

Half-Pass: Cornerstone of Third Level

Our exclusive train-the-trainer series continues

BY LILO FORE

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LAST MONTH, IN "STEPPING UP to Second Level," Vicki Hammers-O'Neil walked you through the many important training milestones and new movements that riders and horses encounter at that critical juncture in a horse's training.

The move from Second Level to Third is also very significant. Introduced in the Third Level tests are the half-pass, extended gaits, flying changes, and *überstreichen* (release of the rein to show the horse's straightness and self-carriage).

As the horse's training progresses through the levels, more suppleness, impulsion, and obedience to the rider's aids are developed. The Third Level movements require a higher degree of lateral and longitudinal "throughness" and suppleness so that more engagement and collection are attained. All of these movements are collecting and collected exercises that develop the horse's strength so that, with the proper progression of these movements, his hind legs will be able to carry more weight and his forchard will become even more light and achieve more mobility. His gaits will become more cadenced and expressive, adding to the ease and grace



FEI-level rider and trainer Kathy Priest rides It's Me H in trot half-pass right at the 2003 USDF FEI-Level Trainers' Conference in Florida. The crossing of the horse's legs is apparent. Kathy has collapsed her left hip ever so slightly, but this is a lovely picture of both horse and rider position.

of the movements. More power in his hind legs will also allow him to cover more ground while remaining in the proper "uphill" carriage in the required medium and extended paces. Only correct preparation of these exercises will achieve what we want most: balance and harmony.

To do Third Level and the associated movements justice requires detailed explanations. Therefore, I've split my discussion of this level into two parts. This month, I'll address the half-pass and the counter-change of hand (the half-pass "zigzag").

Half-Pass Prerequisites

Just as the shoulder-in is the hallmark of Second Level, half-pass is the quintessential Third Level movement. Half-pass is a collecting movement in which the horse steps both forward and sideways while moving in the direction of the bend. It can be ridden in all three gaits but is shown in competition only at the trot and canter.

If you have the skill and knowledge needed to ride a correct shoulder-in and travers (haunches-in) along the wall, then you can ride a half-pass, which is essentially travers on a diagonal line.

Rider prerequisites. The most important half-pass prerequisite for the rider is balance. You must be able to sit centered in the saddle, with equal weight on both seat bones, and with a correct and independent seat. When I say "sit centered," I mean that your entire upper body, lower body, hips, stomach, chest, shoulders, head, and legs should hang equally on either side of the horse.



The training scale or "pyramid of training"

You also must possess the necessary body awareness to support your horse in straight and bending exercises through proper weight distribution.

If you can ride in balance, then you can use the aids independently instead of relying on your hands for support.

Another important rider prerequisite is the ability to coordinate your aids. If you can feel which aids—legs, seat, and reins—to apply at which time, and if you can ask your horse to flex at the poll and to bend, then you can use the aids to help him to learn the half-pass.

Of course, you must also be aware of the common half-pass pitfalls (more on those in a minute) and why they happen. If you do, then you can work to prevent them.

Horse prerequisites. To be able to half-pass correctly, your horse must be at least somewhat straight and must be able to stay in balance on both straight and curved lines. He needs to understand the meaning of your seat and leg aids. He must possess the correct degree of acceptance of the contact and must have learned to go forward and sideways from the leg with proper impulsion. He should be able to flex at the poll and bend in both directions, even while traveling on a straight line. His gaits must be sufficiently educated to have achieved a degree of collection.

The Half-Pass Aids

The aids for the half-pass are the same as for travers along the wall. (As with all of the movements and exercises I'll give you in this article, practice first in the walk, then move on to the trot and the canter when you and your horse feel comfortable with them.)

Seat. Begin by sitting centered in the saddle and then shifting slightly more weight onto your inside seat bone. (I always recommend thinking of sitting in the middle, no matter what exercise you are trying to ride. Doing so will help to

keep you from collapsing at the waist. If you collapse toward the inside, your outside seat bone will lift and your inside seat bone will end up in the middle of the saddle.)

