

Pyramid of Training

ONGOING PURSUIT OF OBEDIENCE AND HARMONY

THROUGHNESS

Throughness is an equestrian term which means the supple, elastic, unblocked, connected state of the horse's musculature and a willing mental state that permits an unrestricted flow of energy from back to front and front to back (circle of the aids), which allows the aids/influences to go through all parts of the horse. A horse is said to be 'through' when, by virtue of a lively impulsion and the suppleness of his joints, free from the paralyzing effects of resistance, he obeys willingly and without hesitation and responds to the various aids calmly and with precision, displaying a natural and harmonious balance both physically and mentally. These qualities are the hallmark of a correctly schooled horse.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONDITIONING

Throughout the horse's training, the muscle development and conditioning should be addressed in order to progress without physical or mental harm toward the fulfillment of the horse's potential. The healthy horse's physique develops in a discipline-specific way, which allows him to perform increasingly demanding exercises with increasing ease. The correctly developed musculature protects the joints, tendons, and ligaments and contributes to the horse's longevity.

Compiled by USDF "L" Faculty and Certified Instructors Examiners and Faculty.

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Premise

Historically, the training of horses was developed mainly for military purposes. Horses were and still are to this day a valuable economic and cultural asset. Therefore, it makes good sense to train them with humane and careful methods based on the nature and physiology of the horse, so that they are able to lead long, healthy, and useful lives. These methods were refined for centuries - the earliest surviving evidence are books by the Greek general and horseman Xenophon (ca. 400 B.C.)- and have become known as "Classical Horsemanship". Unfortunately, there have been many instances when these traditions have been violated in different cultures and by various individuals.

Horses are no longer used for military purposes (except in very rare instances) but have become our partners in equestrian sports. However, the nature of the horse- even taking into consideration modern scientific revelations- has remained essentially the same. Classical principles have not lost their validity; on the contrary, they will help us to produce a dressage horse that can truly be a work of art.

To ensure that classical principles and traditions are honored and adhered to in our present-day culture, the Pyramid of Training (Training Scale) evolved as a means to illustrate the different steps/concepts which are essential ingredients in the correct training of a horse. It is important to realize that these 'steps' are interrelated. One is not supposed to perfect each 'step' before attempting the next, but rather use them as reference for understanding the general progression and interactive development from the beginning of training to its culmination.

RHYTHM

(with ENERGY and TEMPO)

Rhythm is the term used for the characteristic sequence of footfalls and timing of a pure walk, pure trot, and pure canter. The rhythm should be expressed with energy and in a suitable and consistent tempo, with the horse remaining in the balance and self-carriage appropriate to its level of training

RELAXATION

(with ELASTICITY and SUPPLENESS)

Relaxation refers to the horse's mental state (calmness without anxiety or nervousness), as well as his physical state (the absence of negative muscular tension). Usually, the mental and physical states go hand in hand. The horse learns to accept the influence of the rider without becoming tense. He acquires positive muscle tone so that he moves with elasticity and a supple, swinging back, allowing the rider to bend him laterally as well as lengthen and shorten his frame.

A horse showing the correct responses when allowed to chew the reins out of the hands is relaxed.

