

## Refining the Aids



The western term "cue" is perhaps a more accurate term than aids, since when we use the aids, we are actually providing a cue, prompt, or signal to elicit a particular response from the horse. Ideally, the cue is merely a suggestion. If your horse doesn't respond to the suggestion, you may need to make it an order. Always suggest first and give your horse a moment to respond before prompting him again or giving him an order. Be sure to remember this as you work to refine your aids/cues to improve your communication with your horse. To aid means to assist. You want your horse to perceive your aids in this way.

Once your horse has learned to understand and respond to your leg aids, you must develop the consistent, soft connection with his mouth called "passive contact." Contact allows a clearer more precise communication than you can achieve when riding on loose reins. But as you take up contact, remember that your rein aids should assist, not inhibit, your horse's response to your legs. *For example:* When you achieve the response to the aid you are using to speak to the horse, soften the aid, support the response, and follow the motion forward. This is the "release" and reward to the horse. You are refining your tools at all times. Be patient and give your horse time to read your intention.

*"The difference between a green and a made horse is the time of response."<sup>xi</sup>*

- Don't hurry your horse; give him time to respond.
- A horse that is just learning something may need longer to respond.

- If you don't get a response, ask again. (Be sure that you have given your horse the correct aids for the response you want. For instance, are you saying please go forward but forgetting to soften your hands?) Check yourself first; then tell your horse what you want.

As you are developing your ability to ride on passive contact, you must develop your horse physically so that he has greater body control and can respond with greater athleticism. *The most important guideline in creating contact is feeling the push from the horse's hind end. It's the engine.* In this section you will be working on your ability to ride on contact. Your horse should be in a physical conditioning program that will enable him to progress with you.

Conditioning is the key to stabilization and soundness. Horses that are physically fit to do their jobs will stay sound in body, mind, and spirit for a lifetime. A physically conditioned horse has the **proper muscles** to do his job without strain; a mentally conditioned horse is **confident** that he can do the task at hand. A spiritually conditioned horse enjoys and even looks forward to the work he's asked to perform. Spiritual is about **attitude**. Work should be synonymous with play. Have you ever watched a horse choose to jump or "play with the cows" just for the fun of it? Have you ever witnessed an older horse that's being left at home beg to come with you as the trailer leaves for a trail ride or show? Thinking about your horse on all these levels will lead to the basic soundness upon which everything else depends.



*The Driving rein: use to develop following arms.*

*"Piano hands": this limits your ability to follow.*

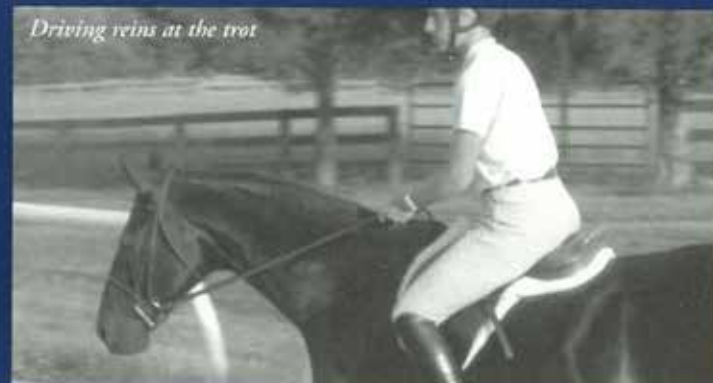


### **Developing Contact – Teaching your horse to reach for the bit!**

Passive contact is the first step. Your horse just accepts the connection to your quiet, steady hand. *The key to passive contact is to keep the reins and the bit STILL.* Learning to ride on passive contact allows you to use the reins effectively and non-abusively to shape your horse. To create a horse that is "on the aids" you must develop hands that your horse can trust. The exercises that follow will help you develop good, trustworthy hands assuming you have also done your homework and achieved a position that maintains unity with the horse's motion.

### **Using a Driving Rein**

The driving rein is an excellent tool to help you keep the bit still in the horse's mouth as you develop the soft connection of passive contact. "Still" does not mean "frozen," but that you are able not to disturb his mouth, to keep the reins quiet, and your arms following but not limiting the natural movement of the horse's head and neck. The reason driving reins work so well is that when you hold a driving rein, the position of your hand and forearm automatically keeps the hinge of your elbow in an open position, allowing your arms to follow the motion of the horse's head and neck easily. The concept of the following hand is that it moves out and down as an extension of the horse's head and neck. Your arms become extensions of the reins. Having your elbow hinge in an open position allows your arm to move with the horse without jarring your upper body. Try rotating your hands so that your knuckles are on top, as if you were playing the piano, and then move them forward and back and feel how that motion actually jars your shoulders. A properly working elbow is essential to the development of hands that function



*Driving reins at the trot*

independently of your seat and legs. All three are working parts of you as a whole, but each must be able to work separately because they have different jobs to accomplish.

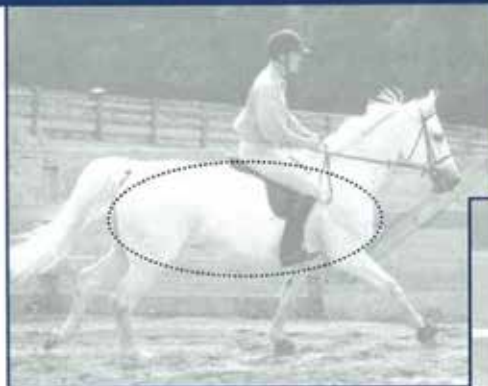
### **Exercise 1**

Begin with trot work using the driving rein. Since a horse at the trot has very little head and neck gesture, it is the easy for the rider to begin to develop a steady, even connection to the horse's mouth. Do transitions from ordinary trot rising to a slower trot sitting and back again. In the transitions focus on keeping your elbow soft, open, and in front of your ribcage to maintain a consistent, soft feel of your horse's mouth. Concentrate on how still you can keep the bit. The corners of the horse's mouth are the point of connection.

