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March 2016

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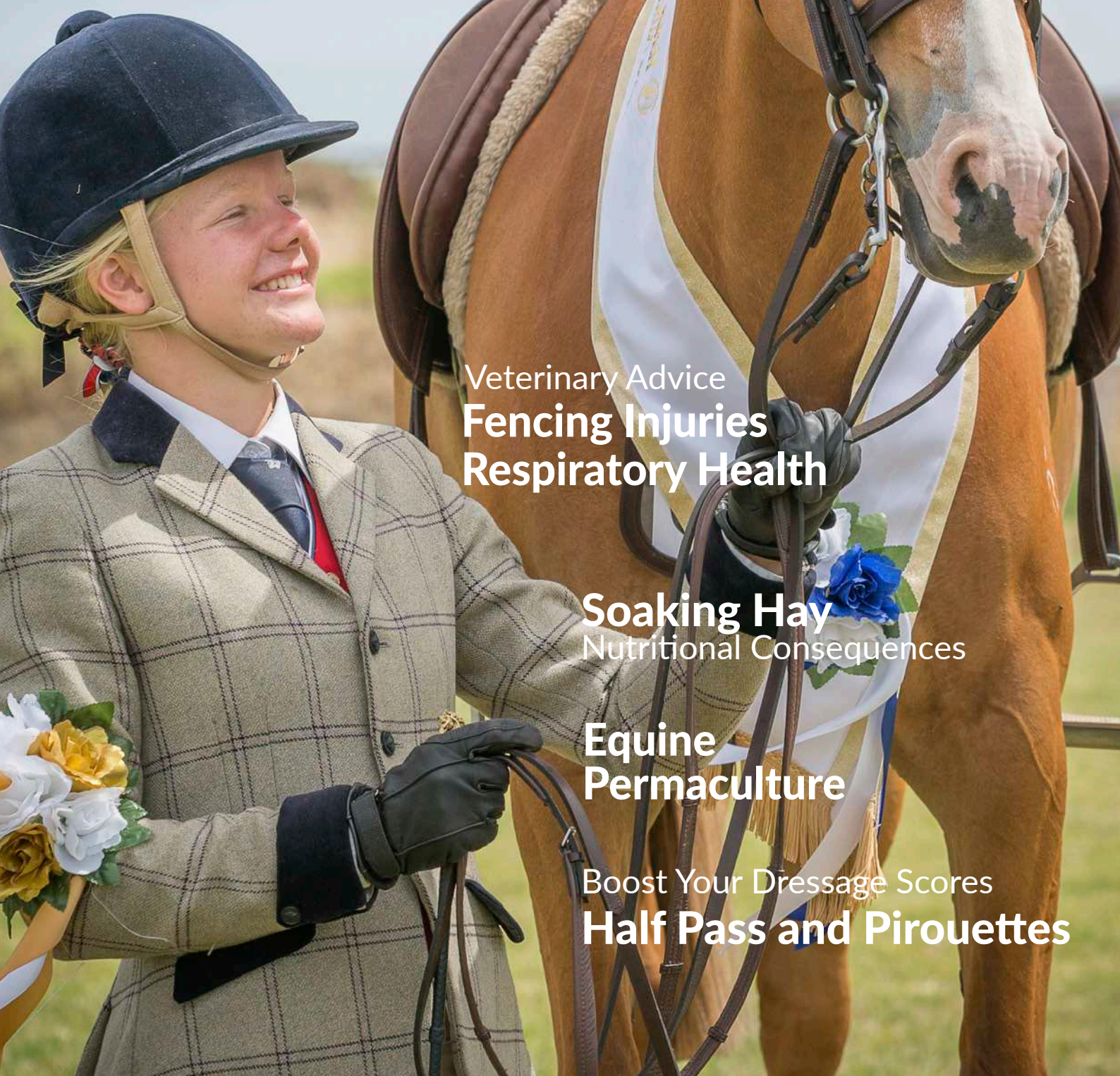
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Boost Your Dressage Scores
Half Pass and Pirouettes





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Boost Your Dressage Scores with Learning Theory



WORDS BY Manuela McLean
AEBC & Equitation Science International
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Part 12 - Lateral Movements Half Pass and Pirouettes

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 training and 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. This month, Manuela McLean continues discussing the 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.