CONNECTION

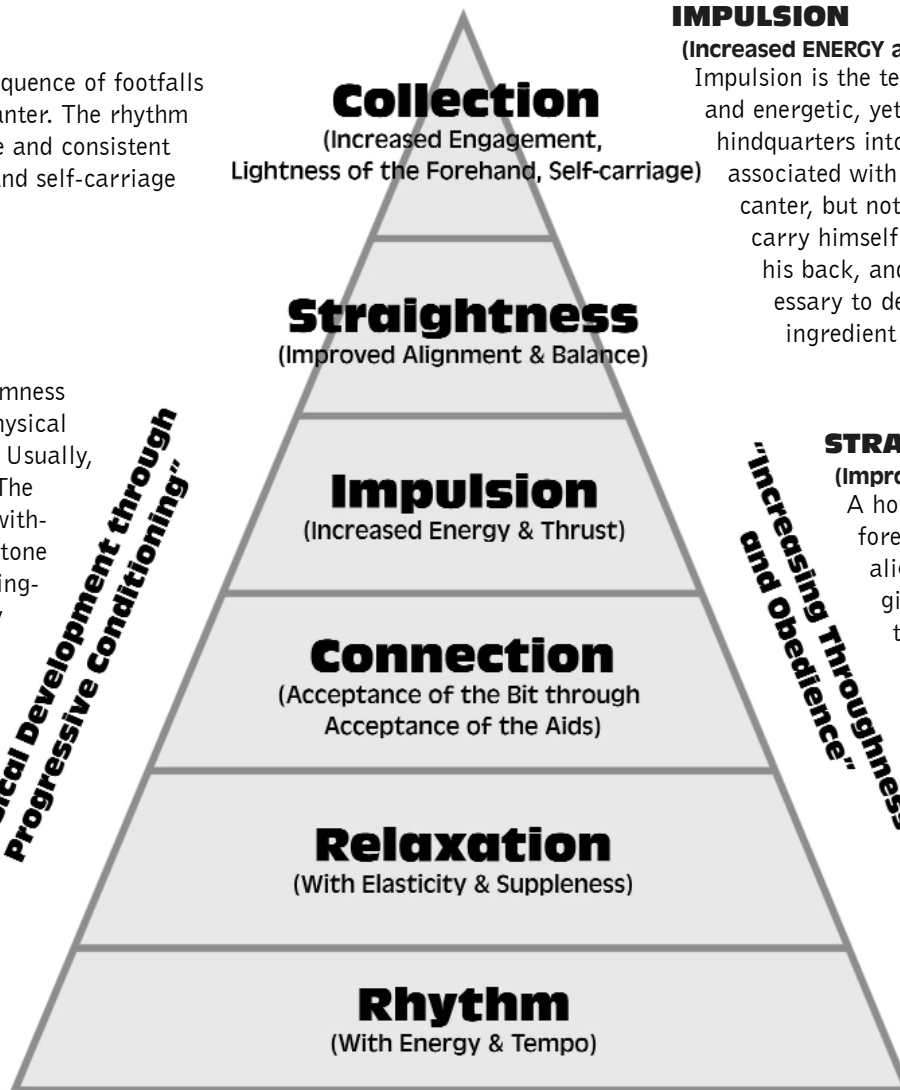
(ACCEPTANCE of the BIT through ACCEPTANCE of the AIDS)

The energy generated in the hindquarters by the driving aids must flow through the whole body of the horse and is received in the rider's hands. The contact to the bit must be elastic and adjustable, creating fluent interaction between horse and rider with appropriate changes in the horse's outline.

Acceptance of the bit is identified by the horse quietly chewing the bit. This activates the salivary glands so that the mouth becomes moist and production of saliva is evident. The softly moving tongue should remain under the bit.

The quality of the connection and balance can be evaluated by 'überstreichen', releasing the reins (to demonstrate self carriage) or by allowing the horse to chew the reins out of the hands (to demonstrate relaxation).

"Physical Development through Progressive Conditioning"



IMPULSION

(Increased ENERGY and THRUST)

Impulsion is the term used to describe the transmission of an eager and energetic, yet controlled, propulsive thrust generated from the hindquarters into the athletic movement of the horse. Impulsion is associated with a phase of suspension such as exists in trot and canter, but not in walk. It is measured by the horse's desire to carry himself forward, the elasticity of his steps, suppleness of his back, and engagement of his hindquarters. Impulsion is necessary to develop medium paces, and later on, with the added ingredient of collection, extended paces.

STRAIGHTNESS

(Improved ALIGNMENT and BALANCE)

A horse is said to be straight when the footfalls of the forehand and the hindquarters are appropriately aligned on straight and curved lines and when his longitudinal axis is in line with the straight or curved track on which he is ridden. By nature every horse is crooked, hollow on one side and stiff on his other side, thereby using one side of his body somewhat differently from the other. This also causes uneven contact in the reins. Appropriate gymnastic exercises develop the horse's symmetry. This allows him to engage both hind legs evenly and prepares him for collection. This process improves the lateral as well as the longitudinal balance of the horse.

"Increasing Thoroughness and Obedience"

COLLECTION

(Increased ENGAGEMENT, LIGHTNESS of the Forehand, SELF-CARRIAGE)

The horse shows collection when he lowers and engages his hindquarters—shortening and narrowing his base of support, resulting in lightness and mobility of the forehand. Because the center of mass is shifted backward, the forehand is lightened and elevated; the horse feels more 'uphill'. The horse's neck is raised and arched and the whole top line is stretched. He shows shorter, but powerful, cadenced, steps and strides. Elevation must be the result of, and relative to, the lowering of the hindquarters. This is called 'Relative Elevation'. It indicates a training problem if the horse raises his neck without displacement of his center of mass to the rear. This is called 'Absolute Elevation' and can, if pervasive, adversely affect the horse's health and his way of going. Collection with Relative Elevation will enhance the horse's self-carriage, so that he can be ridden almost entirely off the seat, and the aids of the legs and especially those of the hands can become very light.