Legs. Both of your legs are of equal importance in riding the half-pass.

- Position your inside leg at the girth and your outside leg behind the girth. The inside leg develops and maintains the bend and also has a forward driving function. The inside leg also activates the horse's inside hind leg, causing it to step more under his body; and encourages the engagement of the outside hind leg.

Your outside leg shifts the horse's haunches inward, forward, and sideways, into the direction of the bend, and maintains the forward impulsion needed for his hind legs to develop the carrying capacity to stay in balance.

A common fault is that the rider "overdrives" with the outside leg, which shifts the horse only sideways and causes him to lose straightness and balance. Another common error is bringing the inside leg too far forward and away from the horse's side. Both of these mistakes cause the horse to become crooked. As a result, he loses the correct bend, and his hind legs are not able to carry him properly across the diagonal line of movement.

In addition, avoid drawing your outside leg too far back behind the girth. In this position, it will be less effective and will lose its forward driving strength.

A point to remember: If the half-pass doesn't happen when you give the aids, pushing harder with your legs will not fix the problem!

Reins. In dressage, the inside rein flexes and bends, while the outside rein regulates and supports. In the half-pass, the inside rein points the horse toward the place where you want the half-pass to arrive. It also flexes his poll and positions his neck slightly into the direc-



Olympic veteran Carol Lavell and Much Ado demonstrate the trot half-pass left. From this angle, you can clearly see the forward-and-sideways motion of the horse's stride as well as the fact that Carol has him well connected into her outside rein. He shows good flexion and bend—a nice picture.

tion of travel. The degree of flexion and bend depends on the angle of the half-pass. Due to the level of difficulty of the tests and to the collection required, Third Level does not yet require a steep angle.

The outside rein regulates the horse's poll and neck position and therefore maintains its role in straightening the horse, even as he travels on the diagonal line in a bent position.

Positioning for the Half-Pass

In the half-pass, the horse's shoulders "lead" ahead of his hind legs slightly. If his body were not positioned in this way, his outside legs (e.g., his right legs in left half-pass) would be unable to cross in front of his inside legs.

One of the most challenging aspects of learning to ride the half-pass is understanding how to position your horse correctly relative to the diagonal line

of travel. Help "map" the desired line by having someone stand at the point where you want the half-pass to arrive. You can even place a series of traffic cones on the diagonal line to guide you. If you have access to an arena with mirrors, use the mirrors to check your horse's angle and degree of bend.

Training the Half-Pass

In a successful half-pass, you should feel that your horse is "connected" from your inside leg to your outside rein. If you lose this feeling, ride shoulder-in until you regain the connection, making sure that you are sitting centered in the saddle with your inside seat bone weighted yet not collapsing your inside hip.

Loose your control over the inside bend while traveling into the direction of the bend by riding travers along the wall, the quarter line, or the center line. Then try riding travers along a diagonal line. Keep in mind that the gait is of the utmost importance and should never lose its quality. Balance is what you live to create and maintain. The half-pass is a beautiful movement, but only if it is ridden in balance and if the gait remains pure.

All horses have a "hollow" (easier to bend; often weaker) and a "stiff" (difficult to bend) side. It's important that you know which of your horse's sides is which.

On a horse's hollow side, the half-pass will tend to become overbent, with the haunches leading. His neck may bend more than necessary, and his shoulders may become restricted in their motion. The half-pass steps may become irregular as a result, and he may lose his forward impulsion. To correct these problems, think of riding the half-pass with less bend by using your regulating, supporting, and straightening outside rein to control the flexion and the bend. To adjust the

angle of the half-pass, give small half-halts with your outside rein when your horse's outside hind leg is about to leave the ground, before it crosses over his inside hind leg.

Here are some exercises that I've found useful in correcting an overbent half-pass. Practice them in the walk first; then try them in the trot.

Exercise: Straight to travers. Ride straight forward for a few strides, either along the wall or on a diagonal line; put your horse in travers for a few strides; then straighten again. Repeat as needed.