This month

Last month, I began talking about lateral movements, which involve a combination of some of the aids you have already been training. The combinations of the aids and postures can either turn the shoulders, the hindquarters or both. I explained about riding the shoulder in, the travers and renvers. This month, we move on to the half pass and pirouettes.

Lateral movements are trained in the same way as any other skill, by systematically shaping them from a basic attempt through to performing the movement rhythmically, with bend (straightness), on the bit (contact) and engagement.

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



Judging marks as they relate to the Shaping Scale

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

Lateral Movements The Prerequisites

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, and develop your ability to time your aids to the horse's leg movements very precisely.

As explained last month, it is best to begin training 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 a half pass, 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 posture can also be practiced sitting on a chair.

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

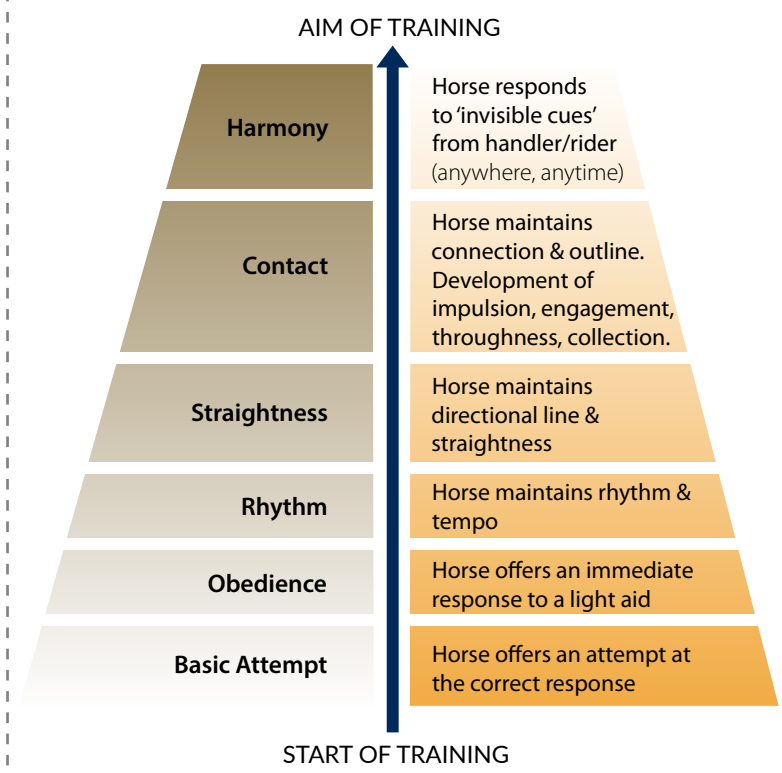
THE PROGRESSION OF TRAINING

'Shaping' is the term to describe how training progresses from learning a new skill or movement to perfecting its execution. It is a systematic process that helps trainers break down the elements of a skill 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 LEFT: In the half pass, the horse is flexed to the inside and the rider looks in the direction of the diagonal line. The horse crosses all four legs as he travels forward and sideways, bending in the direction of travel. Half pass is also referred to as riding travers on the diagonal line. In a correct half pass, the horse's shoulders are always leading the movement.

FAR LEFT: The turn aids are used to position the horse's shoulders. If they are leading too much, both reins can move to the outside to correct the position.

LEFT: The half pass begins from a shoulder fore position by positioning the horse's shoulders to the inside with a direct inside turn aid and an indirect outside turn aid. When the horse is in shoulder fore, the rider's outside leg asks for the hindquarters to yield and the horse moves along the diagonal line. Photos by Nick Wilkins.

Half pass

Riding a half pass involves yielding the hindquarters in a shoulder-in position. The half pass is usually performed across a diagonal. From the judge's point of view, the horse crosses all four legs while travelling forward and sideways, flexing in the direction of travel. It is also referred to as riding travers on the diagonal line.

