

This issue deals with a Frequently Asked Question one of you submitted through the website.

FAQ: My horse is very respectful on the ground and in the saddle with the exception of canter departs in the ring. On the trail he's fine, but to ask in the ring he usually launches into it and there is a good chance he will be on the wrong lead. This is the only issue I've had that I deem serious in nature, as he can really take off! He has bolted to one side in the past and has dumped me a couple of times, so I am a little leery now. Any help would be great! Thank you. Lisa

Answer: It is unclear whether you are alone on the trail, leading the trail ride and asking your horse to canter, or if you are just following other horses and your horse canters when the other horses do. In any event, if the horse is making the decision as to when to actually strike off in the canter, then the horse is in control, not you. This could result in the horse having a difference of opinion when you ask for a canter in the ring if he doesn't want to canter.

Trail riding is generally more relaxed as you're out to enjoy nature with your horse. If it's a group ride, it's usually in a single file situation and one horse/rider combo generally does what the one in front of them does. I always feel more relaxed on the trail and don't have to do much but ask my horse to go a bit more forward at the trot and he will break into a quiet canter.

Ring riding is usually more focused on the training aspects and therefore our requests become more specific with less choices offered. Perhaps you're asking for the canter depart in the ring with too much force; i.e., too much leg suddenly and without preparing the horse.

Here are some other possibilities:

- Does your horse understand the cues for the canter depart?
- Are you giving the cues in a consistent way whether out on the trail or in the ring?
- Does your horse have a preference for one canter lead (right vs. left)?

Perhaps he has a physical problem cantering in one direction and doesn't want to take that lead. Next time you're on the trail, note whether he canters on just one lead or on both.

So the take home message here is:

- Make sure your horse is physically able to canter on either lead. ***
- Make sure YOU (not the horse) are making the decision to start cantering both on the trail and in the ring. ***
- Make sure you are correctly giving the cues for a canter depart. ***

I hope this gives you some ideas to consider and try.