet calm, and able to be adjusted—able to be stopped or redirected forward at a second's notice. And did I mention, he has to be on the bit?

If your horse has already been around the block a few times, you may find him getting complacent or deciding that he's smarter than you are. This is where a bit of unorthodoxy can catch him in his malfeasance! In very limited doses, I have heard turning your horse on his center be recommended by such disparate authorities as Major Lindgren and George Morris.

The exercise is just what it sounds like: push the front end one direction while you make the hindquarters go the opposite way. Imagine a merry-go-round horse pivoting on his supporting central brass pole. Lots of horses will respond with, "Huh? You want *what?*" and, of course, that's the whole point! When you catch them doing an exercise by rote rather than step-by-step on the aids, you need an intervention to draw them back into a more functional reality.

You may have seen Conrad Schumacher directing a related set of exercises for a similar purpose—for example, asking for a reinback of several steps directly into a quarter turn on the haunches to the left (that is, moving the forehand to the left around the left hind leg) followed by another 90 degrees of turn, this time displacing the haunches to the right and then stepping directly forward.

The whole routine (which as long as it is carefully planned and accurately carried out) need not be the same every time. In each case it's a bit reminiscent of an old floor chart from an Arthur Murray ballroom dancing lesson.

Over the years I've gotten on more than a few horses—including some *very* expensive ones—that were programmed to reliably perform specific test movements at specific spots in the ring. "Yes" to a half pass from F to X. "I don't hear you!" to the aids asking to yield off the track at a spot not marked by a letter. Being able to put any part of your horse anywhere you want at any time (always with him *thinking forward*) is the antidote to that bizarre and troubling situation. As always, ensuring your horse is honestly on the aids is your goal.