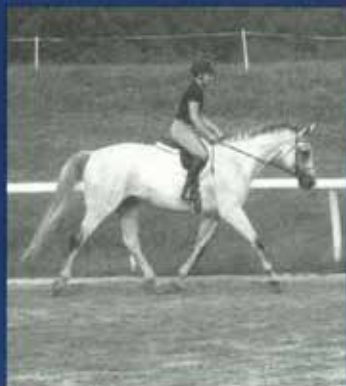


Advanced Contact

Putting the horse on the aids



Bearing rein

Because you have been consistently considerate of his mouth, your horse will reach forward and put his head in your hands when he is physically strong enough to do so. Concentrate on keeping the bit and reins still, and this will happen in its own time. You cannot make it happen. Using force means no quality.

The Bearing and Indirect Rein Aids and the Half-Halt

In Level One you learned the three primary rein aids: the leading rein, two direct reins, and one direct rein. These will always be the basic tools that you use to direct your horse. As your riding grows more sophisticated you need more advanced rein aids to make minor adjustments in your horse's balance and shape. You **must** ride your horse from your legs. This concept is the foundation upon which everything else is based. Nothing will work unless you start with your legs! In the beginning, the rein aids allowed you to reinforce the directional cues you gave your horse by focusing and changing energy levels. Now you will use the reins to refine your horse's shape and the quality of his transitions and movement. REMEMBER that there is always an inside and outside rein, and as you learned in the preceding exercises, they must each be used independently but in a complementary way. Any rein aid loses effectiveness and becomes abusive unless you apply it in unison with the movement of the horse's feet and neck. Always return the reins to a NEUTRAL position when the horse responds. The best riders carry their hands in a neutral position the majority of the time because their horses are so responsive to their changes in focus, energy level, and leg aids.

The Bearing Rein

A bearing rein is similar to the western neck rein. It is a supporting rein aid. The direct rein, used as a bearing rein when the horse pops a shoulder to the outside of a turn, supports the light inside leading rein. This combination won't make your horse feel he has been put in a vise when you ask him to correct his track. The horse moves away from the pressure of the rein against the neck. This supports the action of the inside leading rein, and directs the horse's motion. Remember to soften slightly, so that he continues going forward. The leg aids are the most energetic aids; the hands help maintain the chute of straightness and offer direction.

You'll find the bearing rein, in combination with a slightly leading inside rein, a slightly softened inside leg, and an outside urging leg, has exactly this effect in the haunch turn. This is the third part of the turn for an approach to a jump. The inside rein is the dominant rein, because you don't want to turn the horse's head in the direction opposite of his turn—that happens when the bearing rein dominates. Using the leg on the same side of the horse supports the bearing rein. Remember to focus on keeping your shoulders square when you use the bearing rein. The most common mistakes are made and the wrong messages sent by allowing the bearing rein to cross the neck and stop the forward way of riding.

If at any point your horse pops a shoulder on a turn, correct him by using an outside direct rein as a bearing rein, but be aware of straightness. This is the point at which you must stop pressing and encourage the horse straight forward to preserve the connection from



*Indirect rein-correct
in front of the withers*

*Indirect rein-incorrect
crossing the withers*

hind to front. The horse's neck should remain long, and the bit should stay in his mouth. To soften a space for the horse to move into, use a slight inside opening rein and a softened inside leg. AND REMEMBER, SQUARE SHOULDERS!

The Indirect Rein in Front of the Withers

This aid shifts the horse's weight toward the shoulder opposite the active rein hand. The rein moves toward the rider's opposite hip, stays in front of the line of the withers, and NEVER crosses the withers.

Remember the pane of glass! The opposite rein follows the shape of the neck that your indirect rein asks your horse to create. If this opposite rein does not move in coordination with the active rein, then you put your horse in a vise that prevents him from giving you the correct response. Imagine how frustrating and confusing this is to your horse! Never ask with one hand what you will not allow to happen with the other.

