

## Pole Book Notes

These are Ken Smith's notes on the text of Wayne Sandberg's book, Nineteen Second Pole Bending, Third Edition.



This is the book that got me started in the serious pursuit of pole bending competition. When I began my quest for pole bending information, I discovered there was not a lot out there. I ordered this book and discovered it was filled with detailed information on horse and rider technique, rein and leg aids, training exercises for the horse, and advice to help the rider be successful. The author was the first to write a book on this specialty, and he has studied the subject thoroughly. The book has proved very helpful to me and I do recommend it.

I hope these comments help clarify some of the more challenging passages in the book. They are the result of having worked directly with the author, and then having applied the method successfully with several different horses. Use these notes in conjunction with the book.

**Horsemanship!** It's all about horsemanship. Pole bending is by far the most complex speed event, with ten lead changes and three turns all occurring within a heartbeat of each other. We call it **precision dressage at speed**. You should not be surprised to find that successful pole bending has as a prerequisite good horsemanship. The author addresses the crucial horsemanship and horse handling skills in the first portion of his book. Do not underestimate the importance of this material! At our clinics we find that many students have not learned to use the aids properly. They tend to use their hands together, as if they were one – both to the left, both to the right. The hands should work independently, as each has a job to do. And many students neglect to use their leg aids. The legs need to be able to ask the horse to position its body, and need to be applied differently on each side, depending on what we are asking of the horse. Strive to learn as much about horsemanship as you can. It's all about horsemanship!

The technique we advocate is **NOT** a sashay or sidepass, but rather it **IS** a zig-zag slalom. You ride from key spot to key spot, keeping the horse's head in, on the ideal track, the horse crossing the pole line at or near the mid-point between the poles, with the horse's body crossing the line following its nose. The widest part of the pattern is at the pole, at the key spot, where your knee is just past the pole. **THEN** you can change direction and start back, but **NOT** before.

Page 6. **Submission Training.** Horse enthusiasts today have access to a wealth of information that was just not available a few years ago. This is a part of what has come to be known as **natural horsemanship**, or seeing things from the horse's point of view. Tapes, clinics, and TV shows from several excellent clinicians are readily available to us all. Clinton Anderson and his material on gaining the respect of your horse is directly related to the subject of submission. Other excellent communicators are Chris Cox, John Lyons, Pat Parrelli, and Dennis Reis. Many of these clinicians trace their own education back to the methods of great horsemen such as Tom Dorrance and Ray Hunt.

Page 14. The **crooked** horse. Here are larger photos to illustrate the topic:



You can see in the 2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> photos that the horse has pushed its **shoulder** toward the pole. It is the rider's responsibility to keep the horse aligned. That is, to keep the body parts of the horse lined up on the ideal path we wish to take. The shape of the horse in the 2nd photo is the result of an escape from the rider's control in anticipation of the upcoming direction change. Now let's agree that the horse has to be physically capable and supple so as to be able to shape correctly on both sides.



This horse has, as can be seen in the later photos where he passes the pole correctly. What went wrong? This shouldering position is almost always the result of the horse receiving no direction from the rider. The horse needs to feel the rider supporting it with legs, seat, and hands. Here you can bet that the rider's legs were not being used to support the horse, and the hands are high and ineffective. The reins control what is in front of them. High hands rein the ears – low hands rein the shoulders. The horse has escaped by ducking under the control of the inside rein and it is too late for the rider to get into a position to support it.

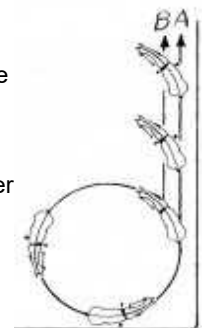
If a horse has this problem with this posture, it most often will be on only one of its sides. All horses are prone to some degree of crookedness, and this horse is typical in that his body more naturally assumes a flexion to the right. Although it appears as a shoulder's problem, the real issue is that one whole side of the horse is under-developed and contracted. That is why the lateral exercises explained later in the book are so important. They help stretch those contracted muscles. The more even you can get your horse on both sides, the less likely it will be to try to escape into crookedness.

Page 15. Here are some clear examples of the crooked horse problem:



You can see the horse's head is to the outside of the track that the horse is following – the ideal track through the pole bending course. The horse's head needs to stay on the track. When the head is out, then the horse is out of position. Why? Because **if the head is out, then the shoulder is in**. Look at the photos above and you can clearly see that the horse is leading with his shoulder, which creates a diving move toward the pole. Sometimes the head is out because the rider erroneously pulls it out, as in the 3<sup>rd</sup> photo, but this horse is clearly crooked to the left – the rider has just made things worse. By crooked to the left, we mean that this horse prefers to carry its head always to the left. This horse needs suppling to the right. We want the horse's whole backbone, not just his head and neck, curved slightly to the right when passing a pole on the right, and curved to the left when passing a pole on the left.

