



Frank Bell Horse Whisperer

Round Pen Problem

Dear Frank,

I don't know if I'm sending this to the right place or if you can give me some advice on what I can do about my horse. My problem is when I am round penning her, she will not come into me, nor will she stop. This doesn't happen all the time. She is six years old, and I've worked with her since she was a year old. But every once in a while, she will just run around and around for hours and not even stop and look at me (she will turn away). Even when I coax her to whoa, she just keeps going. Is there something I'm doing wrong? Can you give me some advice? I feel like all the work I put into her is for nothing and I'm so stressed out over this that I think if I can't get through this that I'm going to sell her.

Dear Bonnie: There is a lot more to round penning a horse than meets the eye. It's not about sending the horse around and around until the horse tires and decides to take a peek or join you. With spirited horses this can take a long time. Some horses have actually died at the hands of inexperienced handlers. To say the least, round pen psychology is difficult to explain, but I will give you a few ideas.

Instead of beginning by sending the horse away, spend some time bonding with the horse just loving on the horse. Then walk off and see what happens. A lot of horses will want to stay with you and follow you. Bonding is the first and most important step of my 7-Step System. It sets the stage for success, regardless of the direction you choose to take. I've watched numerous horsemen, (competent and incompetent) begin a session by running the horse around mindlessly in circles when all the horse wanted was to be with them. My program is vastly different than this simplistic and sometimes dangerous approach. Take some time to read the [Western Horseman article on my website](#). Learn how to bond with your horse, then learn this logical set of exercises that culminates in "Ballet on the Ground" which turns safety into a dance that uses your horse's energy constructively and with absolute purpose.

A few suggestions on round penning: Drive the horse away from you counterclockwise with your body language and your right arm as the driving force. Allow the horse to go around a couple of times, then ask the horse to change directions with an outside turn-away from you. Do the same in the other direction and try to have the horse make the turn in the exact same part of the round pen. After three or four of these turns, as the horse approaches that same spot where she'd turned, back off, turn to the side, avert your eyes, and lower your stature, thereby drawing the horse into you. If the horse does not get it, try again.



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The point is, if your timing and body language are right, the horse will not only take a look, but actually take some steps toward you. If that does happen, let it sink in for a bit, have soft eyes and body, then go in and bond with the horse so the horse finds the right answer when he does the right thing. The wrong answer is leave, but with purpose and a specific goal in mind. My guess is if you love on your horse first there's a pretty good chance the horse will want to stay with you instead of rip mindlessly around the round pen.

I abhor mindless lunging and round penning and far too many horses are ruined by inexperienced handlers who watched one of the "pros." What they did not see were the subtleties of this procedure that took the "pro" years to perfect. Give my approach a shot and let me know how it goes. Remember, your wishes and entire demeanor has to be very obvious for the horse to understand. If you are in the "gray zone" - not quite knowing what you want - how will the horse understand? Make your wishes abundantly clear.

Safe Riding,

Frank R. Bell