1. Do you tend to lose the connection (contact) as you return to the rising trot, or get caught behind your horse's forward motion for a few beats as he returns to the ordinary trot? Think about your hip angle to correct either of these faults.
2. Can you keep the bit still in his mouth and the reins quietly steady? Are you connected to the corners of his mouth?







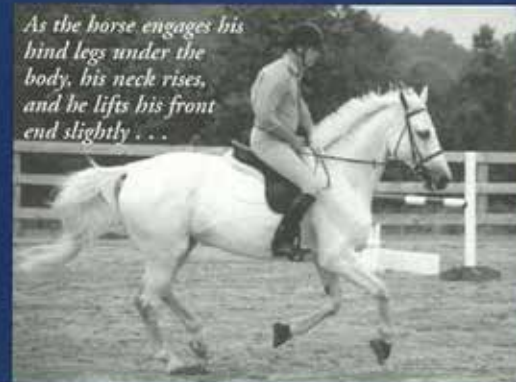
### Exercise 3

Follow the motion of the head and neck at the canter with a driving rein. The movement of the head and neck at the canter is somewhat like an ellipse. As the horse engages his hind legs under the body, his neck rises, and he lifts his front end slightly and then lowers it as his neck descends and stretches forward. The leading leg extends in preparation for the moment of suspension before the opposite hind leg reaches under his body to lift again. The longer and flatter the canter stride—in a gallop for instance—the more elliptical the shape. As a horse shortens his stride and becomes more collected, the shape of the movement becomes more like a circle. In learning to follow the canter gesture, think of making a very small version of its shape with your arms. This will help you to feel the horse strike off into the canter. This is the moment when most riders lose unity with the horse's motion and thus cannot follow the head and neck gesture.

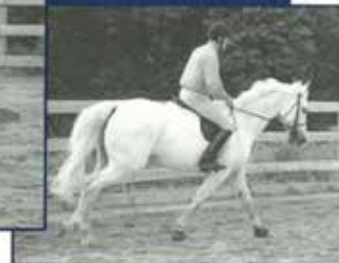
You don't want to actually make circles with your hands, but visualizing and feeling the circle of energy will help keep you in sync with the lift and forward motion of the horse's neck in the canter departure. You will feel the need to follow more forward when your horse is on a longer, flatter stride than when he is rounder and more collected.

Establishing consciousness of and synchronization with your horse's head and neck is extremely important, so take the time to develop this skill now. Later, when you apply a half-halt at the canter, you will be better able to synchronize it with your horse's motion. The time to apply a half-halt is when the horse's head is up. If you apply the aids when his head is down, you go against the motion. You should also soften and

*As the horse engages his hind legs under the body, his neck rises, and he lifts his front end slightly . . .*



*. . . and then lowers it as his neck descends and stretches forward.*



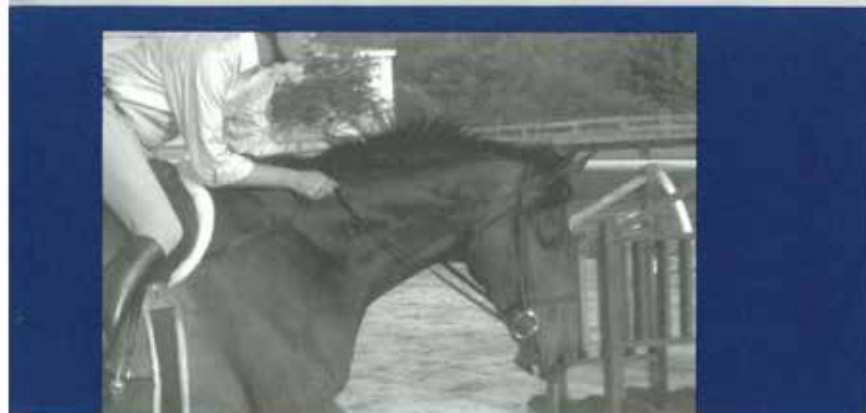
follow the natural forward movement of the head reaching out and down in the step after the half-halt. This allows the horse to raise his withers and bring his hind legs up under his body to allow the collection signaled for by the half-halt can happen.

The flying change of lead at the canter occurs naturally at the moment of suspension when your horse's head is raised. At this point in the stride, it is easy for him to switch hind feet because both are off the ground. If you have developed the ability to feel this moment of the canter stride, then it will be easy for you to master the correct timing to ask for the flying change of lead.

1. Can you feel the change in your horse's use of his head and neck as he begins the canter and are you able to follow it up, forward, out, and down? (It is easier to learn this by beginning the canter from the sitting trot. Only try walk-to-canter transitions after you are sure you can follow the trot-to-canter transition.)
2. Can you keep a steady, soft contact with the corners of the horse's mouth at the canter?
3. Are you following as the horse's neck and leading leg reach forward or are you falling back against his motion?



## Notes

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### Exercise 4

*Please note: you should not attempt this exercise until you have completed Level Two and are working at Level Three.* Begin jumping low combinations using a driving rein and working to maintain contact over the jump. The **top priority** is to not disturb your horse's mouth; hitting him in the mouth is the quickest way to lose his trust and will encourage him to freeze his neck to avoid having his mouth abused. Quality is not possible if this happens often. In using the driving rein your release should be slightly off the sides of the neck about two to four inches below the crest. Try to maintain a straight line from your elbow to the horse's mouth without using the neck for balance. **Never be too proud to take the mane if you begin to lose your balance.** In the beginning there may be a slight loop in the rein. As you advance and your position is secure, you will easily be able to follow the horse's neck movement through the air and "jump out of hand," maintaining contact with his mouth.