The half pass differs from a leg yield (which also involves a yield of all four legs) because in the leg yield the horse is relatively straight and flexed away from the direction of travel. In a half pass, the horse is bent to the inside and flexed in the direction of travel, while travelling sideways. In a correct half pass, the horse's shoulders lead slightly.

Half pass: the aids

You begin the half pass from a shoulder fore (a shoulder in with very little angle) position by positioning the horse's shoulders to the inside with a direct inside and indirect outside turn, with inside flexion. Then apply the yield aid from the outside leg to move the horse sideways along a diagonal line. Beginning the movement in shoulder fore keeps the shoulders leading.

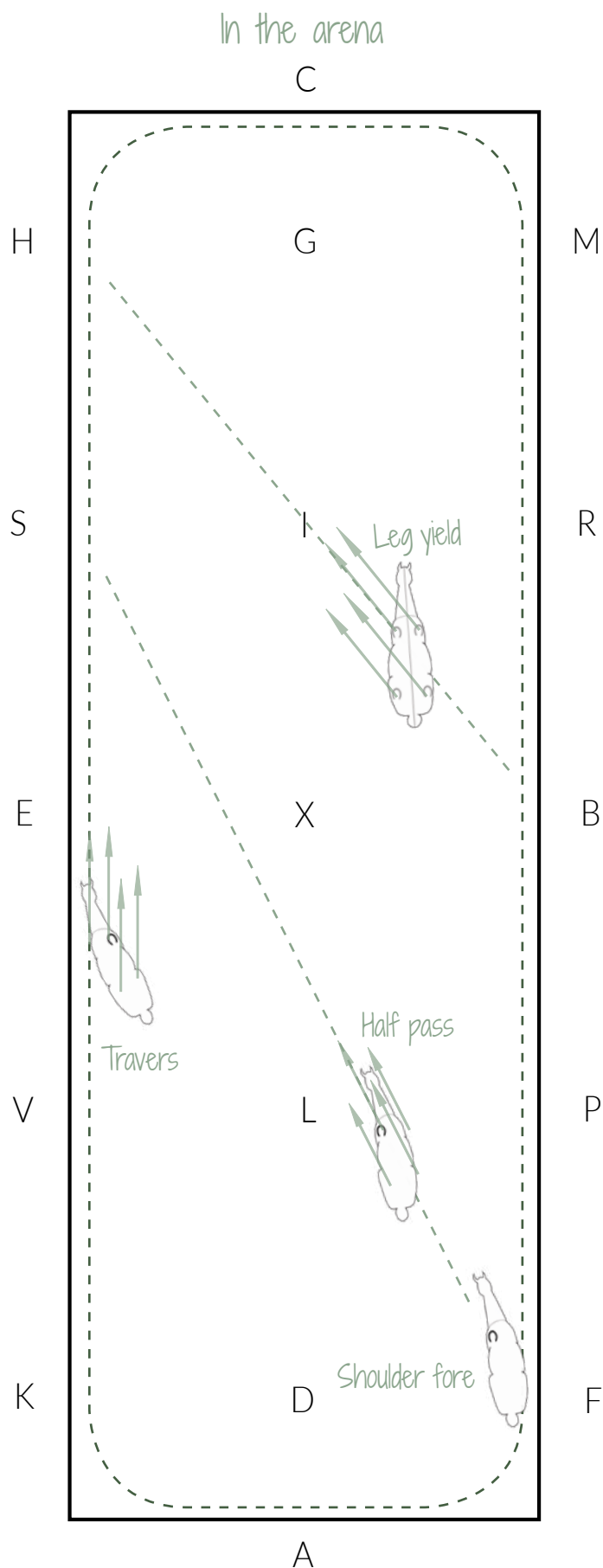
Half pass: the rider

The rider looks along the diagonal line, his/her shoulders maintain the shoulder fore position, keeping the outside shoulder forward and inside shoulder back. The rider's inside hip points along the diagonal line, and the outside hip and leg are back in the 'yield' position. Keeping your hips level and following the action of the gait helps maintain it.

The reins and hands of the rider go back to neutral position, but can be used to adjust the shoulders if needed. The yield position of the leg remains but, once the horse begins yielding, the pressure is relaxed to a contact level, so that it can be used to motivate more sideways if necessary. A whip-tap on the hindquarters can also be used, provided the horse has been trained to yield from a light whip-tap previously.

