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February 2016

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# Boost Your Dressage Scores with Learning Theory



By Manuela McLean  
Director, Equitation Science International

## Part 11 - Lateral Movements

**Dressage judges play an important role in the education of both riders and their horses. The marks and comments they provide can inform rider and coach of the level of training achieved, and any areas that need more work. But, can you turn them into clear training strategies and boost your dressage scores?**

**In this series, Dr Andrew and Manuela McLean, founders of the Australian Equine Behaviour Centre (AEBC) and Directors of Equitation Science International, explain dressage judging against the backdrop of learning theory and the equitation science training scale.**

**We began the series with Dr Andrew McLean's proposal to align the judging system to how the horse learns. Last month, Manuela McLean talked about riding the test and, this month, she begins to wind the series down with lateral movements, which develop and test your horse's ability to collect.**

During this series, I have covered the dressage judging scale from a mark of 0 to 9 explaining how the marks are awarded, and how to train and achieve the qualities the judges are looking for.

Last month, I explained how to put all of your training into practice to ride a dressage test as well as you can. From first outings, spooks and startles, to presenting to the judge and riding each movement with accuracy and precision, and how the judges' remarks relate to your horse's training.

### *This month*

Lateral movements involve a combination of some of the aids you have already been training. The combinations of the aids and postures can turn the shoulders or the hindquarters or both. Lateral movements are trained in the same way, by systematically shaping them from a basic attempt through to performing the movement rhythmically, with bend (straightness), on the bit (contact) and engagement.

A horse that is roughly performing the lateral movement should score a 5. If in a rhythm, 6, if bending, 7, if maintaining the same frame with the poll at the highest point, 8, and with the correct degree of engagement and collection, 9 or 10.





Kerri Afford Photography

## Judging marks as they relate to the Shaping Scale

Mark	Qualification	Criteria
0	<b>No movement shown</b>	Horse does not perform movement or performs an opposing response
1	<b>Major disobedience</b>	Horse bucks, rears, leaps, bolts, spins, pigroots
2	<b>Minor disobedience</b>	Horse kicks out at rider's leg, moves head excessively
3	<b>Resistance</b>	Horse lifts or lengthens neck, rider has to use strong aids, not relaxed.
4	<b>Basic Attempt</b>	Horse performs recognisable movement in correct gait
5	<b>Obedience</b>	Horse performs movement immediately from light aids
6	<b>Rhythm</b>	Horse performs movement in correct rhythm, tempo and stride length, rhythm self-maintained
7	<b>Straightness</b>	Horse's forehand and hindquarters are on the correct tracks, neck and spine are correctly aligned, head is vertical
8	<b>Contact</b>	Horse is in correct frame, back is soft and swinging, hindquarters pushing, rein, leg and seat contact is consistent
9	<b>Engagement</b>	Horse shows suppleness, impulsion, 'throughness', back is up and hindquarters are lowered, collection
10	<b>Harmony, perfection</b>	Horse and rider movements flow, horse is responding to invisible cues

# Lateral Movements

Lateral movements are a means to improve collection, suppleness, bend and manoeuvrability. They include the movements of shoulder in, travers and renvers, half pass and pirouettes. In dressage tests, shoulder in, travers and renvers are only performed in trot, half pass is performed in trot and canter, and pirouettes are performed in walk and canter.

## Before you start

The prerequisites for training the lateral movements is that your horse maintains rhythm and straightness, will flex in either direction without losing line or speed, and is consistent in rein, leg and seat contact.

To be effective as a rider in training the lateral movements, you need to learn to control the combination of aids (pressures and releases) with your posture, and for this you should be able to feel the movement of the forelegs and backlegs through the horse's back.

It is best to train lateral movements in the walk as it is a slower gait, and you will achieve greater control and make less mistakes.

## Helpful Hint

If you have never ridden any lateral work it is a good idea to begin at the halt and start by positioning your horse in the movement. If you don't have someone on the ground to help you, use a mirror.

