

Paso Fino Pole Bending In's and Out's

By Lynn Gallup 2008

Pole bending is a timed event seen at gaming shows, college and high school rodeo, and various local equestrian events. A rider and Paso Fino horse "largos" past a timer line to the end of a line of six poles, then turn the end pole and weave down through the pattern, again turn at the last pole and weave back up, then "largo" back home across the timer line. The fastest time will win. The horse has to not only have speed, but also the agility to switch directions between every pole at a "largo".

Equipment and Pattern: The pole pattern consists of plastic poles that are set 21 feet apart and the timer line 21 feet from the first pole. The poles are 6 feet high and the base is no more than 14 feet in diameter. Fast pole bending times are run in 20-21 seconds.

Paso Fino Gait: Paso Largo. May break gait at far end turn for a fast change of direction.

Time Penalties (5 seconds per incidence): *Knocking a pole over. *Breaking Paso Fino gait or cantering.

Instructions:

- 1: Know that pole bending is a timed event that shows speed and agility.
- 2: Set up six poles in a straight line at the far end of the arena, approximately 21 feet apart and 20 feet from the end of the arena.
- 3: Start your horse at the opposite end of your destination and run parallel to the poles to the end.
- 4: Turn your horse around the last pole (you're now heading toward the start line) and weave your horse in and out of the poles.
- 5: Circle the last pole and (now heading away from the starting line) continue to weave back through the poles.
- 6: Complete the pole weaving and run parallel with the poles (instead of weaving) back to the finish line.
- 7: Win with the fastest time.

Training Tips:

1. Whenever you are about to turn on a pole, do not forget to sit deep in your seat and turn/face the direction of the turn.
2. Use leg cues as well as rein direction. It helps if your horse can neck rein also.
3. Practice with cones at home set where the pole would be placed.
4. Practice largoing your horse on a straight course or line for the down and back straight way of travel (no cantering).
5. Hold your horse steady with the reins at the fastest speed it is capable of without breaking gait while largoing.
6. Practice doing "snake" serpentines at a largo or rather move the way a snake travels in an elongated "S" pattern.
7. Make your own pole bending set-up: 6' PVC pipe put deep in a 5 gallon bucket of sand works well.
8. Have someone time your ride with a stopwatch when your practice to know your best time to beat.
9. Know where the marker is for the start and finish time.
10. Start largoing before you go across the start of the timer and keep going until "TIME" is called at the end of the run.
11. Don't turn too wide, because extra seconds make your time longer, while turning too tight knocks the pole down which adds penalty time points.
12. Practice ahead of time on the horse you will ride and also in the clothes you will ride in the class.
13. Wear an approved safety equestrian helmet as speed is involved.
14. Have fun!