If your horse tends to fall onto his inside shoulder during a turn you might use this rein for a stride. First try an outside leg to an inside neutral hand to see whether completing the second part of the "X" lets your horse right himself. Often a lack of energy from behind causes the shoulder to drop in. By using your leg first, you address the cause, not just the immediate problem. Use your legs, not your hands. A hand is the very last resort, but the indirect rein in front of the withers will remind the horse to stay upright in the turn. This is perhaps the most abused of all of the rein aids, because the rider often never returns her hand to a neutral position to reward the response. Once the horse



*Left indirect rein behind
the withers.*

responds to the indirect rein ahead of the withers and begins to turn, **remember to soften your hand** in support of the turn or circle. We see this rein aid overused in turns, circles and in the one-half turn on the forehand. From the horse's perspective, any aid you overuse becomes abusive and ineffective. The horse builds resistance to constant pressure that never rewards his response with a release. Ultimately you will destroy a horse's quality of movement and, most importantly, his trust, if you overuse any aid, particularly the rein aids.

The Indirect Rein behind the Withers

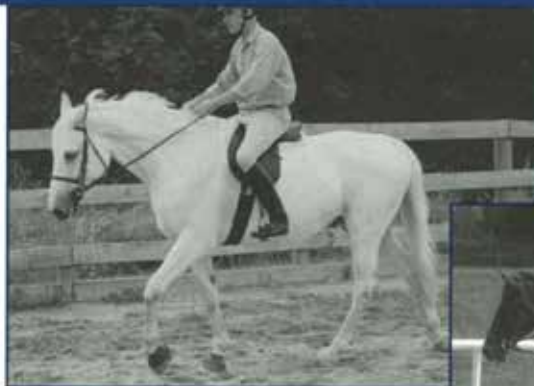
This aid shifts the horse's weight to the haunch opposite the active rein hand. The rein moves toward the rider's opposite hip, behind the line of the withers but NEVER crossing the withers. As always use this rein in partnership with the other rein hand. You might use the indirect rein behind the withers if your horse's haunches tend to fall to the outside of the track you are riding. This rein aid is also used in the conventional one-half turn on the haunch at the walk, but it must not be the dominant rein in this movement because you want the horse to look in the direction he is turning. This rein is very similar in action and position to the direct rein used as a bearing rein.

When you ride a stabilized horse at the trot or canter, explain the haunch turn as the third part of the turn to the jump by using an outside bearing rein and inside slightly leading rein aid, rather than an indirect rein behind the withers. Do not use the indirect rein behind the withers while jumping—the stabilized horse will feel this as too much of a vise. This is a common mistake. Always try leg before hand. For instance, be

sure to soften the ounces of inside leg to give your horse a space to move into before going to stronger leg and/or rein aids.

If you think of the indirect reins as corrective aids to make minor adjustments in your horse's balance, straightness, and carriage, you will not overuse them. For instance, if the horse's hind end is lagging in a leg yield try a stronger displacing leg in combination with an indirect rein behind the withers for a few strides in rhythm with the horse's movement. This will encourage him to shift his weight from one haunch to the other. *First attempt the correction by lightening the outside hand and softening the inside leg, then catch up the second part of the "X", outside leg to inside hand. This keeps everything very simple. Make your corrections by riding the "X" first. If the horse does not feel in a vise, the problem will usually resolve itself without the use of stronger aids.*

Notes



Exercise 2
*Releasing the inside rein
for a stride.*

*Exaggerated release of
the inside rein.*



Refining Your Controls

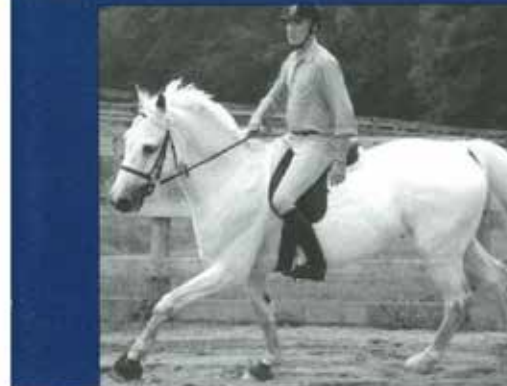
The following exercises will empower the rider.