When you achieve the correct position, take note of what you feel and the position you and your horse are in. You can then try moving into the walk in this position, coming back to the halt and fixing yours and your horse's position before asking again. The postures can also be practiced sitting on a chair.

Lateral movements are a means to improve collection, suppleness, bend and manoeuvrability.

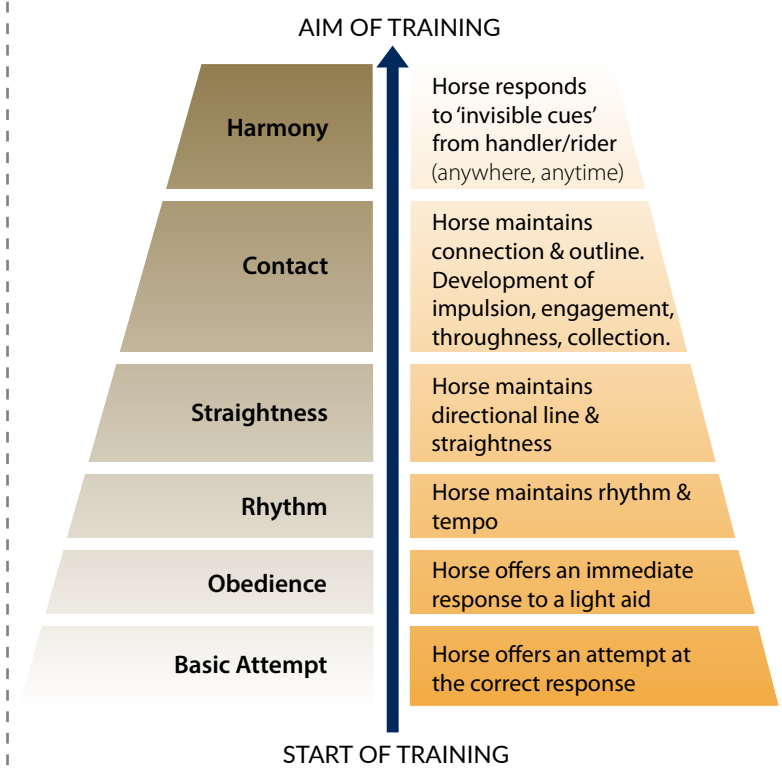
## THE PROGRESSION OF TRAINING

Shaping is how training progresses from learning a new skill or movement to perfecting its execution. It is a systematic process of breaking down the elements into small steps and building on them. The equitation science shaping scale groups the learning stages with the qualities that dressage judges expect to see in the competition arena.

