

***Round Pen Values: “the value of round pens should never be overlooked”.*** They are very effective for uses in "Join Up", "General Training", "Behavioral Correction" and much more. Horses place immense importance on their ability to freely move their feet at will. To be able to escape danger, real or imagined, minor or major, they have evolved their ability to repeatedly run hundreds of yards, often from a dead stop, without much, if any, pragmatic thought and casually return to their starting point without becoming neurotic. We humans would surely become neurotic if we acted in such a manner. To horses, the movement simply expels any built up stress. Therefore, using round pens for training work and/or dealing with behavioral issues, allows them to better deal with stress via moving for as long as they need in order to believe that they are safe. By moving freely their stress doesn't build up to high and allows them to pay more attention to the trainer or behaviorist and improves learning greatly.

Having no corners to impede their progress, the round pens are extremely efficient. Their perspective is much different than ours and is therefore much to our advantage when we use a round pen for training, whether from the ground or from the saddle. As a horse feels free to run, we are able to keep them moving for as long and at whatever pace we deem necessary for training purposes. We are also able to “turn” them at will giving them a view that we can control their movement in a non confrontive manner. We are also more able to use "work" as the equivalent of a reprimand for not listening attentively, so long as they are not acting out of fear.

I have recently been asked to write some basic instructions on building temporary and permanent round pens. The following are some relatively simple, basic methods with a limited number of diameter sizes.

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### ***Temporary Round Pens***

**If a more permanent round pen is not allowed where you are,** Temporary round pens can be built from plastic poles and electric tape or wooden poles. **For a 40' diameter pen (as an example and average size)** : the circumference is (40 x 3.14 PI) or 125.6 feet, therefore, with a post every 7 feet you would need about 18 posts. To make them tall enough you would need (2 x 18) or 36 posts that are 4' tall and by taping the bottom 12” of one onto the top 12” of the other (overlapping and taped in two places) makes them 7 feet tall. Of course, if 6 or 7 foot tall plastic or wooden posts are available then only 18 posts would be needed. Then three strands of electric. tape (one about 12" from the top, one 12" from the ground and one in the middle)  $125.6 \times 3 = 377$  feet of tape total. The tape can be 1/2" width or greater and white or other color if preferred .A power supply is needed if the horse doesn't already respect electric fencing or at least until the horse learns to respect it, then it is generally no longer needed. You need

relatively flat ground with no holes or sharp rocks, etc. If you can get wooden poles, they are usually available in lengths up to 8' at most fencing suppliers. If sunk one foot into the ground they will be 7 foot height. You would need 3 plastic (screw-in) insulators on each post for the wire tape.

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### *Permanent Round Pens*

**A general guide for permanent round pens:** Round pens need to be built safely with sides/walls being built at least six to eight feet tall and if pre-fabricated mesh screen panels are used, allow no gaps (space) left between the top edges of where panels meet. This helps prevent a cannon bone or fetlock / pastern joint slipping into a gap. If a wire mesh panel is used, ***no greater than a 2 inch square design is desirable***, so that no small hoof can get caught. If rails or slats (wooden or plastic) are used then there should be no spaces larger than 2 inches between the horizontal or vertical slats or rails - as a foot could force through and they can become cast. Flat heavy plastic, wooden or metal panels can work if there are no gaps larger than 2 inches between the panels. Although not absolutely necessary, a very good ground surface would be a packed clay base with about 1.5 inches of sand on top. The exception to 2" gaps on slats, panels, is to go larger for horizontal rails. A good distance between rails would be 12". **Suggested minimum round pen diameter would be 30 to 40 feet.** Those diameters result in circumferences of 94' to 126' using 14 to 18 posts ( 7 feet between posts). An ever better size would be 60 feet diameter with a circumference of 189' requiring 27 posts at 7' feet spacing. This 60' size is better for larger horses.

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**A 75 to 100 foot round pen makes an even better space for rider training. A rubber or non-splinter type wooden skirt around the bottom (about 18" high) is also a good idea to protect the horse's feet and retain sand or any other loose surface mix, if used.**

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### *A Closing Reminder:*

If you don't want your horse to become numb to your foot cues, it is important not to nag them with the foot cues and once they have given a response or at least given an honest attempt to comply with a cue release your pressure. This point also applies to cues given from the ground as well.

*Ya'll ride safely and Aware.*

*Lewis aka Blackie Blackburn,*

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