Exercise 1

On a large circle ride inside leg to outside rein at the trot. Push your inside knee down towards the ground, and place the inside calf of the leg **at the girth**, with your weight on the ball of the foot. Direct energy from this leg across the "X" to the outside rein. How does this feel? Hold the inside rein like a sponge, and allow it to follow the natural shape that the inside leg to outside rein has created. The inside hand follows the turning of the horse's shoulders. You might soften your outside leg an ounce or two to allow the natural bend around the inside leg, but your outside leg must never be so soft that it does not simultaneously encourage forward motion. Your shoulders follow the horse's shoulders.

Exercise 2

To see whether your horse is really shaped around your inside leg and you are passive with the inside rein, slide the inside hand forward, loosen the rein for two beats, and notice if your horse's shape and direction remain unchanged. This is the test for stabilization or self-carriage. Following hands follow the head and neck, match the shoulder position, and are *always able* to release the inside rein for a few strides.



Exercise 3

Ride at the walk, trot, and canter with the reins bridged in the outside hand. Begin on the long side of your arena and stay on the track. When you are comfortable, add circles and half-circles of various sizes. Ask the following questions:

- Am I straight?
- Can I ride all the patterns and figures using my legs, body, and seat and my outside rein only if needed?

Be sure that you follow the horse's head and neck gesture. **REMEMBER SQUARE SHOULDERS!** This should become a habit with you at this point in your riding, but always check to be certain that you retain the good habits you have worked so hard to establish. If you change directions, switch outside hands.

Also remember: If your horse pops a shoulder, even though your reins are bridged, allow the outside rein to become a bearing rein for a moment to close the zone. You will use a holding leg on the same side as the popped shoulder, directing energy across the "X" to the opposite shoulder. By softening a leg on the opposite side of the bulge, you have offered your horse a space to move into. *Even though your reins are bridged, use each rein separately.* When you use the bearing rein to correct a bulge, you may need to vibrate the inside rein, which is the primary rein. You do not want your horse to feel he should turn his head to the outside. (*Remember: squeeze the reins like a sponge.*)



*Counter-bending left
Note that the rider's eyes
are still focused on the
track of the circle.*



Counter-bending right

Notes

Exercise 4

Bending and counter bending. Straight strides must alternate with the bending and the counter bending. Do this consciously: stay aware of your horse and be sure he understands and is prepared for what is coming next. It is best to learn this exercise at the trot, because you can focus on the coordination of your aids without the need to focus on following the horse's head and neck gesture. On the circle go to the right (right hand inside) and ride your right inside leg, pushing your right knee down and standing on the ball of your foot on your right stirrup. The energy created from this inside right leg flows to the left

outside rein. To change the bend, ride straight on the circle using just enough left outside leg to right inside rein to reposition the horse's weight equally on **both shoulders**. Ride a few strides straight until the horse is comfortable with the weight shift. Then ask him to move his weight to the right shoulder by using the left leg and pushing your left knee down to stand on the left stirrup. Direct this energy to the right rein, and allow the horse's weight to move to the right shoulder. Your right leg must be on enough to keep the horse moving forward and to stop any tendency he has to fall to the inside of the circle. *(If the horse is not in front of your leg, none of this will work!)*

Use a slight leading rein to help your horse understand the idea of bending around the inside leg. You want to be able to see the corner of his eye in the direction of the bend. The direct rein will help create the bend as your horse gains conditioning. When he is strong enough physically that the rein aid does not stop the forward motion the direct rein can be used. The inside leg to the outside rein is the primary aid and sets the limit that prevents the horse from falling inward and is achieved either with a slight leading rein or a direct rein, depending on the condition of the horse.

When you can perform this exercise proficiently at the trot, then practice bending and counter-bending at the walk, but don't inhibit the swing of the horse's neck as you ask for the changes in bend. You are ready to try the exercise at the canter as soon as you can use the aids and follow the head and neck confidently and completely at the walk.

