



Arizona Reining Horse  
Association Trainers  
Discussion

## “Tricks of the Trade”

### *Radical Rundowns*

By: Stephenie Bjorkman

Reiners love to ride and slide! Reining horses enjoy nothing more than to run at a gallop at full speed and

then screech to a sliding stop! In order to achieve a HUGE slide, your rundown must be precise. Crooked-bodied rundowns cause a not so pretty stop! If you want to WOW the judges then big stops are a must! This article was intended to help all of us non pro’s achieve a precise, straight rundown to a butt-in-the-ground big sliding stop. To answer all of our “rundown” questions, Top NRHA reining professionals Marcy Vermeer and Al Kunenzli will teach us of few of their “tricks of the trade”. It’s time to achieve a radical rundown!

#### **What is the biggest mistake you see people make in their rundowns?**

*Vermeer: “The biggest mistake I see in rundowns is what I call the burst. A lot of people go slow most of the way down the arena and then when they get close to where they want to stop they go from first gear to fourth within two strides. They also tend to get ahead of their horse and ride faster than their horse is going.”*

*Kunenzli: “The biggest mistake I see people make is that riders do not run straight when they run down the pen. It is important that riders turn the corner straight. Another mistake I see is on run in pattern. Riders are not be able to get down the pen with the proper speed. A lot of riders wait too long to build their speed and then they burst. It is important you build smoothly.”*

#### **Do you have any quick tips for starting your rundown correct?**

*Vermeer: “Sit back, look up and build speed just like you are driving a stick shift car. Gradually build from second gear to third gear to fourth gear and even fifth and sixth if you are that accomplished. The other thing I remind people is to only ride as hard as they can sit. Let me explain. If you kick so hard that your butt comes out of the saddle you have stopped riding. Same goes if you pull that hard. So concentrate on the fact that your butt and saddle remain as one.”*

*Kunenzli: “The biggest thing I tell my non pro’s to do, is that you need to lope off correctly. When you lope off, make sure your horses body is in the position the you want*

*to stop in. If you lope off incorrect it is difficult to fix after you get started. Your horse should lope off like you were loping on off in a circle.”*

**What is the most important thing someone can do to prepare for a correct rundown?**

*Vermeer: “Believe it or not, being able to guide your horse is very important on the rundowns. So make square corners on all of your corners and make sure your horse will run down straight and in*

*alignment. This means the shoulders are up and not tipped to one side or the other and that the hip is slightly to the inside (of whatever lead you are on) and that your horse goes straight forward when asking for speed. That is the time when all of the little problems become big problems . . . . when speed is added.”*



*Kuenzli: “The most important thing you can do is fence. At the very least your horse should be maintaining speed until you say whoa. The best way to fence is to build speed all the way to the fence. Some horses may not be able to build without running full out. If you have one of these horses you should run at “their” maximum speed, make sure they keep that speed all the way to the fence.”*

**What “tip” could you recommend for someone who rides a horse that is won’t run to it’s stop?**

*Vermeer: “A horse that won't run to its stop in most cases shouldn't be stopped very often. You need to trust that your horse will stop and work on the rundowns instead. I don't fence very often but if I have a horse that won't go when I kick or cluck or whatever the preferred cue is I get a little more aggressive but again, not so aggressive that I can't ride it, and if i get close to the fence and my horse is still running with the brakes on I will break the horse down while driving it up to its face so it doesn't get rewarded by getting to have a break even though it didn't run and then go to the other side and try it again. Your horse needs to know that you are serious, he HAS to run when you ask him to.*

*Kuenzli: “I like to cluck and squeeze my horse down the pen. If you have a horse that won’t run to its stop, at home you may need to spank them a little bit to go down the pen. If he will not run down the pen with your voice or legs, then I will spank one a little bit. It is important to cluck before you spank them.”*

**What “tip” could you recommend for someone who rides a horse who “bolts” in the rundown?**

*Vermeer: “Instead of stopping your horse when he bolts slowly pick your hand up and drive your horse into the bridle. He may slow down a little bit which is good. If he does slow down a little bit just wait on him till he can be driven into the bridle and gives. If he doesn't check a little bit when you go to drive him into the bridle and he is very heavy then I would stop him but in a soft manner. Don't jar him to a stop because then you are teaching him to stop poorly. You don't have to be in a hurry when you chastise your horse. Take your time.”*

*Kuenzli: “To me a horse that bolts is a problem that should never get started in the first place. It is one of the worst ones to fix. When I deal with horses like this I will round the corner and throw the rein at them, let them take the bait, then when they hit that burst, I hold him and slow down to a walk and do again. This problem often comes from the rider building speed at the wrong time. It is important to take the anxiety away from the horse. Don't make it into a big deal.”*

**What is the best way you can practice a rundown?**

*Vermeer: “I prefer to do rectangles at home and to fence at the shows. It is too hard to do rectangles at a show with so many people doing so many things in the warm up pen.”*

*Kuenzli: “The best way to practice is fencing. But another great exercise is mix it up. What I mean by this is, run down the pen, get to the fence, slow down, and go around to the other end. Then you might want to make big long ovals, go slow a few times, then run down the pen, fence once or twice. Change the routine.”*

**When teaching a horse to rundown how do you know your horse is ready to gain speed?**

*Vermeer: “If your horse can lope rectangles straight and soft and you can move his hip to the inside and keep his shoulders standing up it is time to add more speed. Just make sure you do it gradually. Don't decide that today's the day and go from loping nice slow rectangles to rectangles as fast as your horse can go. Go through the grades in school. A lot of people tend to get through the early grades easy and going slow but as the horse gets a little more broke they forget about middle school and part of high school and just want to graduate.”*

*Kuenzli: “When asking for speed on a young horse you must use the trial and error approach. If you ask for a little bit more, you should know right away if it is too much. If so, back off. You have to decide if the horse is afraid or just not comfortable. Let the horse find his way. A little bit more each day is always good.”*

**How often should you practice your rundown and when?**

*Vermeer: “I don't think you can practice any maneuver too often. Every horse learns to anticipate at some point and I prefer that mine learn to anticipate at home rather than in the show pen because I can fix it at home! And I don't have a set time to work on them. Sometimes I trot my horse around to warm him up and go right to rundowns. It can be a*

*little humbling this way but it gets your horse broke so you don't have to do so much preparation.”*

*Kuenzli: “I like to practice rundowns almost every day on the futurity bound horses. On older horses you can work on the rundown 4 or 5 times a week. As long as you aren't stopping every day, you can always practice the rundown.”*

**Do you recommend practicing rundowns at a show?**

*Vermeer: “That depends on the horse but most horses need to at least feel the ground before they go show. Not all do though. I didn't stop Onside Kick before I showed him very often, but I would lope rectangles on him.”*

*Kuenzli: “Absolutely, because before you show the horse needs to feel the ground where they are at. If you're going to go show you need to make sure he is running as good and comfortable as he would run if the horse was at home. Your horse should be relaxed before you show.”*

**Any tips for your “show pen” rundowns?**

*Vermeer: “Show pen rundowns can get tricky. I think most important is what we have already discussed. Keep your head up, keep your butt and the saddle as one and don't think about where you are going to stop just think about stopping when the rundown feels good. Of course you have to have an idea where your cones are but if you are thinking too much about them you will miss the stop. You almost need to be able to feel where they are so you don't have to look.”*

*Kuenzli: “My tip for the non pros especially is RUN LONG! For some reason everybody has a problem running down the pen. Use the whole pen to run.”*

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