Exercise: Leg-yield to half-pass. Leg-yield from the rail toward the center line; then half-pass back to the rail. Don't strive for a competition-perfect leg-yield; use the leg-yield as a correction to teach your horse from "falling over" his inner leg by first yielding him away from it, then moving him into the direction of the bend.

Exercise: Shoulder-in to half-pass. If your horse leads with his haunches or overbends in the half-pass, ride shoulder-in to half-pass and back to shoulder-in until you have gained control over his hind legs and shoulders.

On a horse's stiff side, there tends to be insufficient bend in both travers and half-pass. To correct this, ride bending exercises, such as eight- to ten-meter circles, until your horse bends properly around your inner leg and moves into your outside rein without evading the circle by falling out with his hind legs. Then, in travers along the wall, you can use your outside leg to shift his haunches away from the rail. As he moves his haunches, his body curves around your bending inside leg, but his head remains facing the direction of travel.

If you lose the bend, don't push the hind legs more. Instead, go back to the circle. Reestablish the correct bend and then repeat the exercise. More pushing or pulling will not make the movement

better; it will only inhibit the flow of the gait because your horse will get tense and worried, and the freedom of his shoulders will be inhibited as a result. He should never feel trapped when he is being taught lateral exercises.

From time to time, as you practice these and the other exercises described in this article, *überstreichen* (release the reins) to see whether he carries himself, and to make sure that you are not hanging on the reins for balance. You want to be sure that he is not leaning on your hands—no "falling onto a shelf" if you release the contact for a moment. I'll discuss *überstreichen* in more detail in next month's article.

Finally, keep in mind that training entails repetition—the same preparations, ridden over and over. A movement cannot be taught on one day. You must learn the feel of the movement, and so must your horse.

Needed Refreshment

When you teach or train lateral exercises, it's important to refresh the horse's gaits in between with some lengthenings or medium gaits so that he feels rewarded for his efforts to collect. All lateral movements are in general collecting and engaging exercises, so he must periodically be refreshed both physically and mentally.

To refresh your horse mentally, stretch him down and forward in whatever gait you've been working in order to release muscle tension and to reestablish relaxation. To refresh him physically, give him walk breaks between repetitions.

From Bend to ...

The travers movement is not only a prerequisite to half-pass; it also lays the foundation for the turn on the haunches, the walk pirouette, and even the canter pirouette. The same rider's aids apply: inside seat bone weighted; inner leg on

the girth to bend and maintain bend; and outside leg slightly behind the girth to make the horse's outside hind leg step forward and more to the middle of his body, in front of his inner hind leg and into the direction of the turn. His outside hind leg should not evade by stepping to the outside.

Whatever the movement, you must always maintain the forward motion so that the gait is not lost during the pirouette.

Depending on your horse's training and level of collection, the size of the pirouette turn will vary. Ultimately, he should be able to turn on an imaginary large serving platter.

The Zigzag

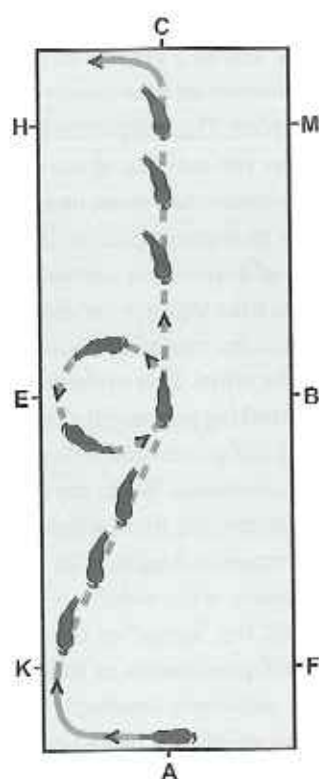
If your horse has learned the travers along the wall and on the diagonal, you can begin training the counter-change of hand (the half-pass "zigzag") at the trot. The important points in this exercise, as always, are to maintain his balance and to preserve the quality of the gait.

Riding a zigzag well is difficult and requires confidence on the part of both horse and rider. I believe in riding patterns because they help instill this needed confidence. I will give you a variety of exercises that will help you to accomplish the task in a peaceful way.

