

Horse and Rider Schooling Tips from Horse Camp

Problem: Horse is tight in shoulders or is ignoring the rider's leg aids (falling through outside shoulder or not bending around the inside leg).

Recommended action or exercise: Use leg yield at the walk along the long side. Check to see that the horse is straight and its head is not too far toward the inside shoulder. Keep outside rein low (4 inches below withers) and still. Wait for horse to accept the outside rein and move off your inside leg without falling against outside aids. When he accepts, ride a straight line and give him a free rein and praise. A leg yield can also be performed on a 20m circle facing out of the circle (exercise devised by a contemporary of La Guerinière and a favorite of Harry Boldt).

Problem: Horse has locked his jaw on the outside rein and bit.

Recommended action or exercise: On a 20 m circle, use an elastic inside opening rein by turning the wrist 90 degrees to face fingernails upward and rotate your arm out away from your body (elbow is above hip bone) and hold rein position quietly until horse gives. When he gives, reward him by returning the inside rein to its normal position. Repeat as necessary to keep him soft. Be sure that outside rein is elastic (think of how wind fills a sail). Hands should have thumb as highest point (no flat "piano hands").

Problem: Rider is posting too quickly and "chasing" the horse's trot.

Recommended action or exercise:

- 1) Check to see that stirrup length is correct. At the halt, post up and down and check that your stirrups stay still. If they are push out, then they are too long. If you sit and take your feet out of the stirrups, they should hit at your ankles.
- 2) Rider's seat position may need adjustment. For example, if the rider is riding in a hunt seat position sitting on the pelvic bone as opposed to the two seat bones then they should adjust their seat using this exercise. At the halt, lift one knee as high as possible and scoot your seat bone under you. Repeat this for the other knee. In each case, you should remain in the center of your saddle but position yourself on to your seat bones.
- 3) Rider's back position may need adjustment. The lower back should be flat and not arched inward. The rider needs to adjust their pelvis angle such that their back should touch all four fingers of their trainer's hand against their lower back.
- 4) Rider's legs are too far forward and not aligned with their shoulders. Many saddles contribute to this problem by placing the stirrup leather bar too far toward the front of the saddle. The rider needs to adjust hip angle to bring their legs under them. Be careful not to let your legs come forward and brace when you are asking for down transitions.
- 5) Use your core to lower yourself into the saddle instead of falling onto the back of it. This makes demands on rider fitness. Practice!

Problem: Horse is against rider's hand in down transition from canter to trot.

Recommended action or exercise: The rider may be using too much hand or using their hand incorrectly: usually because basic position is unbalanced. First, quiet the seat and then put your foot steady in the outside stirrup. If needed, squeeze and release on the outside rein to get the down transition. Avoid hanging on both reins and standing in the stirrups (withdrawing the seat from the horse). Rider must not collapse or give away the reins in the down transition.

Problem: Horse is not moving freely.

Recommended action or exercise:

- 1) Rider's seat may be locked: can be caused by stiff shoulders. To unlock the seat, place your reins in your inside hand. Place your outside hand behind your back and hold the saddle on the inside half of the back. Practice this position in all three gaits to see that the horse moves more freely and their back comes up.
- 2) Especially at the canter, the rider may be locking their seat and their mistimed seat bones may be banging on the horse's back.
- 3) The rider's inside hip needs to be free to rise toward his/her outside shoulder with each stride. This freedom of the pelvis is enabled by having the inside leg at the girth, outside leg behind the girth.
- 4) Other causes for a locked seat can be turning your toes out, gripping with your thighs, shoulders too far forward.
- 5) Also check to make sure that your saddle is not too far forward on the horse's shoulder blades.

Problem: Horse is falling out of the canter.

Recommended action or exercise: Riders attempt to fix this problem may include trying to pump with their seat (loss of seat bone connection) or kick with their legs (loses connection with lower leg). This often results in raising the feet in the stirrups and losing stirrups, especially the inside stirrup. Instead, the rider needs to stretch her/his body core, get more weight in the stirrups, particularly the inside stirrup. Rider collapse of position and failure to maintain a supporting inside leg at the girth each stride will cause horse to fall out of canter. Practice a correct position at the halt or walk by standing in your stirrups.