Page 16. **Rein positions.** You can prove to yourself what these rein positions do, and the significant effect of moving your hands just a few inches. Try them on your own horse. To really see them work, you must have the horse moving strongly forward, freely forward, in whatever gait you are working in. A trot will most often work best to experiment with the rein positions. With your hands in a position in front of the saddle and low, one in front of each of your shoulders, with a straight line from your elbow to the bit, you will be surprised how little you have to move them in order to control your horse.



Page 24. **Shoulder-In.** This description refers to "track A" and "track B", but the diagram is missing the A and B designations. You need to label them in your book. Track A is the track closest to the fence in the illustration, as indicated on the diagram here.

Page 29. **Lateral March.** On this page the author states that it teaches the horse to move off the inside aids – inside leg and inside rein. This is a critically important point. As the horse approaches a bending pole, they are to be **moving away** from the pole line, so that the widest part of the pattern is at each pole – the key spot where the rider's knee is just past the pole. The rider can encourage this movement if more room is needed by using the **inside aids**, as in lateral march, so that the horse is **sent out**, or held out. Note that this is distinctly different from being pulled out with an outside rein, which would cause the horse's head to be pulled to the outside.

Be careful not to use these aids too early. You should get the width in your pattern, the clearance to pass each pole, by getting a sufficient degree of direction change at the preceding pole. You want the horse to cross the pole line **at the mid-point** between poles with his hindquarters following his shoulders, not sideways. You want to encourage the horse to move its hindquarters out as it lands while passing a bending pole, so that part of the direction change is accomplished by the hindquarters. If you begin to apply the leg and rein at the preceding pole, then the hindquarters will not move out, and the horse will move laterally across the pole line, creating a very real risk of hitting a pole with the horse's hindquarters.

Page 44 – **Lost Stirrups.** In addition to the comments in the book, there is one more thing that can cause a lost stirrup. If your horse slips or stumbles, a stirrup can drop away from your foot. Decide for yourself if you need to use rubber bands to secure your feet. And be aware – in some associations rubber bands on the feet are illegal.

Page 59 – **Footfall.** The author says that footfall is the key to it all, but I'd like to qualify that. When you read about the footfall, remember that there are key spots to hit, and there is the two stride rhythm – 1,2, 1,2 through the pattern. Successful footfall includes both successful key spots and successful rhythm. But **key spots rule!** Here's the point: There will be times when the 1,2 rhythm will not get you all the way to the key spot. This could be caused by bad ground, a slip, or whatever. Regardless, your job is to make it to the next key spot. Horses and riders both learn the rhythm, and both are inclined to change direction after the 1,2 wherever they are in the pattern. You must learn to ask for the rhythm, ask for the stretch and the long strides, but insist on the key spots. **Don't count - Ride to the key spots!**

Page 65 – **The Lean.** Near the bottom of the page the author describes a procedure he labels as controversial that is called "lifting the shoulder". The infamous **dropped shoulder** problem occurs when the horse shifts its weight to the front end and dives into the turn in anticipation, or it attempts to **turn without flexion** and thrusts its inside shoulder forward and down, usually accompanied by carrying its head to the outside. In this position the horse loses its ability to support itself in front and its weight drops down and in. A horse in this position can easily stumble or lose its footing and fall. The point is that if you prepare for the turn and enter the turn with your horse in flexion (with the shoulder up and out) and maintain that flexion throughout the turn, the horse cannot drop a shoulder. Your concern should be to get and preserve the flexion, then you won't have to worry about lifting a shoulder.

The book has a few **type setting errors** injected by the printer, not the fault of the author. On the cover, the word 'reality' is misspelled.. On page 31, remove the hyphen at the end of the page so that it reads, "... the most important reins of pole bending and ...". On page 41, the page should end with "... shoulder-in and quarters-in."

And back to Page 4. **Video.** The video CD referenced here never materialized, but Ken Smith has created a **DVD Set of Pole Bending Technique**, which includes detailed explanations and video of the bending and turns of pole bending, and training exercises and horsemanship to help riders become successful competitors. It is a valuable collection of years worth of training and competition experience, assembled clearly and effectively. Complete information and pricing are available on the pole bending DVD page of our web site: <http://www.sunrisewest.com/dvds.html>

**We specialize in all aspects of pole bending, and we raise and train horses specifically for speed events. For more information on pole bending, including clinics, private lessons, DVDs, video lessons, on-line help, equipment recommendations, and exceptional horses, visit us at [www.sunrisewest.com](http://www.sunrisewest.com).**

**Ken and Pat Smith  
Sunrise West Quarter Horses, LLC  
Clarkston, Washington**