

## AUXILIARY REINS AND GADGETS

There are a variety of auxiliary reins and gadgets available. The most commonly used will be discussed here: Standard side-reins, sliding side-reins, draw reins, Chambon and Gogue, and the over-check.

When using any type of auxiliary rein, it is of the utmost importance to pay attention to the proper fit of the bridle. In particular, the placement of the bit (as when starting a young horse, this should be a little higher rather than too low) and the snugness of the nose band. These considerations are of special significance if the horse is a re-schooling project with a faulty connection over the top line, or with a tongue problem, or both. The horse should be familiarized with any auxiliary reins very gradually and they must be adjusted in such a way that they do not cramp the horse together or create a "head set" as this may cause panic, often with disastrous results, both immediate and long-term. The purpose of auxiliary reins is to encourage, not to force!

Auxiliary reins must always be used for lunging. It is strongly recommended to use a special lunging cavesson rather than lunging off the bit. The choice of auxiliary rein depends largely on the horse's conformation and his response to any particular kind, as well as the experience of the trainer. A good rider and trainer will evaluate each individual case carefully and be aware of the pitfalls.

Other types of auxiliary reins have ultimately achieved their purpose if, allowing for an adequate time-frame for the desired muscular development, the horse will eventually go correctly in ordinary side-reins, and most important: his way of going will be enhanced when being ridden.

Apart from lunging, it is advisable to use side-reins (or sliding side-reins) on horses with beginner riders in order to protect the horse's mouth and to encourage the use of the top line. In this way, the beginner can concentrate on the driving aids and not become pre-occupied with the horse's mouth in order to "get him on the bit." Gradually, the rider can then be asked to take a light contact and feel how the horse responds by going more into the connection when the driving aids are applied. Thus the beginner will acquire rudimentary coordination of the aids without being detrimental to the horse. Even when beginners have had a good preliminary education on the lunge line, it is prudent to have the horse fitted in addition to side-reins with a safety strap on the pommel or a breast plate to provide security for the rider in precarious situations, and also to prevent the reins from becoming a means of support, even inadvertently! Unfortunately this method of teaching beginners is sadly neglected and consequently riders incur early in their career the vice of riding with their hands before ever having felt how to engage the horse with the seat and legs.

When at a competition, remember to refer to current competition rules to confirm which type of side reins may be used while at the competition.

### Types of Auxiliary Reins

#### *Standard Side Rein*

**STANDARD SIDE REINS** are the correct choice for horses with normal conformation and those that do not require specialized work. They are attached to the bit rings and to the side of the girth or surcingle. Some riders have been inventive in attaching them to the girth between the horse's front legs. Apart from the fact that this is illegal under USEF rules, this practice is unsafe and can also have very undesirable results in the training process, causing the muscles in the lower neck to tighten, bracing against the contact, or non-acceptance of the bit.

Standard side reins with an **INSERTED PIECE OF ELASTIC** are only helpful in the early familiarization phase and should be discontinued when the horse is beginning to accept some form of contact. They should not be considered for more advanced work as they provide too volatile a connection and in some cases provoke the horse to actively poke against them.

Side reins with **DONUTS** are the most commonly applied and are quite appropriate for any ordinary work. The buffer effect of the donuts makes them also useful for lessons with beginner riders.

However, as the horse becomes more advanced and has learned to accept the bit without reservation, only **PLAIN SIDE REINS** without any form of elastic should be used. This is especially important with work in hand.

**SLIDING SIDE REINS** can be of invaluable help with horses that have conformational shortcomings and re-schooling projects that refuse to use the back correctly. Particularly if combined with ground poles they are an excellent device for teaching the horse to work over the top line. Unlike standard side reins they do not tighten as the horse tries to change the position of his head and neck. Because they are not fixed at the bit rings, sliding side reins encourage the horse to stretch forward and down. (See appx: *Development of the Top Line* by Heike Bean and Sarah Blanchard.) There are two versions on the market. One is Y-shaped and attaches at the girth between the front legs, then divides and draws through the bit rings to the side of the girth or surcingle. The other version consists of two separate pieces which allows for a variety of triangular methods of attaching them. This makes them suitable for a number of purposes including beginner lessons and work-in-hand.



## ***Draw Reins***

**DRAW REINS** are much maligned and can indeed cause much damage if used for the wrong reasons. To quote a European authority: “Draw reins are like a razor in the hands of a monkey.”

Nevertheless they can be helpful with horses that have conformational problems, or due to faulty training have developed the wrong muscles on the underside of the neck and are locked in the back. If properly fitted from between the front legs, they encourage the horse to arch the back and loins, stretching over the top line and developing correct muscles in the neck. It is very important that the rider creates enough impulsion for this process to have the desired effect. If used in this manner, draw reins and sliding side reins pursue the same goals and can be beneficial in the training of the horse.

