

Lesson Topic: Rein Back

Definition

The horse's legs lift and step back in definite two-time diagonal pairs, as in trot but without a moment of suspension. The execution must be straight without any sideways deviation (escape) of the hindquarters.

Purpose

The rein back develops and tests suppleness, throughness and overall obedience to the driving aids and restraining aids. Increased bend of the hindquarters and lowering of the croup creates increased engagement making it a collected or collecting exercise. Due to the demand on the hindquarters, introduce rein back carefully and do not repeat it too often.

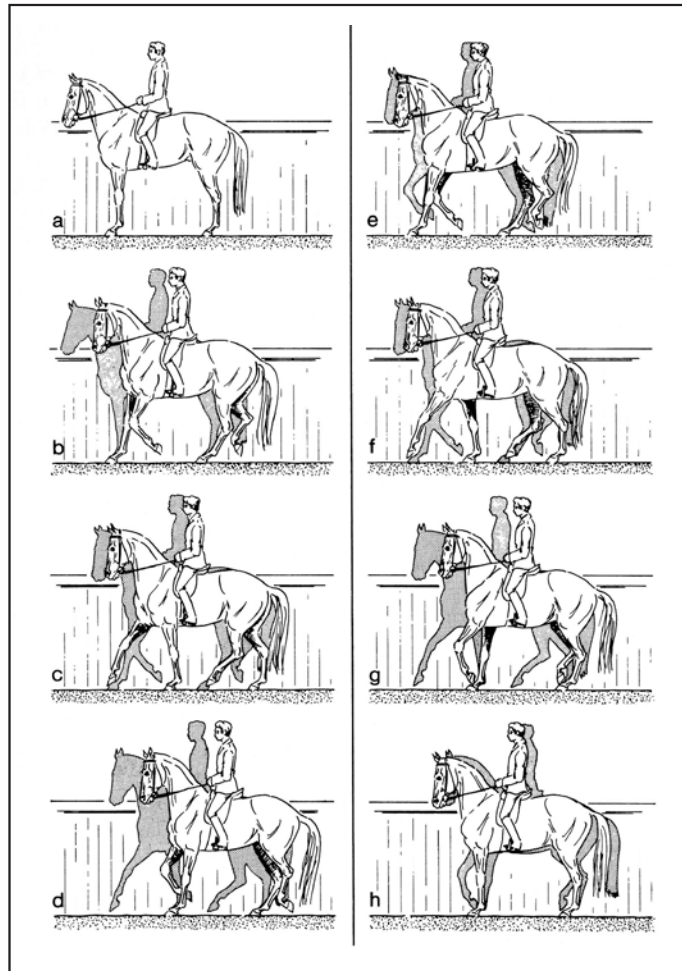
Lesson

Horse and rider are in a well-balanced, slightly collected trot on the right rein. Prepare for a halt on the long side at B (see lesson topic on "Halt" page 24). The halt is square, the horse stays on the aids. Ride a transition forward to trot. Stay on the track. Repeat the trot-halt-trot transitions at A and again at X turning across the school from E to B and changing rein. Repeat the halt at A. From a well-balanced, square, relaxed, pleasant-in-the-hand halt, apply the aids for rein back. Slide both legs slightly back to guard against sideways deviation right or left. Engage seat and both legs (calves) and drive forward. Momentarily restraining the rein, lighten the seat slightly as you feel the horse's response to the driving aids. After completion of the desired amount of steps, (two or three to start with), yield forward with both hands and engage your driving seat and both calves (now back in their original position at the girth) to allow the horse to move forward into the walk out of the rein back. Praise him. Repeat the exercise again after riding large in collected trot. This time ride forward into collected trot from the rein back of four steps and change rein on the diagonal KXM in either a medium or lengthened trot to refresh the forward energy and engagement.

The important moment in the rein back is the yielding forward (hands) with both reins at the completion of the desired steps back, so that the student does not block the horse in front as he asks him to move forward again. The rider is "opening the door." The simultaneous driving aids ideally maintain an uninterrupted contact.

Common Faults

1. Horse lands on forehand in unbalanced halt. Hind legs are out behind ("parked") and not square, consequently, the response to the driving aids is hard to obtain. Student resorts to pulling on both reins and leans back with legs shooting forward. Horse gets hollow, and escapes sideways into dragging, resistant steps.
Correction: Create a balanced trot in good tempo, rhythm and relaxation. Practice trot-halt-trot transitions, creating a response to half-halts and driving into unyielding aids of seat, leg, and hand. Keep the horse on the seat in halt. With a better-engaged halt, practice rein back along the wall to help straighten.



The rein-back.

2. Horse drags his feet backward in rein back leaning on hands, poll too low and behind the vertical.
Correction: Ride a more engaged trot into the halt. Repeat several times. Lighten the seat slightly; without leaning forward, slide the lower legs slightly back as you drive into unyielding and then yielding rein aids. Ride forward after two or three steps and then praise. To help improve suppleness and responsiveness to aids, ride turns on the forehand and/or turns on the haunches.
3. Trot and halt are tense. Halt is unbalanced, not immobile, and hollow. Nervous anticipation of rein back. Horse does not listen or wait for rider's aids. Rein back has rushed, snapping steps, not in diagonal sequence and often more than the desired number of steps. The forward transition is hollow, against the hand, and rushing.
Correction: Relax the horse in working trot on large circles and serpentines, right and left. Then develop slightly collected trot by increasing and decreasing the circles. Follow with trot-halt-trot transitions. Once the horse is confident and relaxed in the halt due to better engagement and balance, practice one to two steps of rein back followed by lots of praise. Do more in a few days, keeping relaxation in mind together with all the considerations of the Pyramid of Training.