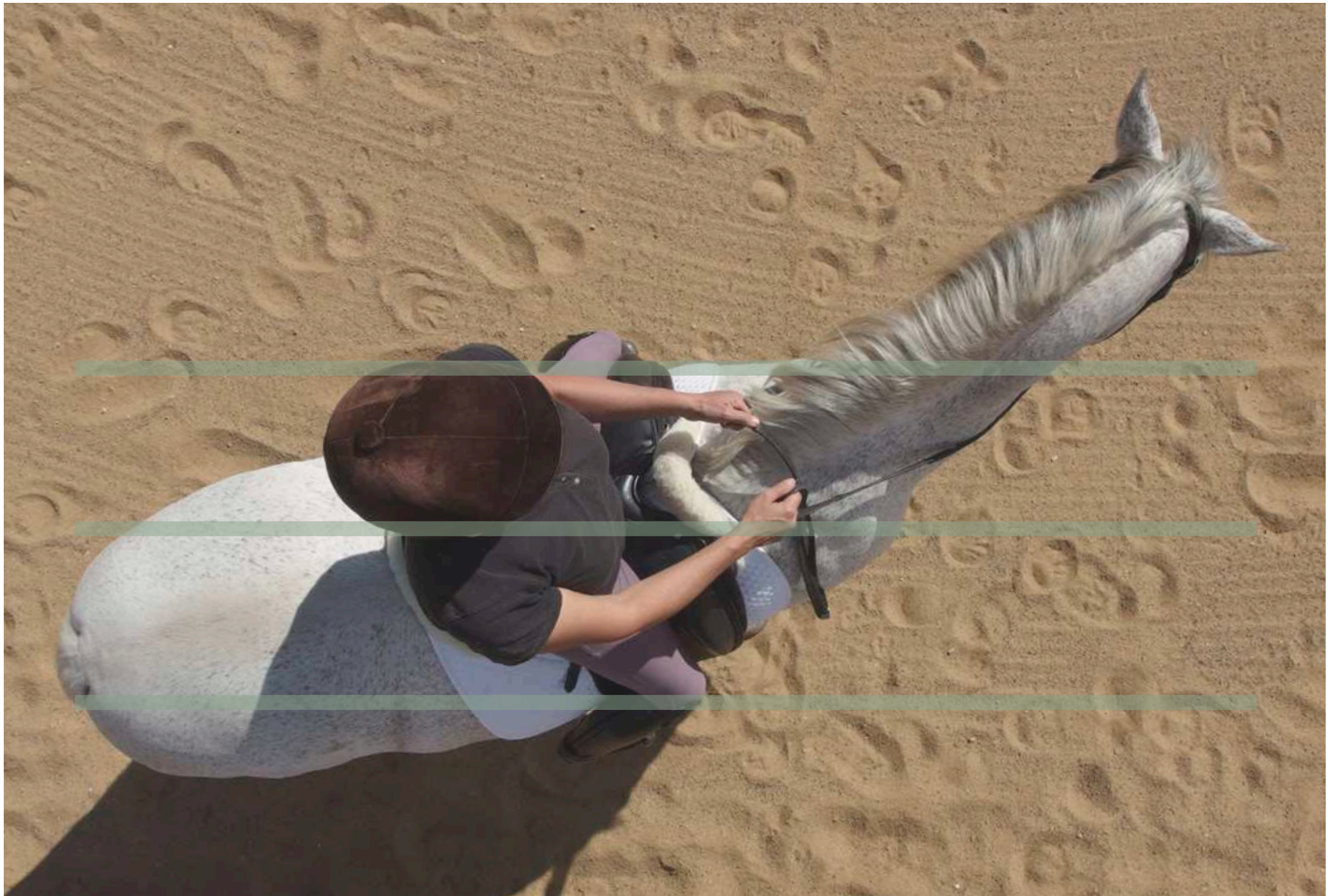
The better known FEI training scale defines the qualities you should aim for, but does not explain how the horse learns them or how you can train and achieve them.

In the shaping scale, however, the qualities are grouped and placed in the order they are learnt. This perspective prioritises the Classical principles of lightness and self-carriage.

As well as gradually learning more and more skills to perfect each movement, the horse has to develop physically in order to travel in self-carriage. This is the essence of dressage.







It is a good idea to practice by positioning your horse in the movement at the halt. If you don't have someone on the ground to help you, use a mirror.

**ABOVE:** In the shoulder in, the horse is flexed to the inside but the rider looks in the direction down the track of the outside foreleg. The horse is positioned on 3 tracks (as shown by the light green lines); the inside foreleg travels on one track, the diagonal pair formed by the outside foreleg and inside hindleg on an inside track and the outside hindleg travels on the track. The horse's shoulders are at a 30 degree angle to the wall.

**MIDDLE:** The inside foreleg is turned with a direct inside rein, the outside foreleg is turned with an outside indirect turn (basically, place both hands to the inside). Repeat this rein aid if you need to increase the angle of the shoulder in.

**BELOW:** To finish the movement simply go back to your straight line position, and position the horse's shoulders back on the track with both hands to the outside. You can also use this rein aid to correct the shoulder in if there is too much angle. All photos by Nick Wilkins.

