

THE PROBLEM: I enter the show pen and walk my horse to center stopping in the middle. Immediately they begins to “dance” around.



Photo Credit: Waltenberry

TRAINER: LORIS EPIS

In my opinion, there are three major things that cause issues at center:

- **ANXIETY** is usually seen in young or green horses, who do not have a lot of experience in the show pen. They may have “alone” issues which causes a failure to pay attention to their riders. This is a simple fix but the key is to not get frustrated or upset with this young/green horse and end up with a Rider Created Issues. Instead expose the horse to the show pen and be patient and let them to gain confidence.
- **ANTICIPATION**, you will see more in seasoned show horses, who are trying to do their job and anticipate the next manoeuver rather than waiting for the rider to give instructions. Anticipation can be corrected by schooling your horse in the show pen as well as breaking yourself of the repetitive exercises you do at home. For example; if you always stop in the middle of your circles and spin, your horse will learn that the middle of the pen means spin and anticipate this manoeuver. Therefore, try to practice spinning in other areas of the arena and keep spinning in the middle to a minimum.
- **RIDER CREATED ISSUES** the subtle and not so subtle cues, movements, reactions and practices riders do at home that create center issues. The three most common Rider Created Issues I see are when a rider repositioning their horse while

practicing spins; when a rider sends multiple cues to their horse during the maneuvers; and when a rider constantly fixes or picks at the horse’s headset. Rider Created Issues are more complicated to fix as it requires the Rider to analyze their cues, movements, reactions, etc. This is where a coach comes in handy, as an experienced set of eyes can be invaluable.

Some tips for the three rider issues mentioned above are:

- Unless you are working on spin shut-offs try not to reposition your horse (move your horse to face another direction) after a spin. If your horse has spun and stopped where you asked, then do not reposition them.
- Understand your cues and be aware of your hand movements while riding.
- Keeping your hands quiet and still when standing can greatly help you both during practice and at the show.

HOMEWORK EXERCISE:

Pick a spot in your arena (it should not be in the middle because of anticipation, anywhere away from the wall is good). Put your hand down and just sit there. If your horse moves to the right, spin them to the left. Let the horse take one or two steps before spinning. If your horse moves to the left, spin to the right. One or two spins is fine as we are working on standing not spinning. Stop and start again. The principle of this exercise is that every time the horse starts to anticipate the manoeuver you put them to work (spin) so that they will learn wait for your command.



Photo Credit: Laura Henderson