Problem: Wrong lead.

Recommended action or exercise: Check position of legs and pelvis. The horse needs to feel your pelvis position so it can position its own pelvis for the correct lead. This requires some bend in the rib cage, and your horse might have trouble positioning its pelvis to the inside because the muscles on the outside of the requested bend are tight. If this is the case, then the horse needs some gentle spirals in and out on a circle to help it attain a bend.

Problem: Overshooting centerline in 10-meter half circles.

Recommended action or exercise: Check to see that legs are correct, with inside leg at girth and outside leg behind girth. Prepare further in advance and give aids for turn at least at E, B, F or K (or a bit earlier) to get the desired result.

Problem: Late to respond in down transitions.

Recommended action or exercise: Prepare further in advance and don't surprise your horse. Use subtle half halts to indicate something is about to occur. Half halts come in many kinds of combined aids: be sure not to lose your position by breaking at the waist, coming out of the saddle or driving with the seat. Do some transitions in front of a mirror to see that you are not sitting behind the vertical and "behind the motion."

Problem: Improving transition from trot to canter.

Recommended action or exercise:

- 1) Use shoulder fore position prior to transition to engage the inside hind.

- 2) Use spiral in and then while spiraling out ask for the canter on the 10m circle and then spiral out to 15 or 20 m canter circle.
- 3) This transition depends on tempo. Too quick a trot results in a lurch into canter. You need a deliberate, forward trot, especially on a green or novice horse.
- 4) Maintain a stretched core and do not pump: check to see that your pelvis is correct so your outside leg is slightly behind the inside leg.

Problem: How to get a smooth transition from free walk to/from medium walk.

Recommended action or exercise: To get a prompt, round and smooth transition without loss of impulsion or change in tempo,

- 1) In the free walk, stretch your core by putting weight in your stirrups and stretching your neck toward the sky (or up into your hat). This should cause your horse to raise his head without dropping his back so you can shorten the reins without having to “pull” him up.
- 2) The opposite is true for the transition from medium walk to free walk when you relax your core slightly and give the rein s-l-o-w-l-y, the horse should stretch down into the given rein.
- 3) The horse needs a relaxed, light connection from leg to rein to keep him round-forward-steady with a consistent posture, so do not abandon the reins or let them flap (disturbs the bit, horse becomes hollow). This is “the rein guided by gravity” spoken of in La Guerinière’s book. Use your calf muscles to keep the free walk active by helping the “belly swing.”
- 4) Your seat, hip joints should remain fluid, with upper arms hanging parallel to your rib cage and elbows above your hip bones. Sticking elbows out tenses back muscles connected to your seat.
 - a. Avoid using your hands/arms to get the transition before stretching your core to recover the rein given back to you by the horse,
 - b. Avoid freezing your hips and pumping with the upper body,
 - c. Do not rotate your shoulders each stride,
 - d. Do not pump your head/neck or flap hands up and down. Excessively busy rider motions interfere with walk rhythm.
- 5) How far down does the poll go in a free walk? At least down to the level of the withers, but can go lower. You should check your form in a mirror to see how your horse stretches.
- 6) Where does the nose go in a free walk? Forward-down-out (FDO) is preferred, but can go slightly behind vertical.
- 7) On a free walk diagonal, change bend at either end, not in the middle. Where a diagonal in free walk changes direction, select a bend at the start that is the same as the one in the change of direction. For example, an F-X-M diagonal starts with a left bend at F, but you can change the bend to the right with your lower legs and pelvis in the medium walk at F just as you come on the diagonal (one stride). Then you have the right bend already in place for the change of direction at X. Subtle adjustment of weight aids toward the inside of the bend just before X should accomplish a change of direction. Wait to give the stretch aid until the horse has his hind feet on the diagonal. At the other end, ask for the medium walk while the horse is still straight, then change the bend. All this requires rider mental focus and precise aids (if this were easy, you could buy it in a bottle at a store).
- 8) QUALITIES OF MEDIUM & FREE WALKS: Active top-line (head bob coordinates with stepping of hind legs and indicates “throughness”), clear over-step, marching steps and energetically forward with no change of tempo between walks.