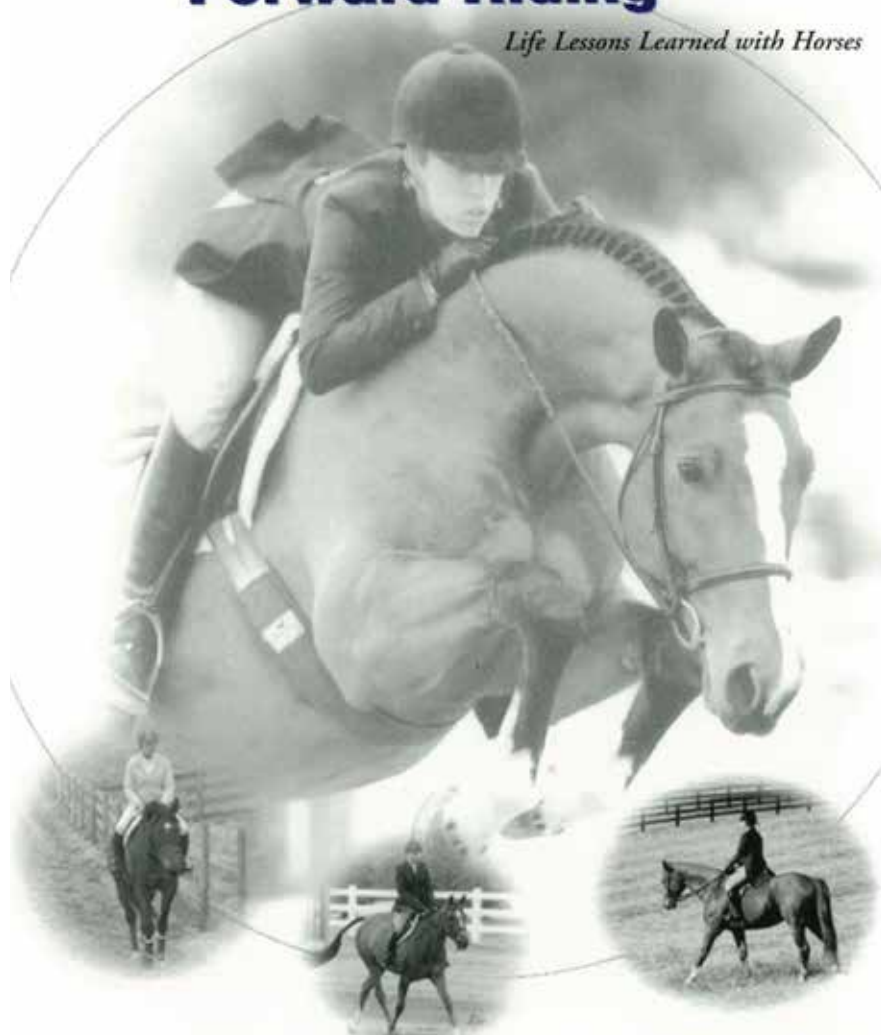


# American System of **Forward Riding**<sup>®</sup>

*Life Lessons Learned with Horses*



**Volume II**

**Shelby French and R. Scot Evans**

**Affiliated National Riding Commission**  
[www.anrc.org](http://www.anrc.org)

**Marion Lee, Executive Secretary**  
705 Longfellow Dr., NE  
Leesburg, VA 20176  
[marionhlee@worldnet.att.net](mailto:marionhlee@worldnet.att.net)

**Shelby French, Education Chair**  
PO Box 1065  
Sweet Briar, VA 24595  
[sfrench@sbc.edu](mailto:sfrench@sbc.edu)

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**Cover Photography:**  
Center jumping horse photo: ©Flying Horse Photography  
Center trotting horse bottom photo: ©Al Cook

**Riders**

Jason Berry	Lizzy Meyer
Alisa Cline-Berry	Lauren Wade
Corinne Davies	Jodie Weber
R. Scot Evans	Mimi Wroten

# Acknowledgments

**Very Special Thanks to:**

Kathy Paxon, whose energy, vision, and dedication to the horse's perspective have brought this whole project to a new level.

