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Questions and Answers with Professional Barrel Racer **Sharon Camarillo**

What are some of the most common mistakes you see riders make? List and discuss as many as you would like.

Lack of fundamentals and horsemanship that needs improvement.

My entire program and competitive philosophy is based on traditional horsemanship and the importance of creating a strong foundation and responsive horse. If your new horse is broke and has a good foundation, then it's a matter of the horse learning a little of the rider's ways and the rider adapting a little to the horse's ways. Be patient. Odds are it will take a year for the horse and rider to gain confidence in each other.

If a horse demonstrates a lack of control or is rude in his manners, I say regardless of his age, that his fundamentals are weak. Start the process of education and discipline. I don't think it is an unreasonable request to be the driver when I am on a hard-running horse in a barrel race. I want the horse listening to me rather than just responding to the pattern.

I want to know that the horse is safe for me to ride, enters the arena without resistance, and is responsive in the run. I encourage riders young or old, experienced or novice, to purchase horses that build confidence and produce safe results.

Before you put a horse into barrel training what level of general riding training do you wish to start with? How broke is the horse?

I think the best thing you can do for your horse is to be sure that he has a great foundation before you introduce him to the barrel pattern.

Your young horse needs to be able to walk, trot and canter easily and maintain his rhythm in all gaits. The youngster needs to be able to lope circles and ride straight lines and lengthen and shorten his stride.

The work that you do on the basics will pay off in your barrel work. A happy horse that is willing to move freely forward at a variety of speeds, is balanced, and can maintain his balance when he has a direction change is then ready to be introduced to the barrel pattern.

Be patient. This process will take time. Remember to balance the youngster's arena time with riding outside of the arena, if possible.

What advice can you offer to barrel racers that struggle with their “mental toughness” or focus when it comes to competition? What do you do to “get your game face on”?

There is a direct relation between successful physical and mental training and consistent competition. Some champions have an innate understanding of the connection; others use sports psychology to enhance their understanding. Two excellent resources are: *In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life Through Mental Training*, by Terry Orlick, PhD, and *Where There Is a Will There Is a Way*, by James Will, PhD, which is available on www.sharoncamarillo.com

It remains the responsibility of the rider and trainers to make sure that the horse is conditioned, trained, given a healthy diet, and kept mentally focused. The horse and rider must perform as a team, but the ultimate responsibility rests on the riders focus and competitive plan for success.

Remember to keep the rules the same in competition as they are in the practice pen. Cue your horse the same way and remember to work as a team. Don't forget to incorporate fast runs at home so the rider and horse can learn how to handle speed away from the pressure of competition.

For riders just learning to barrel race, are there any general tips you can offer to help them improve as riders and barrel racers? Is there anything you wish you had known when you were starting out that you can share now?

Practice perfect for better performance. Remember, whatever minor or major problems you feel developing in your practice work will be magnified in your run. I believe you should practice perfect for better performance and take the time to correct developing problems, no matter how insignificant they seem in the practice pen. This philosophy helps keep the horse honest and helps develop muscle memory in the rider. Any stiffness in the horse's body should be addressed, and varying speed in all gaits should be incorporated in practice. Learning to practice with speed is ultimately important so that the horse learns to accept increased pressure that is required in competition. A rider has approximately five seconds to make a correction once a mistake is identified before the horse commits the response to memory and assumes it to be what the rider is asking for.

Perfection is the goal in practice. Remember to reward the slightest effort on behalf of the horse and “Rome was not built in a day.” Consistency in reward and discipline is essential in developing consistent performance.

What are some things you do to keep your horses content away from home and running at a consistent level?

It takes more than just pulling your horse out of the pasture and loading him in the trailer for you to do well at a competition. A healthy diet and exercise program is essential, so if you are ready for competition make sure your preparation devotes attention to conditioning and nutrition. Successful outcomes and injury-free runs are the result of healthy, conditioned, and properly nourished equine athletes.

Every horse has strengths and weaknesses. Once they have been identified, a plan needs to be implemented after each competition to do some retraining and the necessary corrections to prepare for the next competition.

What are the main things you look for in a barrel horse? This could include both conformation and personality traits.

Buying a horse can be a fun experience, but it takes a lot of work, time and experience to find the right one. Buying a barrel horse is an even more difficult job because we are looking for the special athlete that is able and willing to win.

When selecting for athletic conformation some rules of thumb are: the hind end should appear larger than the front end, the top line should be shorter than the underline, the cannon bones should be shorter than the forearm/gaskin, and the stifle should be wider than the hip.

Can you think of any other advice or tips you would like to contribute?

Success is a lifestyle. Before stepping in the stirrup, identify what it is you expect to achieve in each ride, be it relaxation, conditioning, training, or a tune-up. Learn to identify the mental and physical condition of your horse. Identify his strengths and weaknesses. Though each ride may not result in perfection, each ride is an opportunity to strengthen both your skills and your horse's skills. Learn to ride not as a passenger but as an active participant working toward a successful outcome.

Sharon Camarillo's acclaimed workshops, *Performance Horsemanship for Better Barrel Racing*, have influenced students in 42 states and five countries to enjoy the process of developing their equine partner, regardless of the discipline, to their personal potential.

Sharon is a multi-National Finals Rodeo qualifier, and one of only a few women to have been inducted into both The National Cowboy Hall of Fame and The National Cowgirl



Hall of Fame. As an international equine clinician and industry advocate Sharon's career has encompassed many facets of the equestrian world and western lifestyle.

Sharon received the "Top Hand Award" from the Western And English Manufacturers Association for her signature collection of saddles, tack and clothing. Sharon is an American Quarter Horse Association Professional Horseman.

Her ability to evaluate, inspire and motivate has made Sharon Camarillo's seminars, instructional books, and DVD's among the best sellers in the industry.

For additional information contact www.sharoncamarillo.com