



## CHAPTER

# 6

# Leg-Yield

*Riding a leg yield at the beginning of the warm-up is the perfect exercise for a horse at any level of training to test the horse's reaction to your lateral moving (sideways) aids. Keep in mind that you must always test your aids or your horse will test you.*

**T**he leg-yield is the first movement called for in dressage tests that asks the horse to move forward and sideways at the same time. Generally, it is helpful to train the turn-on-the-forehand prior to training the leg-yield.

## Imperfections and Evasions

Your horse:

- 1 Drags his haunches.
- 2 Leads with his shoulders.
- 3 Lacks "crossing" in his legs.
- 4 Tilts his head.
- 5 Changes his tempo.

Before I discuss how to train the turn-on-the-forehand and leg-yield, and then address these imperfections, look at the USEF Rule Book definition for the leg-yield (see sidebar, p. 51).

The leg-yield is part of a pyramid of increasingly difficult movements that require the horse to move both forward and sideways. Here is what you should master at each level of what I call the "Pyramid of Lateral Movements" before progressing to the next level (fig. 6.2):

- 1 Turn-on-the-forehand
- 2 Simple leg-yield (on the diagonal)
- 3 Leg-yield tail-to-wall and head-to-wall
- 4 Shoulder-in
- 5 Travers (haunches-in) and renvers (haunches-out)
- 6 Half-pass



# How To Ride and Train

## Turn-on-the-Forehand

I prefer to always teach my horses turn-on-the-forehand before introducing the leg-yield. This teaches them to move away from the leg without having any impulsion or forward movement and is the first lesson in the inside-leg-to-outside-rein connection. I use this simple exercise all the way up through the levels to reinforce the horse's reaction to the "move sideways" aid.

Even though it is said that horses doing dressage are only doing what they do by nature, I don't believe I have ever seen a horse running sideways in the pasture, "naturally" performing a half-pass or a leg-yield. I do think that teaching the horse to move sideways and still a bit forward at the same time, which encourages him to cross his legs, requires a bit of time and suppling.

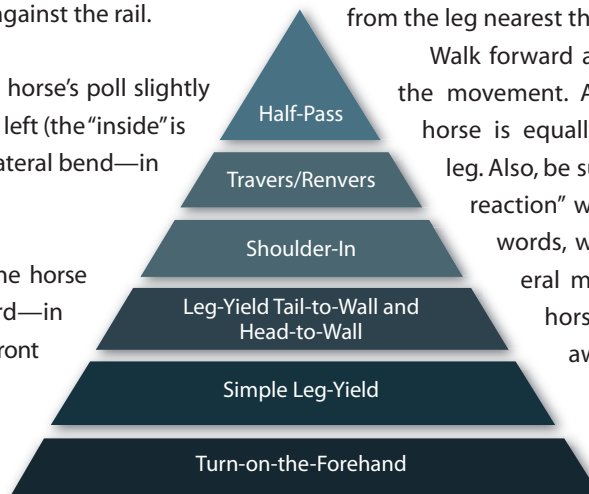
### Rider's Aids

When performing a turn-on-the-forehand off your *left* leg, first halt the horse on the rail, with your left hand and leg against the rail.

1 *Inside rein:* Flexes the horse's poll slightly toward the rail or to the left (the "inside" is in the direction of the lateral bend—in this case, the left).

2 *Outside rein:* Keeps the horse from walking forward—in other words, keeps the front legs in the same spot.

### 6.2 The Pyramid of Lateral Movements.



3 *Outside leg:* This is not necessary behind the girth. You want the horse's hindquarters to step to the right, so you might need to move your outside leg forward toward the shoulder to help support the outside rein and act as a barrier to keep the entire horse from moving to the right.

4 *Inside leg:* This leg now becomes the lateral moving leg and therefore moves about 3 inches behind the girth. This is the active leg.

5 *Seat:* Sit in the middle of the saddle.