**Special Thanks to:**

Steven D. Price  
Beth Palmgren  
Paul D. Cronin  
Anne Kenan  
Peggy McElveen  
Jill Randles  
Sweet Briar College  
Anne Kursinski  
Autumn Farms

**Photography**  
Shelby French  
Sarah Latterner

**Videography**  
Steve Mason,  
Media Concepts

**Illustrations**  
Rebecca Bryant

**Graphic Design**  
bydesign, ltd.

**Copy Editing**  
Sally D. Mason

The overall goal of the ANRC is to promote a contemporary, systematic approach to riding, training, and teaching in the hunter/jumper discipline that is appropriate for horses and riders at various stages of learning. Emphasis is placed on developing a cooperative effort between horse and rider and ultimately achieving a quality performance.

## Our Mission

This DVD series is intended to guide riders through this system and give them a visual image of the performance they are working to achieve. Riders may use the series as a guide for "home schooling" and may submit videos to ANRC instructors for feedback and evaluation. Teachers may utilize the system as an instructional framework for teaching, and use portions of the DVD's to complement their lessons.



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# American System of **Forward Riding**<sup>®</sup>

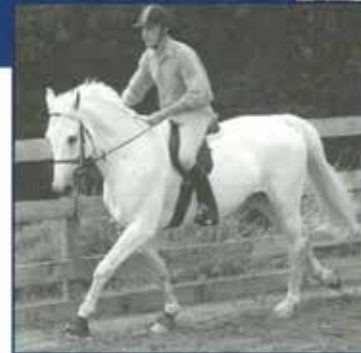
## Level Two and Three Workbook

As you completed the Level One exercises contained in the first workbook, you learned how to create a partnership and a system of communication with your horse by developing a position that makes it possible for the two of you to function as a unit. Your horse learned to accept your leadership and to understand and respond to your aids while remaining mentally and physically relaxed. This is called "stabilization," and it produces the mental calmness and sensitivity that your horse needs to advance to the more sophisticated work you are about to begin. Workbook One focused on how to give any horse a "good beginning,"<sup>i</sup> a foundation on which to build. As you begin your work in Level Two and progress to Level Three, you will concentrate on improving your horse's performance and refining the way you communicate with him by putting him "in front on your leg and toward the aids."

In building your horse's foundation, you shaped his behavior and developed a clearer understanding of the psychology of horses and how they learn. Horses are creatures of habit and have incredible memories. In Level One you developed a pattern of giving clear instructions and rewarding every effort your horse makes to respond correctly. Thus, you created good habits and memories, so that your horse trusts you and enjoys your time together because he understands your expectations. You learned that by valuing small steps in the right direction you can prevent confusing your horse and making him resistant. Your horse appreciates your thinking about what you ask him to do from his perspective.

*"Communication is two or more individuals sharing and understanding an idea."<sup>ii</sup>*

*"Feel gives you timing, and timing give you balance. Your body should synchronize or mesh with your horse's movements."<sup>iii</sup>*



Remember that you and your horse are athletes and that a softer and more precise performance requires both of you to fine-tune your body control. The exercises in this workbook will help you develop

your horse's body, but you must also work to improve your own balance, suppleness, and cardiovascular fitness. Check out the references in the Bibliography to find good resources for developing your athlete's body. Every movement you make while sitting on your horse has an effect on his balance and is likely to produce some type of reaction. Accomplished riders work on their positions throughout their careers. Practicing position is developing your technique.

The main measurement of success in "Forward Riding" is that your horse should understand what is being asked of him and should be happy in his work<sup>iv</sup>. If you are going to ride him, at the very least he should have a good day.<sup>v</sup>



The insights and concepts that you have gained in creating a partnership with your horse are lessons that transfer easily into other aspects of your life. Learning to value progress that happens one step at a time, rewarding all positive efforts, considering what you ask of someone else from his or her perspective, recognizing the connection between physical and mental fitness, and becoming a patient leader are all invaluable skills. What you take away from this experience can enhance your life and your relationships.

You've got your foundation skills, so let's start building on them. Remember this is more than just a "system of riding," it is Life Lessons Learned with Horses.

## A Formula for Success



Every good building starts as a picture in someone's mind. Riding starts there, too. Visualizing what you are trying to accomplish is an important tool. You must have control of your own mind, body, and emotions if you ever hope to be able to control your horse's<sup>vi</sup>. So begin building a relationship with horses in your head.

The first question you must answer is why you want to or already do own a horse. This is a very important and often unconsidered step to true enjoyment.