Evaluate your balance as you use the driving rein over low jumps.

1. Do you lose your balance forward, do you tend to fall back as the horse lands, or do you lose your balance to one side or the other? Check your position to correct these faults.
2. Are your angles at the hip, knee, and ankle loose and flexible? Do they open and close at will? Is your weight equally distributed in both stirrups?
3. Do you feel that you are synchronized with the horse's jumping effort?



4. Can you communicate more effectively with your horse as he lands because you have successfully retained a non-disturbing connection with his mouth as he jumps?

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### **Riding with a short bat between your hands**

This wonderful exercise helps you keep one hand on each side of your horse's neck. It also teaches you that your hands must work together to communicate effectively and clearly with your horse. *When you are holding a crop between your hands, it becomes perfectly clear that if you take an inch with the left hand, you must give an inch on the right. This is an excellent exercise for showing the benefits of—and practicing—keeping your hands at least as wide as your horse's shoulders.*

### **Exercise 1**

Do a large sweeping circle at the trot using a leading rein. Where does your outside hand need to move in order for you to apply an inside leading rein and not put your horse in a vise? Does your outside rein almost act as a bearing rein in this situation?

### **Exercise 2**

Use a direct rein and ride a corner. Be aware that you are really following your horse's shoulders with your upper body. It is imperative that your hands and shoulders mirror the position of the horse's shoulders if you want to be with, not against, the motion of your horse.

1. Do you feel that your outside hand must move forward as the inside hand moves slightly back? If so, you are following the motion of the horse's neck.
2. Can you maintain the contact on the outside rein as you ask your horse to bend around your inside leg? This is very



*Using a bridge.*



important, because the outside rein is the primary rein that supports your horse. The inside rein is merely directional. If we photographed you from above, would we see two straight lines from bit to elbow?

#### **Practice shortening the reins.**

It is important that you can keep the bit still and the contact constant and steady as you shorten the reins.

#### **Exercise 1**

Place both reins in one hand. The "bridge" is where the reins cross and where you hold them with one hand. Hold the bridge and move your free hand forward to shorten the rein. Then hold this new bridge and shorten the other rein. Be careful to maintain the same feel with the horse's mouth as you make these adjustments. Keep the bit still and steady so that your horse will trust your hands. Once the reins have been shortened, let go of the bridge. Remember, it's not about shimmying up the reins or grabbing at them. Do this slowly, and deliberately, inch-by-inch, so the reins end up the same length and the contact with the horse's mouth stays the same.

#### **Exercise 2**

A second way to shorten your reins is to move your thumbs forward simultaneously and deliberately, inch-by-inch. Be sure the reins remain still and maintain the same contact through the shortening. Do not change the feel, only the rein length. Your horse should not feel any change.



1. Does your horse's neck stay long and keep the normal up and down swing as you shorten the reins using the bridge? And when you are using the thumb method?
2. As you shorten the reins are you able to keep the same four ounces of pressure that you had on both reins before you began to change the length?
3. Is your horse aware or unaware of any change?

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### Developing Fitness – Stages of Conditioning

A physically fit horse has both long and short muscles. The long muscles are developed before the short muscles. This means that you deliberately use exercises that ask your horse to reach and stretch before you ask for collection, which involves short muscles. It is impossible for a horse to collect properly or naturally if he lacks the physical strength to raise his withers and engage his hindquarters with the weight of a rider on his back. He can do this only if his long muscles have been strengthened first. There are stages of training of which you should be aware as you begin to look at conditioning your horse.

#### Stage One

**Your horse is just starting or is coming back from total let-down.**

#### Lesson: In Front of the Leg

Your horse has no muscular fitness. At this stage you will teach voice commands through groundwork, round pen work, and lunge work. You will teach diagonal aids (the "X", Workbook One, page 13), first from the ground, using long lines, and then applying the same aids while mounted. Executing forehand turns on the ground and then mounted will help your equine partner understand a leg aid that asks for lateral movement. You may also introduce your horse to poles on the ground, leading in the round pen, on the lunge, and mounted. Just let the poles be in the way so they are no big deal.



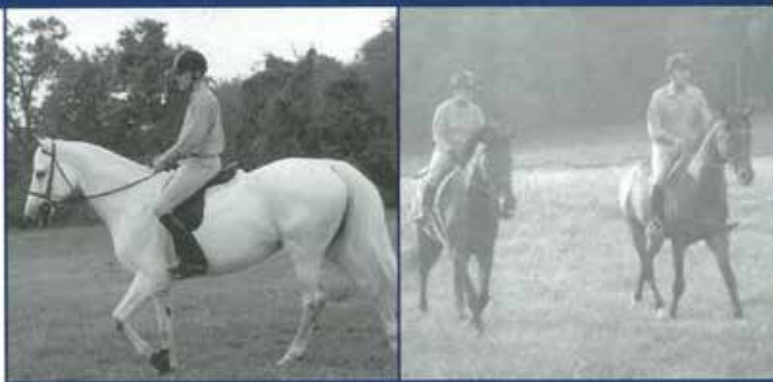
*The "X"*

If you are lunging, be sure you *walk with* your horse. Lunge only at the walk and trot at this stage, with many, many transitions. Watch for your horse to reach and stretch with his head and neck to the ground. You can introduce moving to the outside rein on the ground, using long lines. First, walk toward your horse's haunch and then forward toward his shoulder (forward and over) as your outside line softens. Your hand can even let out line to give him space to move into. When you mount, you will have developed a signal he can understand.