Start your zigzag work by training the "zig." Start in the walk to be certain that your horse understands the aids. It is also best to begin on his concave, more naturally bent, "easier" side, which on many horses is the right side.

Exercise: Beginning zigzag work.

To begin, ride half-pass right to the center line (see diagram above). When you reach the center line, straighten for a stride or two, change the bend to the left, and circle left ten meters. Continue down the center line in shoulder-in left. When you reach the short side of the arena, turn left. If the exercise has been



Introductory half-pass "zigzag" work

successful thus far, ride a 20-meter circle and allow your horse to stretch forward and down. Repeat the pattern in the other direction and in the trot.

After you and your horse feel comfortable with the above exercise, try this variation. Start with the same half-pass right to the center line and ten-meter circle left, but then ride *travers* left down center line to the short wall. Building the exercise in this way will teach you to establish the correct new seat position and to change your weight and leg aids and your rein position accordingly. Riding the circle on the center line will teach your horse not to fall into the new bend or direction.

If you ride this pattern toward a mirror or a ground person positioned at the center of the short wall, you will be able to see and correct any deviation in the line of travel.

After you are able to ride this sequence alternating between travers and shoulder-in after the ten-meter circle

left, try varying it by riding a diagonal line to the left in travers after the circle left. The diagonal line creates the "zag" of the zigzag half-pass!

One benchmark for success in the "zag" is the maintenance of the bend. If you lose the bend, do not simply increase your leg aids. Instead, straighten your horse on the diagonal line, or even ride shoulder-in left on the diagonal or leg-yield back to the right for a few strides. After he becomes rebalanced into your outside rein and bendable, move back into travers left.

To help the horse and the rider to be better prepared for the change of bend, one can use a variety of exercises. As with all half-pass riding, the rider must have a specific line in mind. I help my students by using cones. I place a cone in the corner where they are to begin the half-pass "zig," two cones where they should arrive and prepare to "zag," and a fourth cone where they should finish the "zag." In the beginning, I make the diagonal lines shallow so that the half-passes are not steep.

Exercise: "Zig" to leg-yield. To help your horse to maintain a better vertical and upright balance, ride the "zig" of the half-pass, then straighten him and continue in the same direction in leg-yield. This exercise helps to keep his shoulders from falling against your inner leg and rein in the first portion of the zigzag. If he gives you the feeling of becoming more upright during this exercise, you will know that he is stepping further under his body with his hind legs. You will feel as if he grew an inch taller.

Continuing to ride sideways in a failing half-pass is very counterproductive. If your horse is moving against your inside leg and losing bend, your rein aids usually become too strong, which often results in a tilted head, a bit pulled through his mouth, and an unhappy horse who doesn't understand the punishment he is receiving with your in-

correct aiding. It is better to go back a step and reestablish the pattern before attempting the half-pass again. If you were trying to jump a four-foot fence but your horse kept knocking it down, wouldn't it be logical to go back to a three-foot fence, establish confidence, and then gradually increase the height? Common-sense training!

Remember to give your horse frequent breaks. After a few sequences of lateral work, ride forward with increased impulsion, refresh the gaits, or stretch down and forward to release muscle tension. Take walk breaks as needed. Be sure to work in both directions as well.

More Half-Pass Exercises

Here are some more exercises to train, confirm, or improve your half-passes.

Exercise: Shoulder-in/half-pass variation. Ride shoulder-in to half-pass. Straighten your horse and then ride shoulder-in to half-pass in the opposite direction. This exercise can be done on the center line, on the quarter lines, or beginning along the wall.

Exercise: Diagonals to half-pass. Ride diagonal lines in shoulder-in or travers position and then develop the half-pass for several strides.

Exercise: Incorporating transitions. Start by riding a diagonal line in shoulder-in or travers position as described above; but before developing the half-pass, ride a ten-meter circle, followed by a few steps of medium trot. If your horse remains in balance, try increasing the impulsion during the shoulder-in or travers; then come back to increased collection with more fluent and correct gaits and throughness.

