



# Arena-Side Training Guide

## *Practical Drills for Competitive Shooting Horses*

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**National Shooting Horse Association**

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## Arena Side Training Guide Opening Lesson

**Release Point:** The **most important** factor in horse and rider communication is the release point. Horses do not learn from pressure itself – they learn from the release of pressure. Every correct response, even a very small one, must be clearly rewarded so the horse understands they found the right answer.

In training, always ask softly first and increase pressure only if necessary. The instant the horse responds correctly – even if it's just a slight shift – release completely. That timing is what builds understanding, confidence and reliability. Clear, consistent releases allow horses to respond faster and more accurately as speed increases, preventing tension and confusion before they show up in competition.



### The Zones of Gunbreaking

When beginning to shoot off your horse, it's necessary to recognize their comfort zones. Reference the graphic for the direction the rider should be holding and discharging the outstretched firearm.

*Note: A successful shooting horse needs to know not to stop or slow down every time they pass a balloon or hear a shot, require forward movement at all times during training!*



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## 1 Gun School Checklist

### Basic Training Requirements for a Successful Shooting Horse

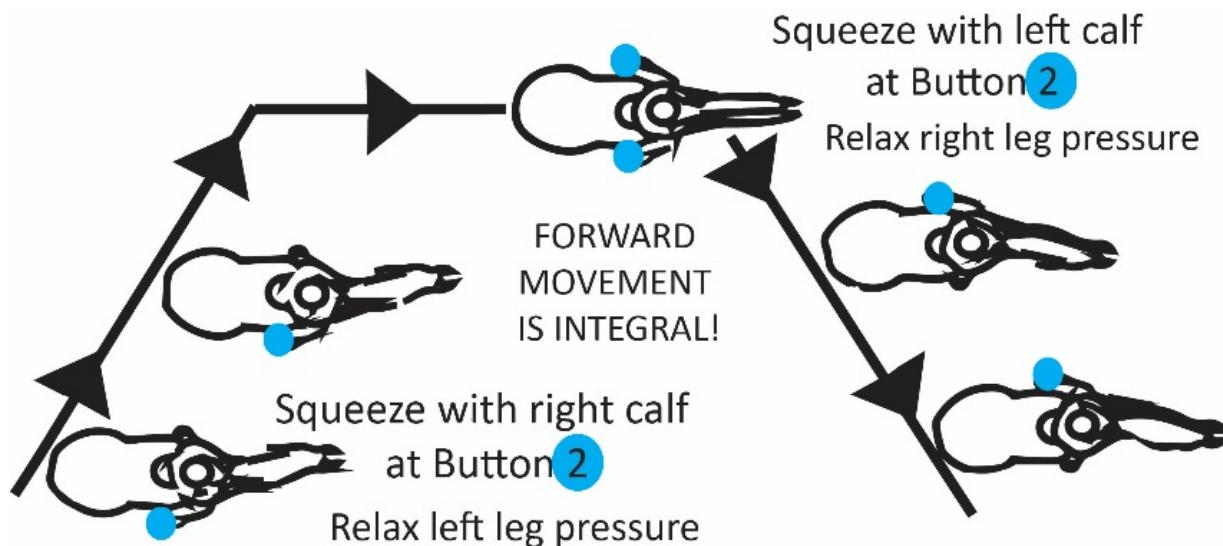
*Preparation checklist confirming that horse and rider have established the rapport and good basic communication necessary to begin the shooting horse discipline.*

- Leads, ties, trailers quietly and allows all four feet to be picked up.
- Stands quietly for saddling, bridling and mounting.
- Yields laterally and vertically, both on the ground and under saddle.
- Carries rider in both directions at all gaits with smooth transitions.
- Has at least a beginner's understanding of how to neck rein and yield to leg pressure.
- Emotionally able to control flight response and remain focused in new surroundings.



## 1-Gun Basics - Leg Yields

Coupled with neck reining, teaching your horse to yield to leg pressure is **the** most important factor of a successful shooting horse. Performed at the trot, two hands on the reins, light contact & direct reining. If no response to squeeze, bump lightly with heel.