Once mounted your job is to consistently ask the horse to stay in front of your leg. This is the top priority for the first stage. No quality of movement is possible without your horse being in front of your leg. Stay aware of your position, how you are asking, and what your horse is saying back to you. Teach the signals now (the idea of the "X"), and be sure voice commands are a habit. You want to establish connection and control before the muscles are built. Ride wide, smooth turns. A horse with little muscular development most likely will have the tendency to fall in on the corners. Do not hold him up with your hand. Instead ride straight forward and allow him to move toward the outside rein. (Ride the "X".) Be sure you have allowed a place for him to move into by softening your outside leg.

*Avoid trouble* by only riding patterns that your horse can negotiate upright. This is the beginning of the stabilization process. Create confidence by doing everything slowly and deliberately.





- Walk, walk, and walk some more. If you cannot walk with your horse in front of your leg, you can not achieve a quality trot.
- Trotting work begins now. As long as your horse is in front of your leg allow him to reach and stretch his head and neck to the ground. If the horse reaches and stretches to the ground but sneaks out behind your leg, walk, reestablish "in front of the leg" and then ask for the trot again. Do this until your horse understands what you want. It does not matter how many times you have to repeat; this is **the** lesson in the first stage.
- At this stage, the horse will often raise his head when trotting simply because he is not strong enough to carry your weight. You need to be a balanced, considerate, non-interfering load. You are putting in hours to create muscles. Once you have established your connection at the trot and on the circle, rest for half of the circle and then ask again. This is an exercise that must be repeated to build strength and muscle tone. When you begin again, ask with the same aids, and once you have achieved putting the horse in front of the leg, remember to relax your aids and support the horse softly to reaffirm the reward.
- Alternate where you ride and what you do everyday so that you and your horse do not become bored. Lunge one day focusing on your connection while using voice commands at the walk and trot. Ride in a field or paddock another day, and on the next ride try a trail or do poles, round pen, and ground work. Groom and graze a fourth day.

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## Stage Two

### Preventing a tendency to run onto the front end

#### Lesson: "Sit on Hocks"

As your horse's hind end gets stronger, he may tend to fall forward onto his front end. If so, he needs to learn to "drop back" and redistribute his weight from his front to his hind end—in other words to "sit on his hocks." This is **the priority** for the second stage. The one quarter turn on the haunches off the outside leg will let you know that the horse is strong enough to stay on the outside rein. Let's review the aids for the one quarter turn on the haunches:

- Ride forward at the walk and think pause.
- As you feel your horse engage his hind end, soften your inside leg creating a space to move into.
- Use a slightly leading inside hand and a rhythmic urging outside leg. A direct outside rein may act as a bearing rein if necessary.
- If the horse is in front of your leg, he will cross his outside front leg over his inside front leg. Do not rush through the movement. Deliberately take one step at a time.
- As you establish the habit, just the thought of a haunch turn will make your horse sit on his hocks in order to perform the anticipated movement. This is the tool you want to develop at this stage of training.

Since the beginning you have been riding the "X". Your horse is now at least able to think about the beginning of a haunch turn. If he has gotten strong enough to maintain a slight natural bend around the



smooth, large, round turns, then it is time to introduce the halt thought on the outside rein. *(It is imperative that you have cleared a space for your horse to move into by softening your outside leg as he performs these large, sweeping turns.)* To create the "halt thought" on the outside rein, close your inside leg to a steady outside rein. Change your breathing and become a sail. Stop the following movement of the outside hand for a stride but be ready to catch up and balance the "X" with outside leg to inside hand. Practice this at the walk before trying it at the trot.

You are still mostly walking but adding more and more trotting and many, many transitions. Your horse is now able to reach and stretch to the ground at the walk and trot while not speeding up or having quick feet. His feet will move more slowly if you are patient. Slow feet are the key, because the quality of the gait depends on the engagement of the stride and its rhythm. Maintain the rhythm; do not hurry your horse forward. If your horse is on his hocks, this is what is important; even though it feels and is slow, that's ok. As your horse gets stronger, he will be able to carry more pace. Encouraging him to lift his back is what counts. The slow pace allows a weak horse time to learn to raise his back. *In front of your leg with his back up is Stage Two. This is the forward way of riding.* Again, you are putting in the miles of walking and trotting to create the desired level of physical fitness. You should also be trotting poles, piles of poles, and raised caveletti, singly and in long lines. Remember to alternate the exercises and where you ride. Some days go for a walk, on others walk and trot and do poles. The next day lunge at the walk and trot while focusing on the connection to your horse.



*Remember to alternate the exercises you do and where you ride. Some days go for a walk, on others walk and trot and do poles.*

Keep your lunge work to a minimum and look for the horse's response as you try to stay connected on the lunge circle.

Field work and riding up and down hills several times a week is another valuable tool for conditioning. Always consider your timeframe in relation to what you are doing. For example, a walk may last for up to an hour, but trot poles for only twenty minutes. It does not matter how long it takes. Your horse should be solid in stage one before moving to stage two, and then solid in stage two before progressing to stage three. If you hurry the process both you and your horse will become frustrated or anxious, and your horse might become lame if he is pushed beyond his point of conditioning.

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### **Stage Three**

**Once forward is a habit, straightness becomes the priority.**

#### **Lesson: Straightness**

When your horse is able to stay in front of your leg, on his hocks, and stretch, straightness becomes the priority. Protect the "X". Show him how to stay upright by consistently using the "X" to help him. If your horse bulges inside, ride inside leg forward toward your outside rein. If he pops his outside shoulder, ride outside leg to inside rein. You will learn to feel it coming and be there to stop it before it happens. The stronger and more upright your horse, the tighter the zone of straightness. As the limits of the zone are closed, a horse that is in front of your leg and on his hocks will begin to raise his withers and round his top line. His neck will be longer and longer, and he will not have to raise his head to carry your weight. Having achieved straightness, you can begin to add precision.