The rider's inside leg is used to increase the tempo or length of stride within the half pass and, in this case, it is important to apply the aid during the swing phase of the horse's inside hind leg (as the hind leg is travelling through the air).

Aim to finish a half pass slightly before (1 to 2 metres) the required letter, this means that your horse's body will be at the letter when the half pass is finished and you straighten. This will, later on, facilitate riding counter changes of hand or zig-zag lines in half pass, as well as riding flying changes at the end of a half pass in canter.





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In the half pass, the horse moves sideways and forwards, while flexing in the direction of travel.
Photo courtesy Ignacio Bravo.

TRAINING TIP

Errors in the half pass are corrected in the same way as in travers and there are many training exercises that can also improve the half pass.

Half pass: obedience

The horse's shoulders should always lead in the half pass. The horse is bent (like a banana), but his forelegs still have to travel along the diagonal line. Concentrate on the inside foreleg first, if it wants to move more forwards than sideways, you will need to apply a direct turn of the inside rein. If, on the other hand the shoulders are leading too much, use an indirect inside rein to bring them back into position. You may notice that, in both cases, the forelegs are taking steps that are too long; the horse is not collecting. The rider's failure 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 with the outside rein.

Half pass: rhythm and straightness

Testing self-carriage of both reins and legs to check the quality of the rhythm is very important. Testing self-carriage with one rein or leg at a time will test the 'straightness', which is really the quality of the flexion and the horse's ability to maintain it without constant rein pressure.

If the horse 'loses bend' during the movement, ride from the half pass (across the diagonal) to a shoulder fore (along the quarter line) to re-establish the bend, before asking him to yield again into the half pass. This will produce a half pass with greater bend and flexion.

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A half pass where the hindquarters lead occurs if the rider has not set up the shoulder fore position first. Shoulder fore produces the bend required and prevents the half pass from becoming a leg yield.

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.

Judge's Comment: Insufficient Angle

If your horse is struggling to maintain the degree of angle, changing the half pass into a leg yield will improve the yield aspect - the amount of sideways travel. You will need to train and consolidate this aspect at home before you can show an improvement in competition. Change the flexion and ask the horse for more yield of the hindquarters before returning to the half pass by changing the flexion back to the inside. Practicing going from leg yield to half pass is an excellent preliminary exercise. You should be able to leg yield at the same angle as the half pass.

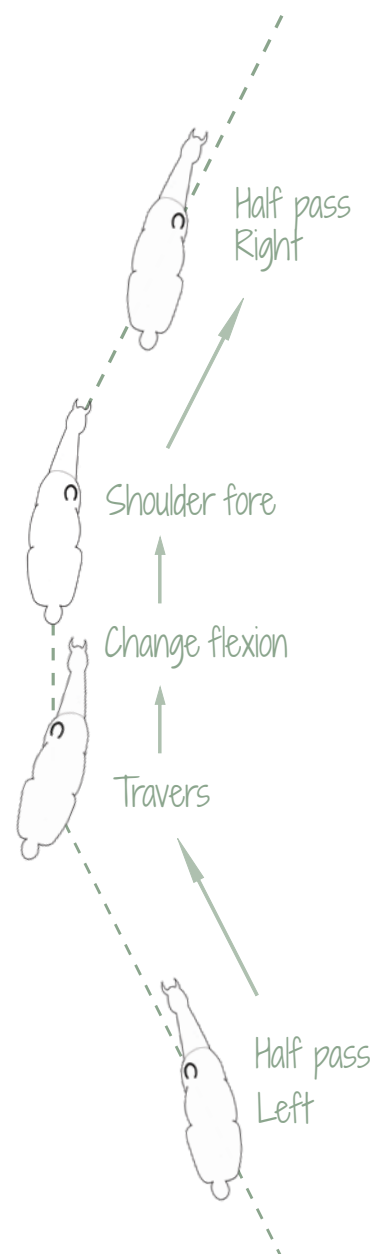
Going from a half pass to a greater angle in travers is also a remedy for this and is a preliminary exercise for counter changes of hand.