- Are you purchasing a horse for a professional to ride and show for you?
- Is your intention to improve your skills and become a successful competitor in your chosen discipline?
- Do you plan to enjoy your horse in a variety of activities and perhaps share him with a family member?
- Do you just love horses and want to learn more about them as you grow in your ability to communicate with and ride your mount effectively?

Teaching



De-Stressing



Rider preparation



**1. Picture your intention**  
*(create a mental picture)*

Your answers will have a tremendous impact on the type of horse you choose to own, the amount of time you will spend with him, your plans for achieving your goals, and the pleasure you will gain from your partnership with your horse. Failure to consider your primary intentions will lead to frustration and adversely affect your ability to accomplish your objective. So before you write the check or drive to the barn (if you already own a horse), be fair to both yourself and your horse and seriously think about your INTENTIONS. This must come first, and only then should you begin to consider the more specific aims that we have outlined below.

*Notes* Why do you own or want to own a horse?

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You now understand why you have a horse and what you hope to accomplish together. Let's proceed to your "Formula for Success." Use this five-point checklist to guide you in the development of your relationship with your horse, and reaching your riding goals will happen naturally .

**1. From a holistic perspective** *(Consider how to create the best quality relationship with your horse partner so both of you can reach your highest potential mentally, physically, and emotionally.)*

**Why are you riding today and what do you hope to accomplish?**

- Do you want to relieve the stress of your everyday life?
- Are you going to teach your horse something today? (The teaching process involves working with your horse towards a potential goal, such as a canter departure or smooth downward transitions. These are done in stages by building on the horse's "TRY." When you get the "TRY," reward your horse by stopping on that positive response. Don't drill. Come back and build on it another day.)
- Are you focusing on your horse's physical conditioning?
- Are you schooling for a specific event?

**What is the challenge you have set yourself and your horse?**

- If you are riding to de-stress, you may need to stretch and loosen your body and mind before approaching your horse.
- If it is a physical conditioning day, do you have a plan and/or a route in mind?
- If you are teaching your horse something new, do you have a plan for your warm-up and how you are going to present the new task?

*Read his body language  
as you work around him.*



### Leave your worries and your ego in the parking lot!

- No matter why you are riding or what you hope to accomplish, this is an absolute MUST!

### From an “in the moment” perspective *(The task at hand)*

**Clarity of intention:** “One pointedness” leads to successful communication.

### What do you want your horse to do?

- A specific movement?
- A fluid hunter course?
- Walk, trot, and canter confidently in a new environment?
- Jump through a difficult gymnastic?
- Gallop cross country?

Focus on the mental picture of your goal until the two of you have accomplished the task at hand. If you want your horse to keep his focus you must keep yours. You must hold in your mind whatever picture you are offering to your horse, and walk into it without distraction. Ride what is happening at the moment and stay in your picture. Do not let it go. Be totally flexible on *how* you create it, but hold your focus. This is one-pointedness. Small steps lead to the accomplishment of the task at hand, and there may be many SMALL steps before you reach the end result. Remember to keep building on the “try” and to reward the horse’s efforts.



*“Forward, round  
and accepting”.*

### 2. Connect to your horse.

*(This will help make it easier for him to follow your lead.)*

### Read his body language as you work around him.

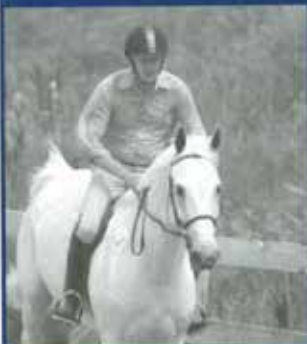
- How is he mentally: relaxed, attentive, confident, nervous?
- How is he physically: healthy, sound, well-conditioned?
- Is he connecting with you?
- What might your horse need before he is ready to share your intention?
  - Ground work
  - Lunging—Keep the lunging to a walk and trot until the horse is totally responsive to you. Remember, maintain the connection to the horse while lunging.
  - A long walk to stretch and limber

**Connect to his movement.** *(This will make it easier for your horse to follow your lead.)*

- Sink down and around your horse
  - Are your energy level and body position appropriate for your intention?
- Connect your legs to his hind legs.
- Follow his motion with suppleness and body control.
- Breathe in unity with your four legged partner.