At this point your horse should be stronger and more responsive. Concentrate on being with him at every step, always helping straightness and weight distribution towards the hindquarters. You can direct his energy so he forms the proper habits and learns to ride to the aids. However, if you flop the reins, your horse may run onto his front end and become anxious. Until he is able to balance himself consistently on his hocks, he needs you to help him avoid loss of balance. Passive contact is the tool for this stage of training. Review the definition of Passive Contact (page 23) Remember: no floppy reins.

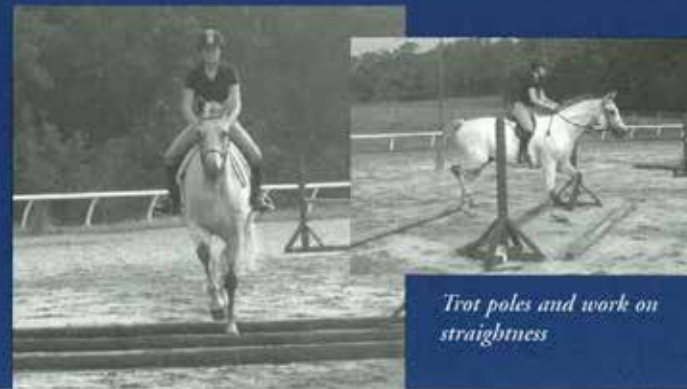




You are establishing habits that will be the base of your partnership. Just like dance partners, you are working on being in sync with each other.

Do many, many transitions, upwards and downwards, with fewer and fewer strides in between. Start on the lunge at the walk and trot to establish the exercise with your horse. You are still mostly walking and trotting, but you can start to ask for canter on the lunge, walking with your horse in wide circles. Then mount and ask for a canter departure from the sitting trot off a voice command. Be happy with whatever number of quality strides your horse is able to give at this stage, lunging or mounted. If he breaks, reestablish a good stabilized trot and ask again for the canter. If he gets in a hurry and runs on his front end, come back to the trot and reestablish a good stabilized pace before asking again. Whatever the scenario, do not push your horse to keep going in the canter. More than likely he is not yet physically strong enough to keep a balanced canter. Be a patient, considerate partner. It is easier to keep cantering than to do transitions. Your horse will figure this out on his own, if you give him time. No matter what, do not ride your horse up into your hands and carry him around to keep him going. That will undo all the good walk and trot work you have already accomplished.

As your horse becomes strong enough to work on straightness and maintain a stabilized canter:



*Trot poles and work on straightness*

- Trot lines of poles and work on protecting straightness. You can start to canter away after trotting the first pole and canter the second pole in the line.
- Trot a cross rail with 9 foot ground poles on both sides and canter away. Start on calisthenics. Gradually add another obstacle. Remove the ground pole on the backside and put a small vertical and later a small oxer 18 feet from the cross rail. These distances are starting points and guidelines. You want to make the horse comfortable, so vary the distances accordingly. Having a ground person with an educated eye is invaluable when working through gymnastic jumping exercises.
- Trot low single jumps with long straight approaches and landings. Think about a quality downward transition after you canter away. Then trot another jump. Work at the trot is good practice for both horse and rider. Transitions are a vital tool and help avoid creating horses that go on auto-pilot.
- You can start thinking about asking your horse to land on a particular lead simply by putting a few more ounces of weight on the stirrup in the direction you will be going with the thought of an outside leg. There is no hand involved.
- Trot in and canter out of lines of low jumps. Ride to your midpoint and then focus on riding out the line to make it work for your horse.



As the horse becomes stronger and able to keep going at the canter:

- Canter lines of poles (42, 54, 32, or 18 feet apart for a horse with a natural 12 foot stride. Adjust to your horse and keep him comfortable and confident while he is learning and building muscles. The challenges can come later. Confidence is crucial. Do simple changes to change directions.
- By now your horse is starting to think about where he is going next and may start landing on leads as you signal. The lead changes will begin to happen as your horse counter canters. You will be able to counter canter away from the jump and ask for the change (to switch hind feet) at the moment of suspension between canter strides.

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*A stabilized horse*



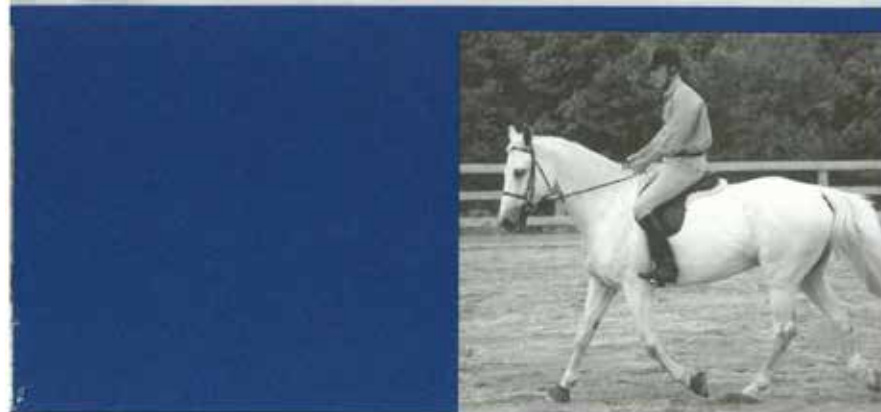
## **Stage 4**

**Your horse is stabilized.**

### **Lesson: Maintaining your Goal.**

Having reached your goal, you must now maintain the muscles your horse needs to stay underneath himself and use his hocks to facilitate engagement. You want the horse to stay straight on light aids. Once you have used the aids to put your horse in front of your leg, you can relax and let the movement happen and the fences come to you. There is no hurry. You have plenty of reserve power in the correct muscles you have helped your horse develop. Once a horse is fit, it takes about 6 weeks off to lose condition. If your horse has a significant period of time off, start over with walking, then add trot work, and when he is able to carry himself again, add the canter.