However, serious damage will result to the horse’s way of going if the rider uses the draw reins to “pull the horse together” from the front. Not only will the horse become set in the jaw and hard in the mouth, often causing tongue problems, but the neck will also develop a broken line between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> vertebrae.

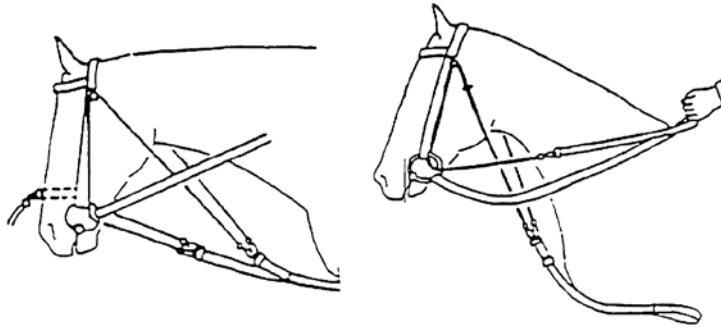
The most detrimental effect of the draw reins occurs when they are attached to the **SIDE** of the girth and are used to “keep the horse together in a frame.” The horse will soon learn to brace against them and to go in false elevation (absolute elevation) with the muscles on the underside of the neck bulging, again preventing the correct use of the top line, and thus allowing the horse to seek a multitude of subtle evasions which will eventually prohibit true collection. (Compare drawings in: *Development of the Top Line*, part II)

## ***Gadgets***

Whereas the previously discussed auxiliary reins only act directly on the bit and therefore on the mouth, the Chambon and the Gogue also exert pressure on the poll and some horses respond to this well. However the horse needs to be introduced to these gadgets very carefully as the unaccustomed pressure on the poll may cause panic at first. Both gadgets aim to stretch the horse over the top line and to strengthen the back. They can be particularly helpful if combined with ground poles. In Europe they are used primarily for schooling jumpers. A serious drawback is that because of the lack of sideways restriction horses may develop a tendency to fall over the outside shoulder when being lunged.

The **CHAMBON** runs through the reins from the headpiece at the poll and is snapped onto the bit rings (see *German FN Lungeing*, pp 27 and 28). When the horse lifts the head, the bit acts as a gag, and the pressure on the corners of the mouth and the poll combined, induces the horse to stretch forward and down. The disadvantage is that when this happens there is no contact with the bit. It is not recommended to use a Chambon when the horse is being ridden.

Because the **GOGUE** has no fixed attachment to the bit (see *German FN Lungeing*, pp 29 and 30) its action on the mouth is different and, according to its inventor, Rene de Gogue, contact with the bit is maintained and there is also a better sideways restriction. When the Gogue is used independently, that is to say, with an additional rein into the rider's hands (see diagram), its action is similar to that of a draw-rein. Used in this manner the Gogue has a big advantage over the draw-rein. Because the stretching effect is obtained chiefly by pressure on the poll, the contact on the snaffle rein stays a great deal lighter and the horse responds by becoming softer in the mouth, making him also more sensitive to the rider's weight and leg aids. The independent Gogue provides the rider with many variables between increasing and eliminating its effect.



Gogue attached for lungeing

Independent Gogue for riding

Whereas sliding side-reins, draw-reins, Chambon, and Gogue all aim at stretching the horse's top line forward and down, the **OVER-CHECK** has quite a different purpose. It is attached to the D-rings on the pommel or the top of the surcingle, runs through the rings of the headpiece at the poll and is fixed to the bit rings (see *German FN Lungeing*, pp 49 and 50). Horses that bore down on the forehand by leaning heavily on the bit or that try to jerk the rider forward by setting their molars on the bit, can be cured with this device. It is commonly used on carriage horses to prevent them from grabbing the bit and start pulling with the mouth! As the horse is required to keep his head in a more or less fixed position, the trainer needs to be very proficient in lungeing before the use of this gadget should even be considered. Good impulsion must be maintained so as not to create stiffness in the back. The over-check can also be useful for horses that want to go behind the bit and roll themselves in to avoid contact. However, a great deal of caution and expertise of the trainer is necessary when using it for this particular problem. It is not recommended to use this gadget when the horse is being ridden.

All these auxiliary reins and gadgets have their merits and demerits, and should be used with circumspection and expertise. In particular, draw-reins bear an inherent danger as they provide seemingly short cuts, and have a tendency to make bad riding less obvious.

But, one should also remember that it is not these devices that cause problems, but the people who use them badly and without knowledgeable help!