

CHANGES OF LEAD AND FLYING CHANGE OF LEAD

Definition

Change of Lead Through Trot

“This is a change of lead where the horse is brought back to the trot and after a few trot strides, is restarted into a canter with the other leg leading.” [USEF Rule Book DR105]

Simple Change of Lead

“This is a change of lead where the horse is brought back immediately into walk and, after a few steps, is restarted immediately into a canter on the opposite lead, with no steps at the trot.” [USEF Rule Book DR105]

Gymnastic Purpose

The gymnastic purposes of changes of lead are to help develop, as well as test, the horse’s collection, coordination and balance, and to improve the quality of the canter.

Qualities Desired

The qualities desired in ‘Changes of Lead through Trot,’ are that the horse maintains his straightness, makes a balanced transition to two to three steps of trot, and strikes off clearly to the new canter lead.

The qualities desired in a ‘Simple Change of lead’ are basically the same as the change through the trot except that the transition from canter should go directly to two to three walk steps, and to the new canter lead with no trot steps.

The transition to walk must be immediate without any intervening vaguely trot-like strides, but also smooth. The steps must be determined and the four footfalls of the gait must be distinct. The transition to the new canter must also be immediate. The horse must canter straight and must constantly remain on the bit.” [Dressage, A Guidebook for the Road to Success, p 103]

Aids

The aids for changes of lead are the same as the aids for the canter. The rider approaches the change of lead sitting in the aids for that canter lead. For example, when in right lead canter, the weight is slightly heavier on the inside or right seat bone. The inside or right leg, is active at the girth. The outside or left leg is slightly back and passive, with the horse bent in the direction of the lead. The rider prepares for the transition to trot or to walk with a series of half-halts. After two to three clear steps of trot or walk, the rider bends the horse left, pushes the new inside hip forward with the weight slightly heavier on the new inside seat bone, slides the new inside leg to the girth and the outside leg slightly back and applies the canter aid for the left lead. [Advanced Techniques of Riding, pp 51-52]

Training Advice

An adequate degree of collection is needed before attempting any change of lead. If the horse is unable to do transitions without falling on the forehand, rushing, becoming crooked, etc., then the collection in the canter needs to be improved with half-halts or simple transitions.

The best way of ensuring that the hind limbs are sufficiently engaged to permit a smooth transition from canter to walk is to execute it on the circle or at a later stage, on a 10 meter volte. If the horse stiffens in the transition to walk, the canter must not be resumed before the regularity of the walk on the circle or the volte with correct bend is established again. Transitions to walk and to canter must be frequently executed and the periods of cantering must be short.

Common Mistakes

In changes of lead through trot or simple changes of lead, riders often allow their horses to become crooked, rush through the change, or let their horses fall on the forehand.

Flying Change of Lead

Definition

“This change of leg is executed in close connection with the suspension which follows each stride of the canter. Flying changes of leg can also be executed in series, for instance at every fourth, third, second or every stride.” [USEF Rule Book DR105]

Gymnastic Purpose

The gymnastic purpose of changes of lead are to help develop, as well as test, the horse’s collection.

Qualities Desired

In the flying change of lead, “the horse, even in the series, remains light, calm and straight with lively impulsion, maintaining the same rhythm and balance throughout the series concerned. In order not to restrict or restrain the lightness and fluency of the flying changes of lead in series, the degree of collection should be slightly less than otherwise at collected canter.” [USEF Rule Book DR105]

Aids

“In preparation for a single flying change, the rider uses half-halts to increase collection. During the canter stride, before the actual change, the rider starts to give the aid by changing the horse’s flexion into the direction of the new canter. The rider’s new outside leg is placed a little further behind the girth; to control the new outside hind leg, which will have to jump well under the body to carry the whole weight immediately after the moment of suspension. The new outside rein clearly supports the rider’s outside leg in this function. The rider’s new inside leg remains a moment longer in its old, supporting position behind the girth and helps the new outside rein to keep the horse straight. Only thereafter is this leg brought forward into its new forward driving position close to the girth, engaging the new inside hind leg. During the last phase of the flying change, the rider eases the new inside rein slightly, without losing contact, to let the new inside foreleg stride out and touch down to conclude the third phase of the first stride in the new canter.” [Advanced Techniques of Riding, pp 51-52]