Lengthening the stride in half pass creates a ground-covering half pass. This coupled with shortening the stride improves the collection in half pass.

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.

Training Tip:

A failure of the horse to yield can be motivated with a light whip-tap on the outside hindquarter, but only if the horse has previously learnt to yield the hindquarters from a light whip-tap. Correcting the position of the shoulders also improves the yield of the hindquarters, but you will need to remind the horse to keep yielding. Begin training a smaller angle of half pass or a smaller amount of bend to make it easier for the horse.



Half pass: counter changes of hand

The counter changes of hand or zig-zag in half pass is introduced at advanced level. It involves changing direction in the half pass and is associated with a change of bend.

It is best to practice changing direction in leg yield before adding the increased difficulty of a change of bend.

Begin by riding in half pass to the centre line (zig) and, on the centre line, continue in travers. Once in travers, change the flexion and then change your leg position to go the other way back out to the track (zag).

When in canter, the trick is to ride straight after the zig, then change leads and flexion with a flying change before going the other way (zag).



A pirouette involves more collection and can be performed in walk and canter. The horse is flexed and bent to the inside. His shoulders turn around his hindquarters one body length, the inside hindleg steps up and down, ideally on the same spot, while the outside hind travels forward and around it.

Half pass: contact

Aim for the poll to be at the highest point by raising your hands. There may be 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.

The Pirouette

A pirouette involves more collection and can be performed in walk and canter. The horse is flexed and bent to the inside. His shoulders turn around his hindquarters one body length, the inside hindleg steps up and down in the same spot, while the outside hind travels forward around it. The horse should end up one body width on the inside track.

A half walk pirouette should be complete in eight steps of the forelegs.

A half pirouette in canter should take four strides and a full pirouette seven or eight strides.

The pirouette: the aids

To begin, ride in a medium walk with flexion to the inside, shorten the steps and collect the walk taking care to keep the tempo of the hind legs. Turn the forelegs to the inside two steps, using a direct turn aid for the inside foreleg and an indirect turn aid for the outside foreleg.

Have your outside leg in the position of yield and apply the yield aid at the end of the second step of the forelegs. Your inside leg can quicken the horse's inside hindleg.

Finish your pirouette as soon as you are parallel to the wall; ideally one body width from the wall. Ride straight to the wall, rather than yielding back or doing a half pass.

The pirouette: the rider

- Flex your horse by closing the inside armpit and fingers; maintain the line and tempo with your seat.
- Shorten the stride and feel the movement of the forelegs.
- Turn your shoulders to the inside, while applying the rein aids.
- As the forelegs turn, position your outside pelvis to the inside to yield in, while using your outside leg.
- Maintain the movement of the back of your pelvis to maintain the steps of the hind legs.

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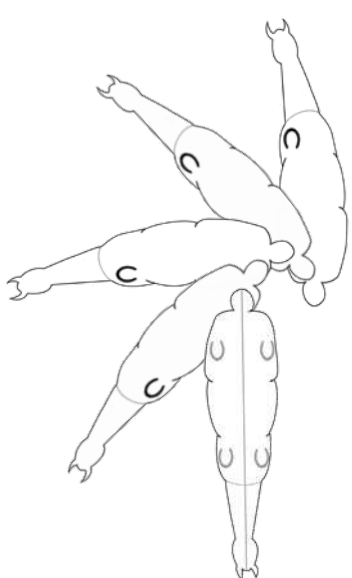
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LEFT: The horse is flexed and bent to the inside. His shoulders turn around his hindquarters, the inside hindleg steps up and down in the same spot, while the outside hind travels forward around it.

A half walk pirouette should be complete in eight steps of the forelegs.

Finish your pirouette as soon as you are parallel to the wall, ideally one body width from the wall. Ride straight to the wall rather than yielding back.

If a horse steps out with the hindleg first, he will not perform a good pirouette. Take care to maintain the tempo when collecting. Improve the yield step of the outside hind leg with a leg yield to passade, or by riding travers on a circle, increasing and decreasing the size of the circle with the reins.