The Canter Half-Pass

Although the aids for half-pass in canter are the same as those in the trot, there is an important biomechanical difference in the two movements. In the trot

half-pass, the horse's outside legs cross his inside legs to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how steeply the half-pass is ridden. The steeper the half-pass, the greater the amount of crossing.

In the canter half-pass, however, the sideways movement occurs during the moment of suspension (the moment in which all four legs are airborne), and so there is no crossing of the limbs. During the initial beat of the canter, the outside hind leg pushes off the ground, providing the propulsion upward, sideways, and forward. When the forchard lifts off the ground, that's when the sideways movement begins. The moment of suspension is the sideways "jump." As a result, the "jump" of the canter in canter half-pass moves as follows: up, forward, sideways, landing.

As you can tell, this movement is complicated. Therefore, it is very important that you can control the coordination, placement, intensity, and feel of the aids.



Carol Lavell and Much Ado in the second beat of the canter half-pass right. The horse is traveling "uphill" with good balance. Carol's position is good: She is sitting centered in the saddle, with her weight over her inside (right) seat bone and her shoulders level.

MEET THE EXPERT



COURTESY OF LILO FORE

Lilo Fore is an examiner in the USDF Instructor Certification Program. She is an FEI "I" judge, an FEI "C" judge for disabled riders, a USA Equestrian "S" judge, and a USA Eq "R" sport-horse judge. She owns and operates Sport Horse America, a dressage-training facility in Santa Rosa, CA.

Without the necessary coordination and timing, there is no clarity for the horse in the aids for canter half-pass. It is feel that comes into play here.

Make Haste Slowly

Using the correct exercises to begin with and in an appropriate order is so important. A rider may find one exercise easier to coordinate than another, or a horse may enjoy one more than another. I believe that horses learn in different ways, just like children. We must find the patterns and exercises that make sense to them—not just to us—and we must learn to speak their language.

If we have done our job well by developing the horse through a correct progression of basics, then the results will be somewhat like a domino effect. When properly aligned, dominos topple in a precise, fluid pattern. If they are not lined up precisely, they will fall every which way. We create similar chaos in our horses if we attempt a level of work based on incorrectly trained or non-existent basics. Every school figure in dressage, even a single corner, has a purpose in the training.

If a movement cannot be achieved, you as the rider and trainer must find out why. In all likelihood, a certain basic detail of importance was left out.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 55)

When Paul assessed the contact as being correct, the tension spikes (the greatest amount of tension measured, not a constant) peaked at around five pounds. Between spikes, the tension decreased to around one pound, and the mean value throughout the stride was around three pounds. These measurements are in the same range as we have found in other trainers riding different horses.

We are grateful to Paul Belasik for donating his time and expertise in performing this study. We hope to have an opportunity to continue these studies by

giving other experienced trainers an opportunity to take part in the future. ▲

Hilary Clayton, BVMS, PhD, MRCVS, is a world-renowned expert on equine biomechanics and conditioning. Since 1997, she has held the Mary Anne McPhail Dressage Chair in Equine Sports Medicine at Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, East Lansing. The position focuses on dressage- and sport-horse-focused research. Dr. Clayton contributes a quarterly report to USDF Connection on her team's research efforts and findings, which she hopes will help dressage and sport-horse breeders, owners, riders, trainers, and caretakers to enjoy longer and more productive careers with their animals.

CLINIC FROM PAGE 42

You may have been in too great a hurry to move through the levels. It is definitely more exciting to do flying changes than simple changes. Even more exciting is when one can wear a tailcoat rather than a short jacket! There is that thinking that "We did Second Level last year, so we have to do Third Level this year." However, this progression is possible only if your horse's basics have been de-

veloped correctly from the beginning.

The difference between a horse whose training has been rushed and one that has been developed slowly and correctly is much like the difference between fast food and gourmet cuisine. The differences are obvious, and the latter reflects a well-prepared and carefully developed recipe built on basics. ▲

Next month: Lilo Fore continues her discussion of training for Third Level.



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