

RULES FOR THE EXERCISE PEN-----FROM THE OFFICE OF NCHA

A few simple rules of courtesy, sprinkled with a heavy dose of patience, can solve a lot of practice pen problems.

1. When an individual is trying to work his way from the center of the arena to the outer edge of the arena, lope to the inside of him rather than to the outside of him. By loping to the inside, you reduce the chance of the two of you running into one another, and also make it easier on the individual trying to maneuver his way out of the pen.

2. Lope on the outside circle, trot in the middle circle, walk on the inside circle. If the walkers stay together, it keeps the flow of loping moving more smoothly. By loping on the outside, you have more loping distance than loping on the inside of the circle. In addition, you have more flexibility to lope your horse since everyone is going somewhat at the same speed.

3. If you need to visit with someone, outside of the arena for a few minutes, but do not personally need to leave the arena, find a place to visit that is not in the direct flow of the lopers. Often a person visiting becomes engrossed in a conversation and forgets to be attentive to his horse. The horse then slowly maneuvers backward into the flow of lopers, causing an obstacle for the lopers to maneuver around. Or the horse may ease its way closer to other horses tied to the fence and instigate some trouble. Being aware of what your horse is doing at all times provides a safer environment for everyone in the exercise arena.

4. It's enticing to visit with other horsemen when you are walking your horse in the exercise arena. Should you wish to visit, however, make it just a twosome. When three or more horses walk side by side while their owners visit, they inhibit the movement of others in the arena who are there to exercise their horses. To visit, move to the center of the pen so that you are out of the flow of traffic, or better yet, get your horse exercised so you can enjoy a good visit elsewhere.

5. Refrain from stopping your horse abruptly while in the traffic flow. The person loping behind you may be unable to stop quickly enough and could run into the back of your horse. A collision between two horses can injure both riders and horses. Use the same safety rules when riding that you would use when driving a car. You wouldn't stop abruptly in the middle of a busy highway, so you shouldn't stop abruptly in the flow of loping horses. Lope to the outside of the circle before stopping your horse abruptly, or stop him only after you know you are not in someone else's way.

6. Be aware of others when you want to "change lanes" in the arena so that you don't do so directly in front of another horse. Remember the car theory and ride your horse just like you would drive your car. Wait until there is an opening before you change lanes in the arena, and you won't hinder the flow of loping horses or chance an accident.

7. While walking your horse in the arena, keep aware of him at all times. It's easy to get involved in the cutting going on at the other end of the pen and assume, since you're walking in a small circle, your horse, can't cause trouble. He can, however, inch his way too close to the horse in front of him and stick his nose to that horses' butt. You're the one that could get hurt in that situation.

8. The same thing can happen while you are standing in the arena and holding your horse. The horse may stick his nose out to sniff another horse, or even back up to that horse. In either case, it could start a kicking contest in which you, the horses or someone else could get easily hurt.

9. Be aware of others trying to prepare their horse for the show and move out of the way.

10. Leave plenty of room in the opening between the exercise area and the show area of the arena. Those who show next certainly don't need the stress of having difficulty getting from one end of the pen to the other. Just preparing to show has been stressful enough.

11. Be considerate of those sitting in the stands watching the show and do not stop your horse in front of them.

12. The bottom line is to be aware, stay alert and be considerate.