With the horse halted next to the wall, flex him slightly in the direction of the wall. Use your leg (the one closest to the wall) just behind the girth and, with a gentle pressure, ask the horse to move one step *sideways*. The opposite rein (the one furthest from the wall) will be the "Whoa" rein. If the horse moves *forward*, halt again. He must understand that the outside rein says "Stop. Don't move forward." Reinforce this aid and then "give"—let the horse stand a few seconds. Then ask the horse to move sideways again, away from the leg nearest the wall.

Walk forward a few steps and repeat the movement. Always make sure the horse is equally responsive off each leg. Also, be sure to allow an "action/reaction" with your aids. In other words, when you use your lateral moving leg (action) the horse should quickly step away from it (reaction). This is followed by the reward (praising, petting the neck,



sugar, voice, relaxing aids). Do not allow the horse to just do the exercise on his own without your aids.

Turn-on-the-forehand is also the beginning of the lateral bending aids. The “dining car” and the “caboose” of your choo-choo train will move outward away from the leg. Later, when you ask the horse to bend correctly, your outside leg behind the girth will “catch” the caboose. For now, allow both “cars” to move out!

### Leg-Yield

Once the horse understands the turn-on-the-forehand, you can begin to sequentially train the *three* types of leg-yield:

- 1 On a diagonal line
- 2 Tail-to-wall
- 3 Head-to-wall

### On a Diagonal Line

#### Rider's Aids

Begin by leg-yielding off the left leg to the right, away from the wall. Note that the horse's left side is his “inside” since his poll is flexed slightly toward the wall. The horse is on four tracks, which means that if you stand in front of the horse, you can see all four of his legs.

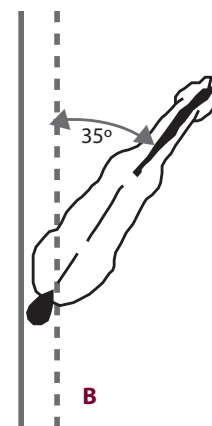
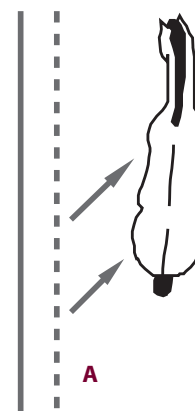
*1 Inside rein:* Keeps the horse flexed in the poll slightly to the left.

*2 Outside rein:* Controls the speed as well as helps to support the horse's balance by not allowing him to fall on the outside shoulder.

## USEF Rule Book LEG-YIELD

The horse is almost straight, except for a slight flexion at the poll away from the direction in which he moves, so that the rider is just able to see the eyebrow and nostril on the inside. The inside legs pass and cross in front of the outside legs. Leg-yielding should be included in the training of the horse before he is ready for collected work. Later on, together with the more advanced movement shoulder-in, it is the best means of making a horse supple, loose and unconstrained for the benefit of the freedom, elasticity and regularity of his gaits and the harmony, lightness and ease of his movements.

Leg-yielding can be performed on the diagonal in which case the horse should be as close as possible parallel to the long sides of the arena although the forehand should be slightly in advance of the quarters. It can also be performed along the wall in which case the horse should be at an angle of about 35 degrees to the direction in which the horse is moving (figs. 6.1 A & B).



**6.1 A & B** Leg-yield on the diagonal (A) and along the wall (B). Note that leg-yield along the wall can be either tail-to-wall or head-to-wall (see p. 53).



3 *Inside leg:* In this direction, your left leg is the lateral moving leg, positioned 3 inches behind the girth. This is also the active leg.

4 *Outside leg:* You may use the outside leg (in this direction, your right leg) behind the girth when the horse's haunches are leading. Use this leg near the shoulder to help support the outside rein when the horse is falling over the outside shoulder. And, when the horse is going sideways *too much*, you can use this leg as the active leg for a few strides in order to encourage the horse to move more forward and less sideways.

5 *Seat:* Sit in the direction of travel—in this case, to the right.

Here, the horse's body stays *parallel to the wall*. This is the easiest way to begin the leg-yielding as it requires the least amount of suppleness and crossing of legs. In addition, start by asking the horse to move *toward* the wall from the quarterline so you ask him to do something he likes—most young horses like to stay near the wall, as it gives them confidence and a place to find their balance.