## Shoulder in

Shoulder in for the horse involves a turn of the shoulders to the inside of the track, while the hindlegs stay on the track and do not turn. The rider's body is also positioned in this manner; the shoulders are turned while the hips remain parallel to the long side. The horse is flexed to the inside but the rider, however, is looking in the direction down the track of the outside foreleg.

The horse is positioned on 3 tracks (see image), his shoulders at a 30 degree angle to the wall. The horse's outside hindleg is on the track, his inside hindleg and inside foreleg are on the same track, and the inside foreleg is on a track further to the inside. When viewed from the front, the horse's legs all appear to travel in straight lines, whereas the judge at C will see the horse crossing the forelegs only.

### Shoulder in: The aids

The horse should be flexed to the inside first, the inside foreleg is turned with a direct inside rein, the outside foreleg is turned with an outside indirect turn (basically, place both hands to the inside); once the shoulders are turned, the rein aids are relaxed and remain in this position, but can be reapplied if the horse fails to keep the shoulders in. Applying the direct and indirect turn aids in the correct timing of the forelegs (as they are beginning the swing phase), facilitates the response. It is impossible to change the foreleg position if it is on the ground!

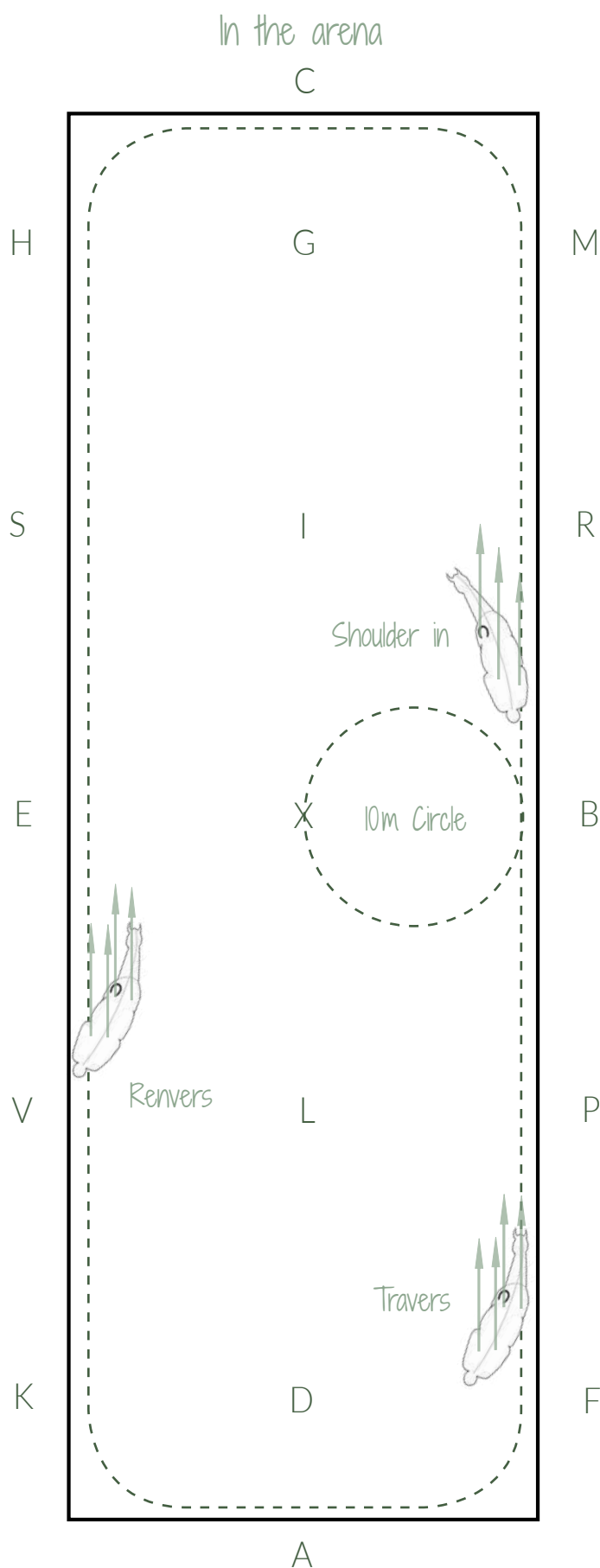
The rider's inside lower leg maintains a contact, preventing the horse from turning the hindlegs. It needs to be relaxed and able to be used to increase the tempo or stride length.