This is the base to which you can add whatever level of collection your horse is capable of, given his conformation. As you have developed the long muscles that position him in front of your leg, onto his hocks, and finally straight, the use of transitions have begun to strengthen his short muscles. With the formation of short muscles, your horse may begin to flex at the poll naturally. Practice exercises to develop both long and short muscles, and you will have a sane, sound, happy horse. Remember: a good test is to be able to drop the inside rein at any moment and have your horse continue to carry himself.

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### Exercises for Energy Shaping

Understanding impulsion taught you to maintain a passive contact with your horse's mouth and to have a horse physically fit for the challenges you want to undertake together. As you work through these exercises, focus on keeping a consistent passive contact with a following arm. Use the rein aids at the absolute minimum required to achieve the desired result. Keep your horse in front of your legs. Always ride your horse forward, over to the outside rein and as straight as possible. Ride the "X"

### Exercise 1

Ride two speeds of the trot: ordinary to slow and back to ordinary. All horses should learn to lengthen and shorten stride first in the trot.

*Transitions are the key to connection.*

At the ordinary trot rising, ride forward and over from your inside leg to your outside hand, creating a feeling of connection and riding to the aids. (Ride the "X" consistently.) Use your body language, your legs, and your energy to shorten and lengthen the trot. To shorten the stride, let your energy deplete, open your hip angle, and relax your legs. Sit gently in the saddle. Your horse must raise his withers to make the downward transition properly. If you cave in his back when you sit, a quality transition will not be possible. After you have ridden twenty to sixty quality strides at a shortened trot, increase your energy and think forward. Soften your hand and invite your horse to move forward. Mirroring his hind leg movement, use your independently operating urging legs to move him forward again into the ordinary trot rising.





*Lengthening uphill*



*Shortening downhill*

Be sure you lighten your seat as you soften your hand and send your energy and focus out in front of you. The horse will follow your intention. Remember: intention is a thought and a clear picture. Concentrate on your picture and what you are feeling.

### **Exercise 2**

Work on varied terrain to encourage your horse to lengthen uphill and shorten downhill. Start on a gentle slope and allow the terrain to teach him. Use your upper body and energy to alert your horse to changes in the terrain. Eventually he will learn to look ahead on his own. *Use the walk extensively before adding the trot, and you will achieve maximum benefits from conditioning and balancing.* Practice quality transitions and different speeds of walk and trot while keeping your steady communication with your horse.

### **Exercise 3**

Ride two speeds of the walk: the free walk on a long rein and the ordinary working walk on contact. A quality walk has FOUR beats, and when the horse is in front of your leg, the hind foot over tracks the print of the front foot. Start with a good free walk in which your horse stretches out into a relaxed loose rein, swings the hind leg under his body, oversteps, and moves forward with interest. When you achieve this walk, shorten your reins. Keep the bit still in your horse's mouth as you take up passive contact. Your arms **MUST** follow your horse's head and neck gesture even when you ride on a long rein and as you bridge your reins to take up the contact. If your arms do not allow the horse to move forward freely, you will never establish a trusting connection to his mouth. Your legs are there to support your forward intention. If your

horse misinterprets the passive following contact of the reins and begins to slow down, your legs can encourage him forward. What you actually want is for the horse to continue forward with the same degree of engagement. As you encourage him to swing his hind leg more forward, he should begin to lift his withers and back. As you make contact with his mouth, this swing forward will actually increase his connection from hind end to front end. This is a purposeful and active working walk with you following the horse's head and neck gesture at all times.

### *Notes*

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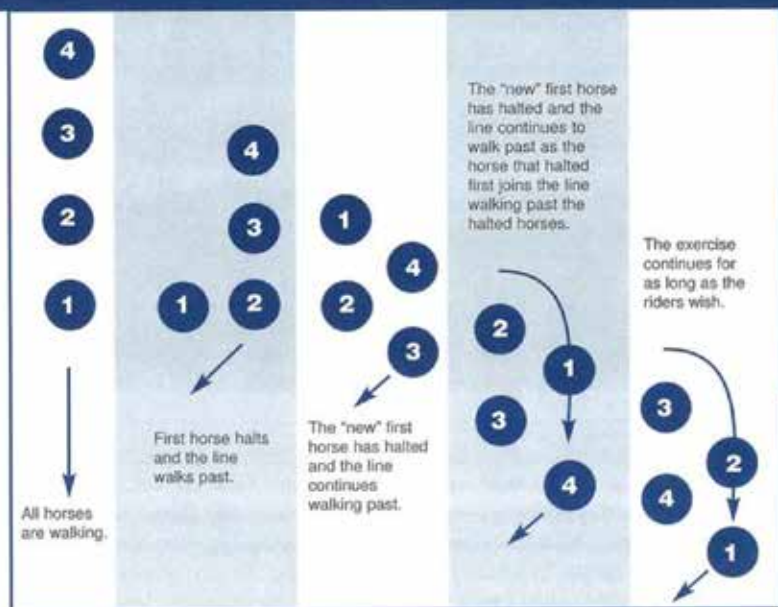
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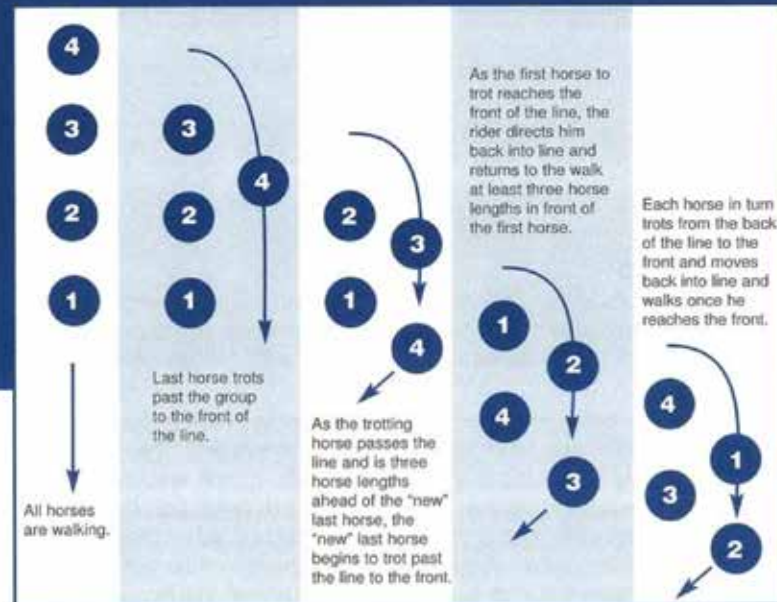
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#### Exercise 4