Once the horse is more proficient at leg-yielding and has more lateral reach, the angle of the leg-yield can be increased to add more difficulty. You can then begin to ask the horse to move *away* from the wall toward centerline.

For this first type of leg-yield, turn onto the quarterline and walk straight ahead. Be sure the horse understands he must *go straight first* and that he doesn't begin to fall sideways in anticipation. He must wait for your leg-yield aids. Then, use a little outside rein to "close the front door" a

bit, put your inside leg slightly behind the girth, and move your weight in the direction you want the horse to travel. The movement must be a forward and sideways one. The horse should remain flexed or positioned *away* from the direction of travel, but I find it helpful to change the flexion a bit to keep the horse supple in both reins.

Once the horse understands the aids for the leg-yield on the diagonal, you can move into trot. Again, start from the quarterline or centerline and move *toward* the wall first. When the horse is proficient in this exercise, leg-yield at the trot *away* from the wall to the quarterline or centerline, as well.

### *The Stair Step Exercise*

When you find the horse starts to fall sideways out of balance, there is an exercise to solve this problem. If you review the aids I've described for leg-yielding on the diagonal (see p. 51), you'll see that your outside leg can also be used up near the horse's shoulder. Also note that when one leg sends the horse sideways, your other leg is either the *holding* leg or the "*forward-sending*" leg.

In leg-yield, the horse should be moving away from the *inside* leg ("inside" the bend), but when he falls through the outside rein and leg, you can correct the problem by changing the active leg: use the *outside* leg to send the horse a bit forward and straight ahead. So, go sideways from your inside leg a few strides, and then use your outside leg to send the horse straight ahead for a few more strides. It is what I call the "Stair Step Exercise." The horse needs to learn which leg is in charge of what job.



## Tail-to-Wall

### *Rider's Aids*

Begin with a leg-yield on the right rein, moving away from the right leg (inside).

*1 Inside rein:* Leads the forehand off the wall and flexes the poll slightly to the right.

*2 Outside rein:* Controls the speed as well as helping to support the horse's balance by not allowing him to fall on the outside shoulder.

*3 Inside leg:* The right leg will be your active and lateral-moving leg—positioned about 3 inches behind the girth.

*4 Outside leg:* Can be used behind the girth if the haunches fall too much to the left, or may be used closer to the shoulder to help support the outside rein.

*5 Seat:* Sit in the direction of the movement—in this case, to the left.

Again, this type of leg-yield is on four tracks. The inside hind and inside front legs will cross over the outside legs (see fig. 6.1 B, p. 51). This is a good way to start the "idea" of shoulder-in (a movement on three tracks—see p. 77).

Be sure to start at the walk. You will lose a bit of angle in the trot and of course until the horse becomes supple, you will also lose some impulsion. Be sure to only do about 12 meters at first and then straighten and reward the horse. Don't keep going until you have no impulsion left, or until the horse gets fed up with the exercise.

## Head-to-Wall

### *Rider's Aids*

Begin with a leg-yield off your left leg (the "inside" leg).

*1 Inside rein:* As in turn-on-the-forehand (see p. 50), the inside rein will slightly flex the horse's poll to the left. The inside rein also helps the horse understand that the forehand should be positioned to the left, away from the direction of travel.

*2 Outside rein:* Controls the speed as well as helping to support the horse's balance by not allowing him to fall on the outside shoulder.

*3 Inside leg at the girth:* This is the left lateral-moving leg, positioned about 3 inches behind the girth. It's the active leg.

*4 Outside leg:* Can be used behind the girth if the haunches fall too much to the right, or used closer to the shoulder to help support the outside rein.

*5 Seat:* Sit in the direction of the movement—in this case, to the right.

This type of leg-yield is also on four tracks. The horse's head and shoulders face the wall and the outside front and outside hind legs cross over the inside legs.