### Shoulder in: The rider

You need to feel the rise and fall of both forelegs to apply the aids correctly. Remember to engage your core, have your horse flexed, and then, turn your shoulders as if going across the diagonal. Turn each foreleg in, one step to the inside, during each swing phase or as your hips lift; the inside leg first and the outside leg second. You will then need, to turn your head to look along the expected track of the outside foreleg.

Your hips and pelvis do not turn, the inside hip points towards the horse's outside shoulder and the outside stays where it was, parallel to the wall. Your inside lower leg position stays in the same position with the outside leg slightly back to maintain the line of the outside hind.

When finishing the movement, simply go back to your straight line position and position the shoulders back, with both hands to the outside. If going onto a circle from shoulder in, turn your hips onto the line of the circle. Remember, horses stall as they leave the wall!







## TRAINING TIP

### *Shoulder in: Obedience*

The most common problems that occur when developing obedience is that the horse wants to continue turning and head across the diagonal, or that he does not bring the shoulders in enough and, instead, bends his neck too much.

Slowing the horse's tempo when riding lateral movements is important, if he goes across the diagonal (shoulder in off the track) and begins to, or leaves the wall with his hindlegs, then you will need a half halt to stop the forward movement of the shoulders. In this case, the inside foreleg is generally the problem. First, half halt the inside foreleg to stop it from going further in and then quicken the tempo with your inside leg.

### **Judge's comment:** Not enough angle

If he does not turn in enough and just bends his neck, the judges will comment that there is 'not enough angle'. To improve the angle begin at the halt. Turn the shoulders in and improve the obedience of the turn aid at the halt (in other words, aim to achieve an immediate turn of the shoulders from a light aid. See Part 3 of the series), and then walk on down the long side, maintaining the shoulder in.

Halting in the middle of a shoulder in is a great test to see if the horse maintains the shoulder in position when halted. You can adjust the forelegs or the hindlegs at the halt and continue in walk.

### *Shoulder in: Rhythm*

To develop rhythm, aim to feel the forelegs through the front of your hips and the back legs through the back of your pelvis. You may need to make some adjustments with the reins if the horse's shoulders do not feel even, and with your legs for his hindlegs and back.

Test for self-carriage of rhythm and shoulder in position by giving forward with the reins or lower legs for 2-4 steps.

### **Judge's comment:** Lacks impulsion and swing

Shoulder in is a collecting movement so there will be some slowing of speed as the horse shortens his stride. Once he reliably stays in shoulder in, the tempo can be improved with the quickening aid. Comments such as needs more impulsion relate to tempo and more swing relate to length of stride.



## Shoulder in: Straightness

Although the shoulder in requires a certain amount of bend, straightness in this case refers to maintaining the tracks with his legs and an even bend from head to tail. Remember to test for self-carriage of straightness (check that your horse maintains his shape and direction) by giving with the inside rein to see if the inside fore stays on the inner inside track and the horse maintains flexion, or with the outside rein, to see if the outside fore stays on the inside track, in front of the outside hindleg.

### Judge's comment: Lacks flexion

Lack of flexion tends to relate to losses of bend. Too much neck bend can be corrected with an indirect outside rein. Some horses leg yield instead of doing shoulder in; they swing their hindquarters out as they bring the shoulders in, their body becomes straight and the movement then becomes on 4 tracks.