Hunter Exercises help you practice the skills of good group riding, so that you can enjoy a pleasant and safe experience when riding with others. If you plan to show your horse, these exercises will also help your horse become comfortable in that situation. In addition, you will learn spacing and planning skills that will allow you to show your horse to greatest advantage in an under saddle class. Carefully planned Hunter Exercises teach horses to be comfortable being passed and to maintain their pace and position within the group. If you have the opportunity to practice these exercises in a large, open field, you and your horse will learn to cope with the demands of changes in terrain as you also practice safe group riding.

Begin by making sure that each horse is comfortable being passed while he is standing still. The first horse in the line halts, and the line of horses walks past him. As the first horse passes the stopped horse, the passing horse becomes the leader of the line, moves over in front of the stopped horse and halts. The other riders continue on, and as each new "leader of the line" gets to the front, that rider and horse move back over to the line and halt. (See diagram.) As in all hunter exercises, the continuous flow allows each horse to practice the



exercises multiple times. The riders should stay two or three horses' lengths (18 to 27 feet) apart while they are moving or halted, and pass at least one horse's length (9 feet) to the side of the other horses. Once the horses seem comfortable being passed, the group moves forward at the walk. Now the last horse may trot to the front of the line, pull over into the line, and return to the walk. As the last horse moves two horses' lengths in front of the horse just ahead of it, that horse becomes the last horse in the line and begins to trot to the front. (See diagram.) The horses thus trot in small groups over short distances. Because they are trotting past the group, it will be much easier to slow them back to the walk when they are at the front of the line. They will not want to leave their friends. Watch the demonstration of this exercise on DVD III. When all the horses are comfortable at the walk and trot, the group can begin to trot as a line. Then, let the last horse canter to the front. Once he reaches the front, he comes back into line and returns to the trot. To vary the exercise have the first horse in the line canter to the back and return to the trot as he catches up with the horses at end of the line. These exercises are the initial building blocks for group riding experiences that are safe and fun. They also allow you to practice shaping your horse's energy with clear intentions and an organized plan in somewhat challenging circumstances.



## Exercise 5

Prompt transitions: walk to trot, walk to halt, walk to canter, canter to trot, etc. To quote Lendon Gray, "Make an absolute request and expect an absolute response and then follow up with a thank you by releasing the aid." Be deliberate with the pictures and tone you send your horse, stay consciously aware of what your horse is thinking. Stay tuned in and connected as you feel where your horse is and how much and how quickly he is able to give you a quality mental response. Do not sacrifice the quality of connection for a quick response. Can you become one with your horse and think and feel as he does at the moment? Remember that the quality of any transition will be destroyed if the rider's hands and legs are not in sync with the horse's movement.

"The duller the horse, the less constant leg pressure you should use; a hot horse must learn to be comfortable with your leg on."<sup>xii</sup> Your holding leg aid directs your horse's energy and shapes his path of travel. Two soft, steady holding legs help maintain this zone or chute for horses "with a lot of go." On an exuberant horse, it often works well not to pick up the trot until you are able to put your legs on at the walk and create a soft zone the horse stays in comfortably. Do lots of patterns—circles, half circles, serpentines using different speeds at the walk—until your horse connects and allows you to put your legs on. Then you'll have control of the engine.

A lazy horse requires that you educate him to respond promptly to the **urging leg** that keeps him up in front of your leg. The **holding leg** directs your path, but the urging leg is your gas pedal. If you don't feel you are getting a response to your leg aids and have let your legs become a vise around your horse's barrel, then you have created a problem. *Remember that the horse is always seeking the release of pressure. That release is the relaxation of the aids when the horse has achieved the response you want.* If you never release or at least "decrease" the pressure of your leg aids, the lazy horse will learn to ignore you in self-defense. As the warmblood breeds become increasingly popular in the hunter and jumper world,

riders must learn to communicate effectively with horses that are more "at ease" by nature than our thoroughbreds. Being conscious of each leg working separately and the ounces of pressure used by each leg is the key to controlling the engine—the hind end. Not having enough leg to keep the horse in up in front causes a great deal of trouble. "Enough leg" does NOT mean that your legs are strong and muscle-bound so they move your horse forward through brute strength. Rather "enough leg" means that you have taught your horse to respond to your urging leg by releasing pressure when you get a response. If you do not get a response, reinforce the leg aid *immediately*, and then release the pressure.