Exercise 5

Spiraling in and out on a circle at the trot. On the circle ride *inside leg* to outside rein in rhythm with the horse's feet. To spiral in on the circle, begin using your *outside leg* rhythmically behind the girth (displacing leg), as you push your inside knee down and soften the inside leg to create a space for the horse to step into. Add the idea of a gentle leading inside rein as your horse spirals in and his weight distribution becomes equal on both shoulders. As the circle decreases in size, use your upper body to show the horse the degree of collection needed. When you reach the center, gradually switch your aids and ride straight for a couple of strides. Be sure to switch your leg positions! The inside becomes the displacing leg and the outside leg softens to create a space for your horse to move back out. Keep the horse in front of your leg. You can use a cone, barrel, jump or a pole as your center to spiral in, out, and around.

Notes



Hand-gallop

Exercise 6

There are three speeds of the canter: ordinary, hand-gallop and slow. Use your legs, energy, and upper body to signal increases and decreases of pace. Begin with ordinary to hand-gallop—this will be an easier transition for your horse. To increase, lighten your seat, soften the sail of your body by inclining your hip angle slightly forward, follow more forward with your hands, and use urging legs if necessary. If your horse responds to your forward intention, he should promptly and easily open up his stride to a “hand-gallop” as you lighten your seat to a two-point position and support with your leg. Begin by practicing the hand-gallop on long straight lines, and then ask your horse to carry the longer stride through gentle turns and tighter corners. To return to the ordinary canter, open your hip angle, fill your sail, and reconnect your seat with your horse's back. Support with the inside leg to a steady outside rein; this combination of aids asks your horse to decrease his stride length. Once your horse performs the transitions from canter to hand-gallop and back to canter consistently, you can begin to ask him for a slower, more collected canter. Because the slower canter is more physically demanding for your horse, he may initially require more support from your leg to sustain it. Practice it only for short periods until your horse's physical conditioning improves. It is best to ask your horse for this shorter stride while riding a circle. To decrease, open your hip angle, wrap around your horse, sitting softly, and become a sail. Support your intention by riding inside leg to a steady outside rein. If necessary, close your fingers around the outside rein, and keep the horse's head straight with a soft slightly leading inside hand to balance



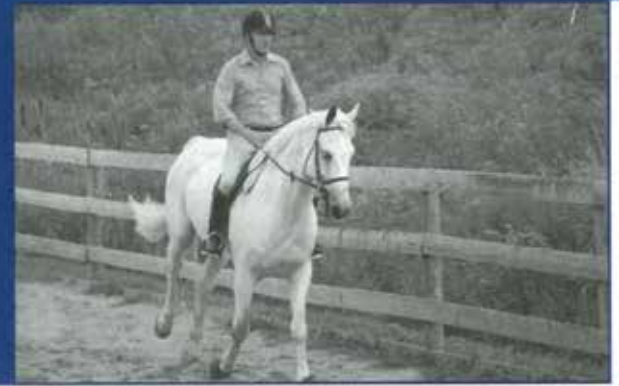
Collected canter

the outside squeeze, always following the horse's neck movement. Remember: ask for a downward transition at the canter when the horse's head is up. Be aware of how the horse's feet are moving and what stage of the stride you are in. Then you know when the horse's head is up and when you can ask for the decrease. This is important—it avoids trouble. Physically it is impossible for your horse to decrease at the stage of the canter when he is reaching down and forward, because his hind end is not engaged. More than likely he will hit your hand and drag you because he couldn't balance with his head. You may have to use an urging leg to encourage your horse to maintain a true canter rhythm as he raises his withers and shifts his weight back slightly to shorten his stride. Canter twice around a circle of about 50 feet in diameter, and then carry the shortened stride onto a straightaway before lightening the deepness of your seat and following more forward to return your horse to the ordinary canter. See page 43 in Susan Harris' *Horse Gaits, Balance and Movement* for a clear visual picture of the canter footfalls along with neck position.