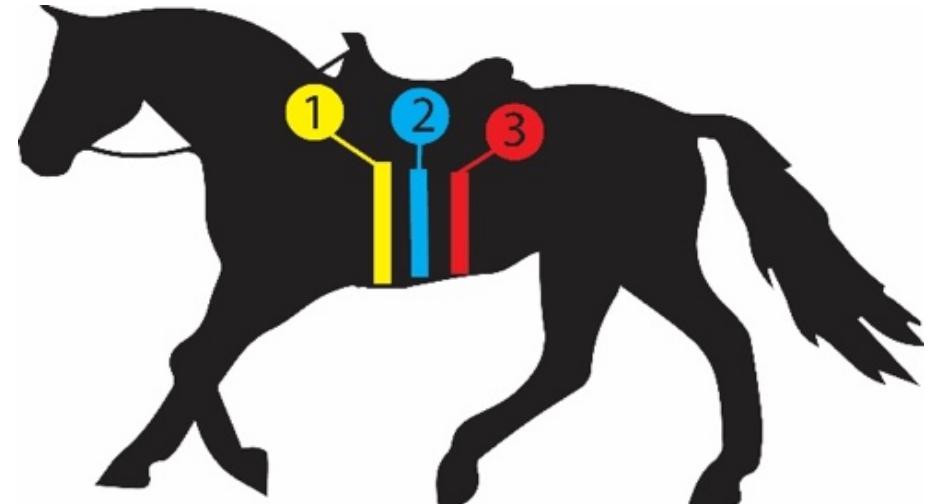


## 1-Gun Basics - Leg Position

Leg cues are very necessary communication tools for successful horsemanship.

The three leg positions are commonly referred to as buttons.

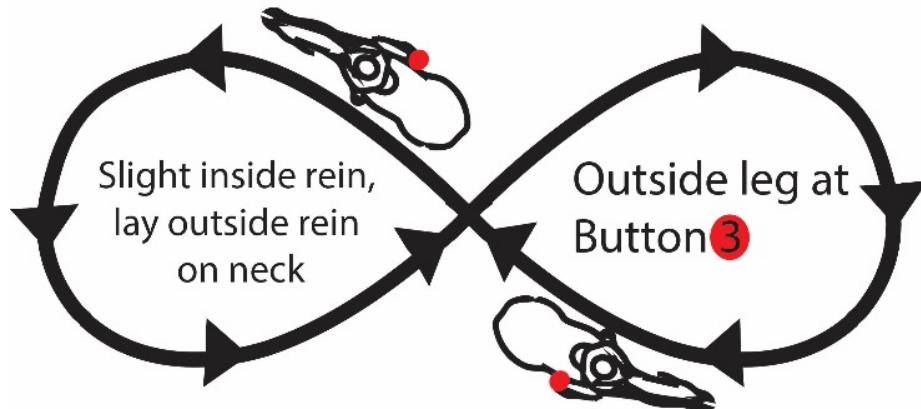
- Button 1 – At the girth - Controls the horse's fore and shoulder
- Button 2 – Slightly behind the girth - Controls the horse's middle for lateral movements
- Button 3 – Behind the rib cage - Controls the horse's hip and hindquarters





## 1-Gun Basics - Neck Reining

Neck reining is absolutely essential to the shooting horse discipline. Practice the simple figure eight drill to teach your horse this important skill. Start at a walk, advance through the trot and lope using BOTH hands with light contact.



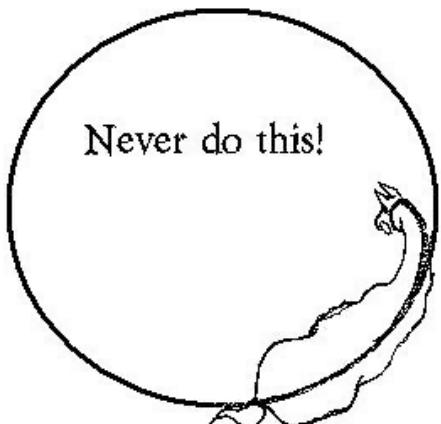
***Remember to incorporate your leg aids!***



## 1 Gun Basics - Circles

Correct circles are important to **efficient** shooting horse patterns. A horse that executes ***correct circles of varying sizes and at different gaits*** is a responsive partner with the basic skills necessary to enjoy the shooting horse discipline! Use both hands direct reining.