Training Advice

Flying changes of lead should not be attempted until the horse is able to perform the simple change of lead easily, responding to the lightest of canter aids. There are many ways to train flying changes. One example is to establish counter canter going large around the arena, and at the end of a long side, ask for the flying change. Flying changes can also be asked for at the end of a diagonal line, from the half-pass, from a 20 meter circle in counter canter, or various other ways.

Common Mistakes

In flying changes as well as the other changes, riders tend to throw their upper bodies to get the change which can lead to horses changing only in front or behind.

Change Of Canter Lead Through Trot On The Diagonal

By Cindy Sydnor (September 12, 2009)

In first level the horse is required to change rein at the canter with a change of lead through the trot. When done well, the horse is in a good 3-beat, well balanced canter and on the bit. A little before X a smooth transition to the working trot is made, and the horse remaining reliably on the bit, makes two to four trot steps straight, followed by a straight canter depart to the other lead. The trot steps should be centered over X.

This exercise tests the horse and rider’s combined skills and coordination, also the rider’s ability to keep the diagonal line straight without the benefit of the rail, while changing gaits and flexion/bend. Like most dressage exercises, when done well, it looks easy; but it is also easy to make mistakes and “lose” the connection and straightness, to say nothing of the possibility of producing the wrong lead after the trot.

Let's go through the exercise starting on the right rein at M and changing across the diagonal to K with the change through the trot over X.

- The right lead canter is well established: three-beat, on the bit, very slightly positioned to the right, in good balance. The rider sits a little deeper on her right seat bone, inside (R) leg is "at" the girth, outside (L) leg is somewhat behind the girth, left outside rein is well connected and keeping the horse well flexed at the poll; inside (R) rein is also connected with the responsibility of keeping the horse's jaw soft and also guiding/steering the horse through the corner between C and M onto the diagonal.
- The horse is straightened on the diagonal in the right lead canter. Three preparatory half halts with seat, legs, and left rein are given as the horse's right hind lands (this is the moment the rider's seat is deepest in the saddle during the canter). The rider's weight is made equal on both seat bones in conjunction with the third half halt, and the horse recognizes that he should transition to trot, which he does. He will land in the trot on his right hind and left front diagonal pair.
- One counts that first step of trot as number one, followed by two more. The rider gives two preparatory half halts to the right hind leg for a canter depart to the left lead. The half halt aids for the left lead canter include a change of flexion, a weight shift onto the left seat bone, and a clear right rein aid. The rider's leg position must be definitely changed: left leg near the girth and right leg behind the girth.
- To keep the diagonal line straight, the rider keeps her eye on K throughout the exercise and rides the horse well between the right and left aids.
- The exercise requires coordination of the aids in producing the change of gaits and leads in the canter. However, if the half halt aids for the first transition from canter to trot are successful, the timing for the left lead depart is almost guaranteed, because the inside hind leg of the horse in the down transition becomes the outside hind leg for the canter depart. In other words the rider only has to focus on the right hind on the M-X-K diagonal. She would focus on the left hind when riding the exercise from left to right, such as on the diagonal from H to F.

When teaching this movement to an inexperienced horse, it is advisable to allow more than the ideal number of trot steps. Do not insist on two to four trot steps right away when schooling the horse, as this might result in abrupt transitions and loss of connection. It is important when riding a test that this movement is not only executed correctly, but that it has uninterrupted "flow."

Therefore, when schooling, the best method is to increase the number of trot steps perhaps to six or even ten, thus giving rider and horse more time to deal with the necessary changes in aids and balance. When this becomes easy, then the trot steps can gradually be reduced.