Notes

Exercise 7

Counter-canter: When you establish a stabilized counter-canter with your equine partner, you have attained a high quality of movement, a very good physical condition, and a strong mental connection. The counter-canter is a wonderful exercise for developing your horse's responsiveness to your aids. He learns to wait for direction rather than to assume what is expected. It is also a great way to develop your horse's balance and lateral agility. Initially practice the counter-canter



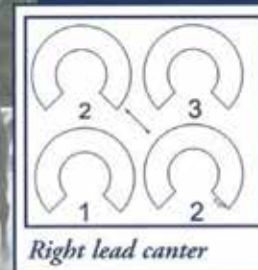
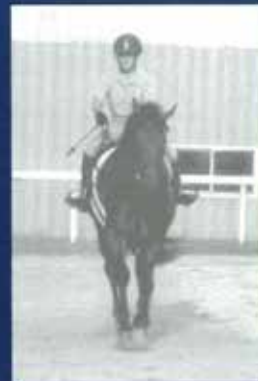
Counter canter

with the horse looking in the direction of the lead, rather than in the direction of travel. Practicing the counter-canter on a long rein, once you are confident your horse understands the aids, will help him to become more supple and flexible. If your horse favors one lead when landing from the jumps or if the flying change is easier in one direction than the other, you will find that the counter-canter will probably be more difficult for your horse to sustain on the lead he doesn't favor. Practicing the counter-canter on the more difficult lead without forcing or upsetting your horse will help improve the quality of that lead. Focus on maintaining the three beats of the canter. *Allowing the canter to degenerate into four beats reduces the athletic development potential of this exercise and increases the chance that the horse will swap to the true lead through a break down in the canter rhythm. Ultimately, this will have a negative effect on the quality of your flying lead changes.*

The simplest way to begin work at the counter-canter is to change direction with a half-circle and maintain the lead after you have changed direction. The more open your work area, the easier this will be. Many hunter/jumper show horses associate fence lines with lead changes because this is what they have been taught. Try to stay out of the corners and off the fence line as you are teaching your horse the counter-canter. It will help if you focus on your direction of travel and look to the inside of the turns well ahead of time. Be careful not to turn your shoulders in the direction you are traveling—just **use your eyes**. At this point you are asking your horse to stay bent in the direction of the lead, not in the direction he is traveling. If you change your shoulder

position in anticipation of the turn, a sensitive horse will probably read this as a signal to change his lead. Indicate direction with your eyes. Concentrate on following the horse's head and neck gesture as you canter, and maintain a slight bend toward the leading leg. As you approach a turn, look, breathe, and follow to help your horse sustain the counter lead. If you stiffen and grab in expectation of the turn, your horse will almost always change leads because he feels your stiffness and your arms disrupt his balance. When you and your horse are confident in the counter-canter on both leads, then it is time to try striking off on the counter lead.

The aids for the counter-canter are identical for those of any canter departure, so before you begin this exercise be sure that you can consistently pick up either lead on a straight line in the open. Because it is the opposite of normal practice, picking up the counter-canter along a fence line is often mentally challenging for both the rider and the horse. To make it easier for both of you, it is helpful to begin the exercise by leading the horse off the track to the inside for a few strides at the trot, to create a space for him to step into as he picks up the counter-canter. Ride a small "V" as you lead the horse off the rail and then back to the rail slightly as you ask for the canter. This is a stepping-stone to help you both understand the mechanics of the aids. Often it is just the proximity to the wall that makes the movement difficult. As your horse understands the aids more clearly, he will be able to read your intention without worrying about the wall or fence line. As Pat Parelli says,



"Horses are born claustrophobics." This is an important concept to keep in mind when asking the horse to go deep into a corner, load into a horse trailer, or pick up the counter-canter against the arena wall.

As you and your horse progress, you will be able to achieve a straight, round, quality counter-canter with his head straight in front of you, rather than bent in the direction of the leading leg. If you are on the right lead counter canter, soften your right outside leg enough to create a space, and encourage your horse to keep moving over to the outside with a rhythmic, gentle inside urging leg. Your horse will learn the signals and not switch leads until you soften the inside leg and close your outside leg. To avoid an unwanted swap of leads as you approach a corner, soften your outside right leg on the right counter canter to create enough room for your horse to move his hind end into the cleared space and keep moving forward. This allows a comfortable round corner. You can straighten his head and allow the outside leading leg to follow a more comfortable path, making it easier for the horse to keep the lead and not feel cramped. This is a wonderful exercise for building long, loose, flexible shoulders and great practice for riding the hind end first. If you have a horse that is crooked to the left, you might warm up with right lead counter-canter, thus freeing his right shoulder in the above fashion.