Yielding the hindlegs out in the shoulder in prevents collection from occurring (remember that in the shoulder in the hindlegs stay on the track). Positioning your outside leg back will prevent the horse from yielding but aim to maintain the position of the forelegs.

You will also need to test your individual legs so that if the hindquarters drift out, the horse falls out instead of doing shoulder in, an outside leg with a slight yield feel, can correct his position.

## Shoulder in: Contact

Once the shoulder in has rhythm and straightness the correct contact will happen of its own accord and the horse will begin to collect. At this stage you can target the poll, aiming to keep it at the highest point, taking care to maintain the action and tempo of the seat.

The stride length also needs to be maintained and, as the horses collects, will become higher increasing the knee and hock action. Again make sure you can feel all four legs through your pelvis for improved collection. Shortening and lengthening the stride while riding the shoulder in and while maintaining the same length of neck will greatly improve collection.

You can begin training the shoulder in in trot when your horse has developed his training to rhythm level in walk. In any case you should keep returning to practicing it in the walk to develop the qualities.

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It is a good idea to practice the travers position by positioning your horse in the movement at the halt. If you don't have someone on the ground to help you, use a mirror.

**ABOVE:** Travers involves turning or yielding the hindquarters to the inside without turning the forelegs. In both travers and renvers, the horse's legs travel on 4 tracks, both forelegs are on the track, and the hindlegs are on the inner tracks at a 40 degree angle. When viewed from the front, all the horse's legs appear to travel in straight lines. The judge at C will see the hindlegs crossing.

**MIDDLE:** The horse's head and neck should remain parallel to the wall (slightly flexed to the inside in relation to the angle of his body).

**BELOW:** The horse's forelegs are positioned on the line with a combination of direct and indirect turns, while the hindlegs are positioned with a yield aid. All photos by Nick Wilkins.



## Travers and renvers

Travers involves turning or yielding the hindquarters to the inside without turning the forelegs. The riders' position is the same as the horse's, his shoulders stay on the line and his hips are turned to the inside. The horse's head and neck are on the same line as the forelegs; there is flexion in the direction of travel.

Renvers is the same, except that the shoulders are on the inside track and the hindquarters are to the outside, the rider's hips are turned to the outside, his shoulders are on the track.

In both travers and renvers, the horse's legs travel on 4 tracks, both forelegs are on the track, and the hindlegs are on the inner tracks at a 40 degree angle. When viewed from the front, all the horse's legs appear to travel in straight lines. The judge at C will see the hindlegs crossing.

### Travers: The aids

The horse's forelegs are positioned on the line with a combination of direct and indirect turns, while the hindlegs are positioned with a yield aid. Position the shoulders towards the wall, in the corner, with an indirect turn aid from the inside rein and both hands to the outside. The hindquarters are yielded as the forelegs reach the wall with a yield aid from the outside leg (when the hindlegs are approximately a meter from the wall).

The horse's head and neck should remain parallel to the wall (slightly flexed to the inside in relation to the angle of his body).

### Travers: The rider

Feel the rise and fall of both forelegs and both hindlegs to apply each aid in timing with the beginning of the swing phase of each leg (apply the pressure aid just before and as the leg lifts and swings forward). Learning to time your aids helps in many ways, it ensures the horse can respond immediately, and it develops your coordination and feel.

Remember to engage your core, have your horse flexed, and then, turn your shoulders as if going down the long side while applying an inside thigh pressure with the indirect turn aid. Maintain the position of the inside hip towards the horse's inside ear and allow your seat to move in time with the rise and fall of the inside foreleg to create rhythm.

Position your outside leg back in the corner, then turn your outside hip back and apply the yield aid. Your inside seat bone (pelvis) follows the line of the inside hindleg. Maintain the movement of the hindlegs with your pelvis. Your inside leg is forward and can be used to improve the tempo and stride length.

When finishing travers, reposition your hips back to the straight line and put your outside leg forward.