**Don't ride circles as a passenger, you must utilize both legs and hands properly to produce a perfect circle.**



Horse's head and neck  
out of alignment

Your inside leg should be at Button 2, outside leg at Button 2 or 3 (depending on your horse) with enough pressure to keep the haunches on the track of the circle.

*If you can see more than a third of your horse's inside eye, he's over-bent!*

***Your inside rein and leg produces a slight bend in the horse's neck and body, and your outside rein and leg balance and limit the degree of that bend!***



## 2-Gun School Checklist

### Advanced Training Requirements for a Successful Shooting Horse

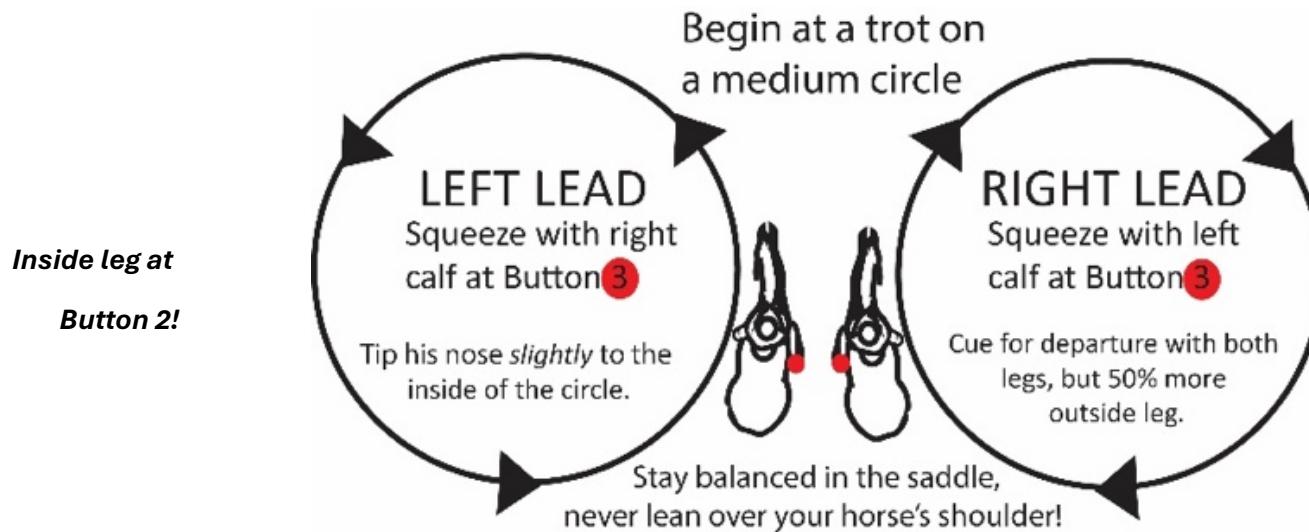
*Preparation checklist confirming that horse and rider have established the higher level of trust & communication necessary to advance in the shooting horse discipline.*

- Holds course and maintains gait on a straight line and on a circle, in both directions.
- Stops smoothly when rider relaxes and sits deep in the saddle.
- Moves shoulder, hip and side-passes quickly and willingly in response to leg pressure.
- Yields laterally and vertically at all gaits.
- Picks up leads in both directions.
- Able to remain under control and focused at a higher rate of speed, with multiple direction changes.



## 2 Gun Basics - Correct Leads

It's imperative for clean, fast patterns to be able to identify your horse's lead, and cue him correctly when beginning each pattern. Use both hands.