### 3. Every intention is forward.

- Is your horse in front of your leg, forward, and accepting?
- Do you have your horse’s attention? Is he with you mentally?
- Is your horse reaching for the bit?



*Can an observer see a unity of mind and purpose between you and your horse?*

- Is your horse forward and round?
- Have you prepared your horse mentally and physically?
- Are you riding your horse from back to front?
- Every movement, even the halt and the back, has a "forward intention!"

#### **4. Aids clarify your intention.**

- Aids are cues or prompts to help your horse understand your intention, so be sure you listen for your horse's response and reward it.
- Are you providing confident, calm leadership?
- Be patient and give your horse time to read your intention.
- A non-disturbing, soft rider in unity with his motion is the horse's reward.
- Horses are individuals, so you need to adapt your aids to your horse's response.
- Is your horse trying to respond to your suggestions?
- Are you able to ride your horse from inside leg to outside rein using diagonal aids? (Remember the "X" page 13 Workbook One.)

#### **5. The end result is True Partnership.**

- Can an observer see a unity of mind and purpose between you and your horse?
- Does your connectedness create a sense of calmness in both of you?
- Are you so "in tune" with your horse that he can read your changes in focus and body energy level?
- Is your body balanced over your horse with functioning shock absorbers?
- Are you a team and can you help each other when needed?

Picture

Connect

Forward

Aids

=

**Partnership**

Keep the shortened version of these five concepts in your mind every time you are with your horse and you will be amazed at the results. When you feel a breakdown in your partnership, mentally run through the checklist to identify the reason things aren't working. This will help you know where to begin rebuilding. You may have lost your mental focus, but the problem might also be further down the chain. Perhaps you have your picture and are connected with your horse, but your body language is out of sync. Or you are focusing forward, but your hands are restricting your horse's energy and discouraging him from moving forward. Or perhaps everything is working until you consider the "aids" portion of your list and suddenly realize that your timing is off or that your horse needs you to explain things in a different way. Maybe it is just the simple fact that your body can't stay with the movement you have asked your horse to perform. Your "whole" will always suffer if one of the parts is weak and/or dysfunctional. Having a checklist will help you identify your weaknesses so that you can improve them and get back to building!

Which of the five steps in the formula for success do you feel confident about and which will you need to focus on and improve?

*Notes*

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## Developing Connection

Let's assume you have a clear mental picture of what you want to do in this ride or at a particular moment in your ride. How do you connect with your horse?

Read his body language as you work around him. Review Workbook One, pages 47-55. This will remind you how to assess your horse's mental outlook as you lead, groom, and prepare him for mounted work.

### Connect to his movement.

1. Sink down and around your horse. Don't forget that you will concentrate on this your entire riding career. Always go back to Workbook One when you need to review position work. Pages 3 through 24 offer many exercises to help you refine your ability to sink down and around your horse.
2. Are your energy level and body position appropriate for your intention?
  - Can your body absorb the concussion of your horse's movement in a non-disturbing fashion?
  - Have you relaxed your energy level if you are asking for a downward transition? Have you increased it for an upward transition?
  - Can you successfully decrease your energy, change your breathing, and allow your body to drop lightly and softly down and around your horse as you open your upper body and draw him back to you by asking and allowing him to sit on his hocks and raise his withers? (Remember the idea of using your upper body as a sail—see Workbook One, page 31.) Be sure you sink around your horse. Do not sit heavily on his back, splitting him in two so that he cannot raise his withers. This will disrupt his energy flow,

cause him to hollow his back, and prevent his staying connected from hind to front. Can you boldly and deliberately and with total concentration visualize the picture of what you want your horse to do and where you want his attention? Can you throw your energy out in front of you to help draw your horse forward into the picture?

3. Connect your legs to his hind legs. Ask the question: How are his feet moving?
4. Follow his motion with suppleness and body control. Are you in harmony enough to perform the exercises you executed on the lunge line?
5. Breathe and unite with your partner. Can you breathe in rhythm with your horse? Working through the lunging exercises on pages 13-17 in Workbook One will really help you develop this ability.