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## TRAINING TIPS

### Travers: Obedience

The forelegs are often difficult to control in travers. The horse is bent like a banana but his forelegs still have to travel in a straight line. Concentrate on the inside foreleg first, if it wants to cross towards the outside, you will need to apply a direct turn of the inside rein. If the inside foreleg wants to go too much to the inside, use an indirect inside rein. In both cases, the forelegs are taking steps that are too long - the horse is not collecting. The rider's failure to be able to feel the rise and fall of the inside foreleg is associated with these problems. It affects flexion as well.

Once the inside foreleg is under control the outside foreleg can be targeted. If it wants to cross to the inside a direct turn of the outside rein will be needed. An indirect outside rein will stop it falling out; this is not a common problem.

### Judge's comment: Not enough angle in travers

A failure of the horse to yield can be motivated with light whip-taps on the outside hindquarter - but only if the horse has already learnt to yield the hindquarters from a light whip-tap (See Part XX of this series). Improving the position of the shoulders also improves the yield of the hindquarters but you will need to remind the horse to keep them in. Begin training a smaller angle of 3 tracks to make it easier for the horse.

### Travers: Rhythm and Straightness

Testing self-carriage of both, reins and legs to check the quality of the rhythm is critical before you can begin to improve the tempo or stride length. The rider's inside leg is more influential to quicken the tempo or increase the stride length because the outside leg is associated with yielding. The appropriate seat cues should be used when quickening or lengthening.

Testing self-carriage with one rein or leg at a time will test the straightness and quality of the flexion.

Remember to always go back to a neutral, contact position and relaxed seat when your horse is correct, he will then hear your cues and aids when you have to adjust him. If a horse is on 3 tracks and not 4, the angle or yield of the hindquarters is insufficient.

### Travers: Contact

Aim for the poll to be at the highest point by raising your hands. There maybe one ear lower than the other, the horse's head is tilted, raising the rein of the lower ear to make them level will fix this. Maintain the same rhythm, stride length and tempo with your seat and leg aids while adjusting the poll. Raising the poll is not an aid unless he is lengthening his frame and stride, or quickening and pulling down.

**ABOVE:** Renvers is the same at travers, except that the shoulders are on the inside track and the hindquarters are to the outside, the riders' hips are turned to the outside, his shoulders are on the track.



## Renvers

Renvers is the same as travers but in reverse. The hindquarters stay on the track and the shoulders are brought in off the track. It may sound similar to the shoulder in position, but in the renvers, the legs travel on 4 tracks and the flexion is reversed. When travelling on the left rein, the horse is bent to the right and vice versa.

### Renvers: The rider

The rider brings the shoulders in with an indirect outside rein (the right hand when travelling on the left rein), this also changes the flexion. The rider's inside lower leg (the left leg if on the left rein) is positioned back to yield the hindquarters out or to keep them on the outside track.

Renvers is generally trained and ridden from a shoulder in. The change of flexion occurs from an indirect outside rein, this also brings the shoulders more in, and the hindquarters are yielded from the riders inside leg.

The corrections to maintain the renvers position, develop it in a rhythm with the correct bend and contact are the same as those for travers.

### Next month

Don't miss next month's issue when Manuela will continue explaining the more advanced lateral movements - the half pass and pirouettes - breaking them down into easy to learn steps in a way that you and your horse can understand.



**MANUELA MCLEAN**

NCAS Level 2 (Dressage Specialist), BSc (Biology), Dip Ed

Manuela McLean, , co-developed the AEBC training system and co-authored 'Academic Horse Training' with her husband, Dr Andrew McLean. Manuela coached and trained Joann Formosa and her stallion, Worldwide PB, to gold medal success at the London 2012 Paralympics. Manuela has ridden and competed at FEI level in Dressage and advanced Three Day Eventing. In great demand as a clinician, Manuela travels to teach riders of all ages throughout Australia and to New Zealand, Canada, Denmark, Finland and the United Kingdom.



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