In both canter and walk, ride a half pass to the centre line, ride travers for 1-2 strides, then circle back riding a working pirouette.

The pirouette: straightness

Stepping out with the hindlegs can also be associated with poor turns of the forelegs - the horse bends his neck and steps out, rather than turning his shoulders. Ride a large pirouette flexing to the inside and, at step four, flex to the outside and turn more in with an indirect turn for four steps. Going back to flexing to the inside, using a direct turn aid for four steps and repeating the indirect turn will help correct this. You will have ridden a full pirouette by this stage.

TRAINING TIPS

The pirouette: obedience

Start training pirouettes by riding a square in a medium walk, focusing on the turn of the forelegs. Each corner of the square should be completed in four steps of the forelegs. Ride these using inside direct turn aids only or outside indirect turn aids only. This helps to refine your horse's responses to the single turn aids. If your horse bends his neck instead of turning, you will have to go back a few steps and re-train the turn aids further.

Once this is established, ask your horse to yield his hindquarters through the corner, turning his forelegs second. This will help train the hindlegs not to step out.

Another useful exercise that does not require bend is to begin a leg yield from the long side. Once the rhythm is correct and your horse is straight, begin turning the forelegs gradually while yielding, until you are facing the opposite direction. This movement is called a passade.

When riding a pirouette, always turn the forelegs first. Problems associated with the size of the pirouette, (too big), are often caused by the hindquarters starting first. Begin by riding them larger than smaller, so as to maintain rhythm.

The pirouette: rhythm

Horses that 'ground' or do not keep the hindlegs walking in the pirouette are not maintaining the walk steps. It is often the inside hindleg that grounds. Feel the movement of the back of your pelvis - the moment it stops walking is the time when grounding occurs. Count the beat of the legs feeling for that moment so, if it happens at step five, you can be ready to use your inside leg to initiate the stepping of that hindleg at step four.

HELPFUL HINT

A common rider problem in any movement that involves yielding is that his or her hips fall out. The body gets tipped to the outside. The inside seat bone is no longer above the horse's inside back muscles or shoulders and this makes your seat ineffective when increasing tempo or stride length. The outside seat bone becomes ineffective at yielding too.

If you have a tendency to tip to the left, you will naturally curl your ribcage to the inside. Try sitting at the halt straight, feeling your hips and pelvis are centred. Place your right fist into the side of your right hip, and beginning pushing your hips to the left. Resist that push! Find the muscles of your core, ribs, thighs and pelvis that keep you in the straight position. Now, practice until it is easy. Use these muscles to prevent yourself falling out when yielding.

The pirouette: contact

Throughout all lateral work, remember the horse's frame when performing lateral work and the importance of an even, light contact during flexion.

- He should not lengthen nor shorten his neck while flexing. He should not swing his hindquarters and lengthen or shorten one side of his back before and during the lateral movement.
- He should maintain his body posture and poll at the highest point, whilst in the movement, in self-carriage.

Train and improve one thing at a time. Changing more than one variable at a time is difficult for the horse and for you too. When altering the frame, do it gradually and give the horse up to three seconds to achieve the required frame. This is softer on the horse's mouth and is felt less like a rein aid. Remember to adjust the tempo and stride length when you apply the aid.

Developing feel and harmony

Assessing your horse's responses while training is most important and you will feel this through your seat, legs and reins, as well as seeing it through the changes of his posture.

Check the rhythm of his legs using a metronome for tempo and ask someone on the ground to check his stride length by observing how much he tracks up.

Shape your horse's responses gradually and read his mood to decide what works best for him. Read your mood too! It may be better to ride out than train when you are tired or grumpy.

Cross train your horse by riding out, jumping, doing pole work or in-hand work, to keep him interested, improve his obedience in all situations and to build up his muscles. Dressage develops the physique of the horse, but it can be monotonous to ride in the same place, doing the same thing everyday. Above all, you must have fun with your horse and enjoy your training.

Next month

Don't miss next month's issue when Manuela will wrap up the series with a deeper look into the canter, developing the counter canter and training flying changes. All this while breaking down the movements 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, New Zealand, Canada, Denmark, Finland and the United Kingdom.



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