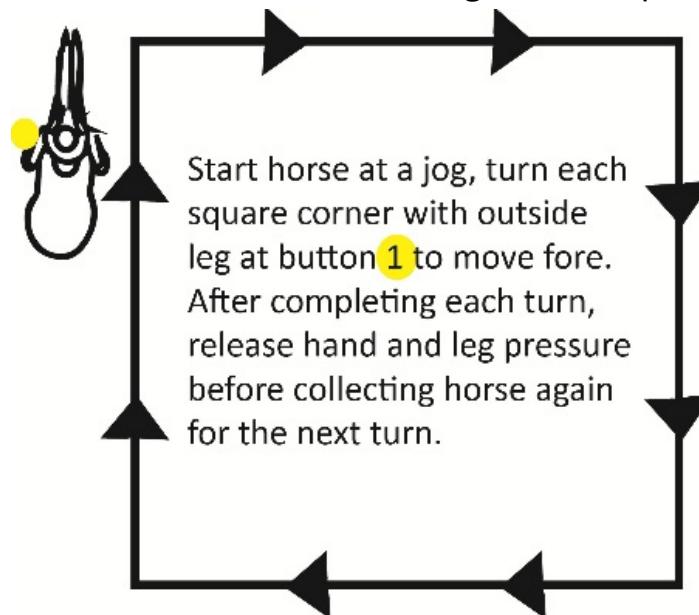


***Always ask for the correct lead when you are riding, even on the trail.  
Remember, you're either training or un-training your horse EVERY time you ride him!***



## 2 Gun Basics - Corner Drill

Work on the corner drill at varying speeds to test your horse's responsiveness and to identify communication barriers that may be occurring. Use a combination of neck and direct reining to accomplish this drill.

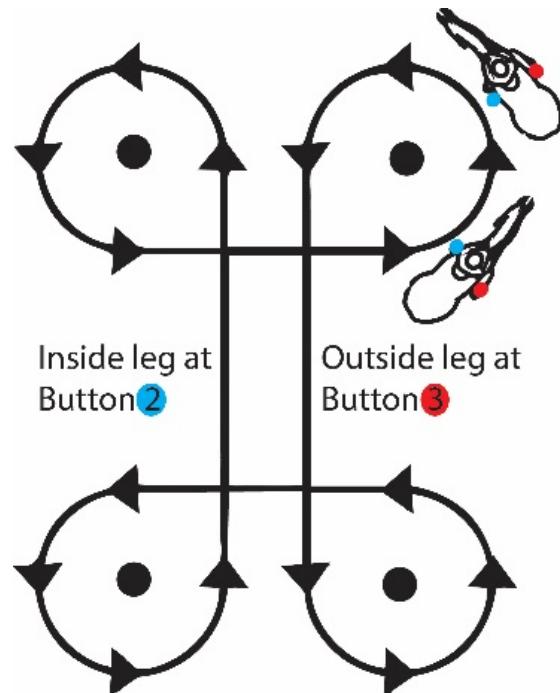


***Don't drag your horse around the corners, expect him to turn on a light rein!***



## 2 Gun Basics - Four Barrel Drill

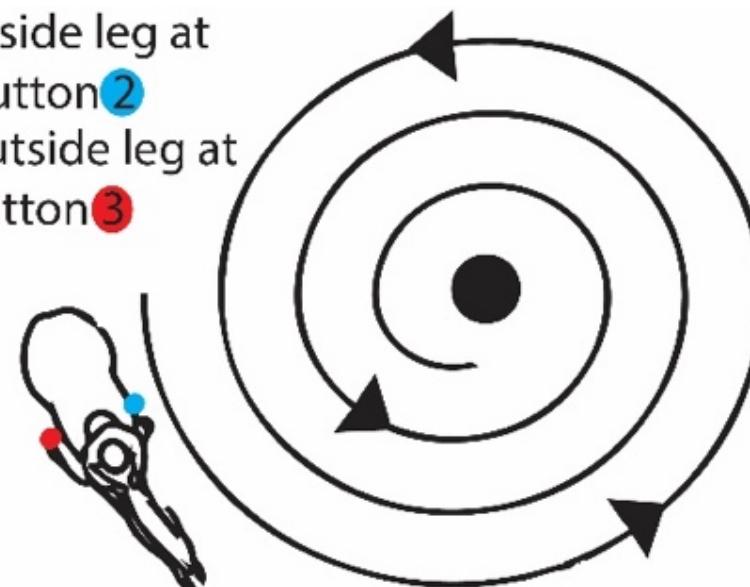
When you round each barrel, think “perfect circle” and make sure your horse is collected and holding his frame through each turn. Use both hands direct reining to accomplish this drill.





## 2 Gun Basics - Spiral Drill

Our favorite out of all the drills we utilize, the spiral drill helps both rider and horse with SO many things! Spiral in, and then back out around the barrel, thinking perfect circle, and maintaining the bend. Use both hands direct reining to accomplish this drill.





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