### Notes

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*A horse with a natural forward inclination*

*Good engagement of the hind leg at the trot*



## **Developing Forward** Here's that GO Again

A horse that moves forward freely has impulsion. Impulsion derives from the word impulse meaning an urge or inclination. The thesaurus suggests "momentum", "thrust", "drive" and "forward motion" as synonyms for impulsion. It follows then that it is much easier to get a horse with an urge to move forward in front of your leg and connected than one who doesn't have this natural inclination. Of course you don't want your horse so impulsive (impetuous, reckless, or hasty to react) that you cannot direct his energy.

The opposite of impulsion is inertia: sluggishness, disinterest, and apathy are not desirable traits in an equine partner. You want your horse to have an urge to forward motion that is balanced by his attentiveness to you. You want your "Go and Whoa" to be equal.<sup>vii</sup>

*Remember, there are different horses for different purposes. For example, a "kick along" quiet horse is much more suitable for beginning riders than a sensitive horse. A green rider and a green horse are not a good combination, and often such a horse and rider take steps backward.*

### **Put the horse in front of your leg.**

A horse that is in front of your leg is connected from hind to front. You can feel his hind feet under your seat bones. The hocks are bent and flexible and engaged under the horse's body and do not trail out behind the hind end. In creating a connected, stabilized horse, you must develop the motor—the hind end. This means you must first ride forward and work constantly on straightness. Remember the analogy we used in the first workbook about how wobbly and unsteady a bike's first pedal strokes are before you develop forward motion.



*Good engagement at the walk*



*Hocks that are not engaged*

### **Straightness is tied to forwardness.**

As the horse gets stronger (physically and mentally) you gradually focus his energy on an increasingly straighter path by limiting his boundaries (funneling his energy from back to front). As you close the limits, stay aware of your horse's mental state and connected to how your equine partner feels. To create quality, the horse must be relaxed. He must not sense that he is being put in a vise or be intimidated by your asking him to be a little bit straighter and more upright day by day. In time horses will look for this space themselves. As your horse learns to work through his body, the connection you are encouraging will begin to feel natural to him. He will learn to carry himself with your weight on his back just as athletically as he moves without you. (Your horse's tail carriage will let you know how relaxed he is. Watch for his tail to swing back and forth loosely in rhythm with his footfalls. His neck posture is also a good indicator. Is his neck long?)

What should this look like? Many people lean toward the popular "picture" of the horse flexed at the poll and crammed into the bridle. At this stage of riding, we strongly discourage the use of draw reins and gadgets. In the wrong hands, they are harmful and can create a horse that is "behind the bit". First and foremost, the "forward way" is the best way. In time, as the horse becomes straighter and can maintain his balance, he will naturally flex at the poll as he sits on his hocks, raises his withers, and softly places his head in hands he has learned to trust.





What are you looking for?

- A horse that is with you will have a relaxed neck carriage, he will give you his eyes when you are on the ground, and his ears will flick back and forth to you when you are riding.
- A horse that is wide-eyed, head in the air, neck stiff, tail up, and snorting is definitely not with you mentally. If you are already riding, these might be indicators that you should dismount, depending on your level of physical skill and mental calmness in riding out a storm. If you haven't already mounted, then you need to do some more work on the ground with your horse before getting on. Consider letting your horse graze for a moment, then start with walking ground work, followed by lunging or round pen work. Establish connection before you mount.

**2. Do you feel he has reserves of energy that are there for you to call on?**

- If you want an upward transition, will a suggestion get the response or will it take an order?

Your answer will tell you about your horse's mindset and about his level of respect for your leadership. "Remember, your horse will feel your state of being, and no matter how forgiving, he will enjoy it more if you're on the same frequency. The next minutes (after mounting) will, I hope, be at the walk. Learn to enjoy it, improve it, and learn from it. It is the beginning."<sup>x</sup>

Always ride forward with the picture of your inside leg to your outside rein creating a connection with your horse. Alternating leg aids allow you to shorten and lengthen the walk. You must know how your horse's feet are moving to apply the alternating leg aid in correct sequence to get the response you desire. Adjust the ounces you apply as you lengthen the stride. The feeling is that you are "swinging" your horse up in front of your leg. In the power walk you can feel the swing from side to side as each hind leg engages under your seat bones. Follow with your hips. Be sure not to allow your horse to fall forward onto his front end. This is easy to feel because you will no longer feel his hind feet up under you or his back rising. The horse will be "in parts", split at the withers, with his hind end trailing out rather than reaching energetically underneath him.

*Notes*

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