In quality transitions, your horse will not only respond promptly but will also remain straight. Alternate between the use of the holding and urging leg aids as required by your horse. A direct passive outside rein and an inside, slightly leading primary rein may help retain straightness, but the legs are always the primary aids.

## Notes

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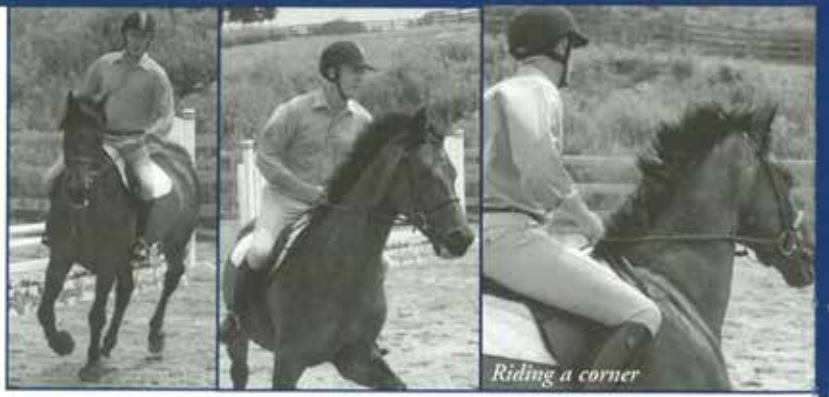
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### Exercise 6

Ride corners in your flatwork to develop straightness and the beginning concept of the half-halt. In riding a smooth corner, start tracking on the long side of the ring. Riding left inside leg to right outside rein with the horse in front of your leg. As you approach the corner prepare for the first part of the turn by opening your hip angle so that your horse follows your body language and backs up onto his hocks. If you need more room, move further out on the first part of the turn. Look around the turn with your eyes and shoulders, and your horse will follow your change in focus and body position. As your inside left shoulder comes back around the inside of the turn toward your horse's left hip, soften your outside leg and hand. This gives your horse a space to move into, so he can lengthen his neck to reach for your softened hand. This is the way you let the turn happen. The second part of the turn is the mid-point which lasts for only a few strides. The horse should feel straight and be in front of your leg with impulsion. The third part of the turn begins as you come out of the corner. Ride straight, square your shoulders, steady the outside rein, and catch your horse with the outside leg to the inside rein if needed for straightness. The third part of the corner directs and leads your horse onto the desired track. Choose a focal point, lead with your eyes, and direct with your leg to hand connection. This type of turn encourages the horse to maintain the pace, to "stay here."

Follow these three steps to all turns whether tight or wide. Even a small "try" from the horse and rider is a building block to the forward way of riding. Remember that the inside leg is at the girth shaping the turn, and the outside leg is slightly behind the girth, urging the horse out of the corner. This type of turn encourages the horse to maintain the desired pace.

### Exercise 7

Turns to an obstacle. In riding a turn to an obstacle, you initiate the turn just as you do in your flatwork. However, the third part of the turn will be slightly different. It will require a softened inside leg and a softened outside rein as the outside leg takes over and sends the horse to the inside rein, as in a haunch turn. Once again, the aids of a haunch turn while trotting or cantering are:

1. Ride forward.
2. As you feel your horse engage his hind end, soften your inside leg, and create a space he can move into.
3. Use a slightly leading inside hand and a rhythmic urging outside leg. A direct outside rein may act as a bearing rein if necessary.
4. If the horse is in front of your leg, he will cross his outside front leg over his inside front leg. Do not rush through the movement. Deliberately take one step at a time.

As you complete the third part of the turn, catch the straightness and move forward by riding inside leg back to the outside rein, constantly riding the "X". With the haunch turn as the third part of the turn, your



horse moves forward off the corner toward the obstacle, and you catch the straightness on the inside. Think and ride the straight line while supporting your horse to keep him in front of your leg. The forward momentum from the haunch turn allows for greater variety and smoother distance options at the obstacle. Because you are continuing your forward motion towards the obstacle, it is easier to keep going. You can use your breathing to soften and settle the pace if needed.

Turning to an obstacle/jump without a haunch turn creates the necessity of having to straighten after the corner. As a result you will often have to make a visible move to the jump or, if all you see is an easy distance, you may have to add a step out of the corner. This last option can force you to hurry your horse to the second obstacle in a line of jumps. Such errors in distance can be avoided by making a haunch turn the third part of the turn. Using the haunch turn will insure that you get your horse to the obstacle balanced and on his hocks so he can cope with any distance and jump in the best form possible.

**Even an eager horse will take a breath and back up to jump around the obstacle as long as he has been allowed to move forward.** The engine is always engaged in this scenario. Straightness at the jump can be precise because of the forward impulsion. Horses tend to jump **up** rather than **at** the fences, because their hocks are engaged in the forward motion of the haunch turn. Riding a turn to an obstacle in this way says, "Let's go forward! See, there is a jump." You can create a situation where the horse is deliberately being asked to help, and his body and mind have been positioned to do so. You are asking that he participate more fully and he will often help you with the

distance if you are willing to listen. The worst that happens after using a haunch turn is that the horse pats the ground, still jumping off his hocks if distance is less than optimal. This is safe! With a horse that is balanced in front of your leg, you can ride out the line smoothly by softening your hand and sending your energy forward. If the distance in a line is tight, the impulsion from the haunch turn keeps your horse properly balanced on his hocks, and you can adjust his stride as needed. The forward ride of the haunch turn always provides enough impulsion and balance to get over the obstacle comfortably. *Ride his hocks to the base of the jump.*

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