

Under She Goes
By Jim and Barbara German

This article is responding to a series of questions regarding the lady's turn under the man's arm in rumba and cha. Several aspects are involved including the beginning and ending body position, the man's lead, and the following figure. Before coming to an answer, a brief review of history is necessary.

Forty years ago there were two different techniques for dancing the rumba and cha cha. The American "box" concept popularized by Betty White and Arthur Murray and the International "diamond" concept published by British Latin Champion, Walter Laird.

About fifteen years ago there was an increased interest in the US to complete internationally in Latin dancing. International dance teams were hired by US studios to demonstrate and teach the International standard. Today we have Dance Sport incorporating the International "diamond" concept with the open American variations. (Of note, this summer when we were taking instruction from the reigning American Rhythm Champions, Bob Powers and Julia Gorchakova, he stated that now little difference exists at the competition level between American and International. This brief history was necessary since the following answer is based on our "diamond" concept (forward, recover, and side).

First, a quick look at dance position. Today more dancers are being exposed to the concept that the woman is slightly to the man's right side and facing him. The arm hold is more open and we are seeing the incorporation of the pase doble arm hold to gain a more open look. For most Latin dances, the dance hold position is considered to be the lady's home position. The underarm turn, or the second measure of the Alemana, will start and end from this home position for the lady. To lead the underarm turn, the man will raise his left hand bring the lady's right hand up. The lady turns under the joined hands and return to her home position. Using Rumba and being a little more specific, let's look at the Alemana. This is a two-measure figure where the last step of the first measure is where the man begins to lead the underarm turn. At the beginning of the man's side step (step 3), he will begin to raise his left hand up, not out, taking the lady's right hand up just above her head. This action will signal the lady that a turn is being lead and she will increase the angle of her right foot more to the right to set herself up for the turn. The man keeps his hand there with his palm down to provide a pressure point for the lady to use as she turns. (Of course, the man has released the lady's hand and fingers.) On the second measure, the lady will execute the turn starting with her left foot and return to her home position in three steps or weight changes. As the lady begins to face the man on her return home, the man will lower his left hand to normal position.

In this example, the lady's underarm turn is completed with a more sideways movement rather than a circular movement. The lady initiates moving to the man's left side on step 3 of measure 1, continues moving in the same direction as she crosses left over right turning right face (step 4), continuing the right face (step 5), and returning to her home position on step 6. Many ladies incorporate a nice look to the turn by delaying their head turning action on step 4 and quickly completing their head turn to face the man on step 5. Many ladies are also brushing their right foot to the left foot before step 5. This really presents the figure as a linear (sideways) movement with quick head action in the turn. If the Alemana starts in fan position, the first measure would bring the lady to her home position with the man's left hand raised as before. Now the lady is ready to complete the second measure of the Alemana to end in her home position. When starting from fan position, the lady may not get the little extra preparation for the turn she achieved when starting from open facing position

If a Lariat follows the Alemana, the man would keep his left hand up and move it across his body to his right side. This is the lead for the lady to complete two measures of forward walks around the man. The lady will complete the Lariat by returning to her home position on step 6. The man may also extend his right hand to the lady's left side waist high at the end of the Alemana to assist the Lariat lead and provide balance for the lady if needed. For the man, it is important to remember to lead the turn and let the lady complete the turn. There is no additional requirement for the man to "assist" the lady by "stirring" her around.

Let's incorporate the Rope Spin as a follow to the Alemana. Some men have been seen to lead the Rope Spin in an interesting way that appears to avoid the stirring action that can happen on the lady's spiral. As the lady is entering step 6 of the Alemana, the ball of her foot will make contact with the floor first since her steps are ball/flat. At this time, the man will lower his left hand and lady's right hand down to approximately waist level and return immediately to the raised position. This action will lead the lady to spiral on the ball of her left foot one full rotation before lowering to whole foot and continuing the figure to her home dance position. (Leading the lady to spiral, in this manner, may take a little practice but it feels soooooo good it is worth the time and practice.)

See you on the dance floor.