This exercise is the beginning of travers, renvers, and half-pass (see pp. 84, 85, 121). It teaches the horse to displace his hindquarters from your outside leg behind the girth. It also teaches the horse not to throw the "caboose" of your choo-



## Personal Story

**Applause (real name Rocket Launcher)** was an unbroken three-year-old purchased by me as my first “really good horse.” He was 16.3 hands and a half-brother to Bruce Davidson’s famous event horse, J.J. Babu. Applause finished in twenty-first place in the USDF Horse of the Year awards at First Level one year. Little did I know that his registered name was actually a fitting one.

Our early training on the long line went smoothly. However, it turns out Applause was a bit cold-backed. Once he was mounted, he would either quietly walk forward or start bucking like a saddle bronco. Even having someone lead me forward wasn’t safe—at least for the person trying to lead him. You could never really tell which decision he would make. I remember not

really wanting to get on...I had to just hope he would outgrow the habit, which he did, thankfully. And I never did hit the dirt!

Our next obstacle was leg-yield. I was out at Keenridge preparing for the Regional Championships, and in a lesson, Hilda Gurney thought it was time for Applause to learn head-to-wall leg-yield. My horse was

not happy with the idea of crossing his hind legs and found his family eventing history handy as he jumped out of the dressage ring and raced through the walnut orchard. I told Hilda that head-to-wall really should be taught with an actual wall in front of the horse...not an 18-inch fence.

**6.3** Here I am on Applause, a young horse I trained. During one early lesson he decided leg-yielding head-to-wall did not hold his interest!





choo train to the outside of the circle when asking for lateral bending.

In this exercise it is important for you to move your weight into the direction of travel. This aid will then be established when you add bend in the more difficult lateral exercises. The horse must move away from your leg, under your weight.

### JUDGING TIP

The difference between a “7” and a “10” in leg-yield in a test is that while both horses go from Point A to Point B correctly, the horse that receives the higher score takes fewer strides to get there. Later in training you can use the leg-yield to increase the lateral reach in the half-pass.

## Cures and Solutions

### 1 Problem: My horse drags his haunches.

This is usually a lack of responsiveness to your lateral-moving leg aid. Go back to turn-on-the-forehand (see p. 50) and use your whip if you need to reinforce your leg aid. The horse must answer your quick and light aid to be successful later in the half-pass.

### 2 Problem: My horse leads with his shoulders.

This is a bit like when the horse drags his haunches (see above). Remember, once the horse is leading with the shoulders, you cannot make his hind legs go faster. You will need to slow the shoulders down. You can stop going sideways for a few strides and get your alignment (see the

Stair Step Exercise on p. 52). You can also counterflex the horse a bit in the direction you are going. This will help “stand up” the outside shoulder.

### 3 Problem: My horse lacks “crossing” in his legs.

As mentioned in the Judge’s Tip at left, the difference between a high score and a modest score from the judge is really the amount of lateral reach the horse can show. From Point A to Point B, your horse may be able to do it in ten steps, but another can do it in eight steps. Some horses, by nature, have quite a lot of lateral reach—but since the horses reading this book are *not* perfect, they will need a bit of work here!

You may have to feel that you are actually pushing the horse sideways out of balance in order to increase his lateral reach. The horse must really open up the angles of his shoulders. Don’t ride leg-yield at home as you would at a show. Your job in training is to raise your standards and develop more lateral reach and suppleness than you would need in competition. If your horse can easily do a leg-yield at home with energy and ease, then when it comes to show time and the requirement is easier, he will be a star!

Try counting the number of strides it takes you to get from Point A to Point B. Do this in both directions. One direction will take more strides because the horse will be less supple this way. First, work on this more difficult direction until it matches the other side. Then, when both sides are equal, start working again on improving overall lateral reach. You should be able to take out a stride or two each direction.



#### 4 **Problem: My horse tilts his head.**

This is caused by the horse not staying even in both reins. You will need to change the flexion in the poll to keep the horse supple. Your goal in the show ring is to maintain flexion away from the direction of travel, but in training the suppleness and even contact is more important than maintaining flexion in one direction.

#### 5 **Problem: My horse's tempo changes.**

This is a balance issue. For a high score in the show ring, the tempo must be the same. In schooling, work first toward a good response to the leg aid and good lateral reach. At each show you can then find the exact balance that works for your horse on that particular day.