



GET TO SECOND BASE

Success with Lateral Movements

Part 2 of a six-part series on finding success at Second Level

By Beth Baumert

Photographs by SusanJStickle.com

In your quest for Second Level success, you'll want to pay special attention to certain things that develop collection in your horse. (What's collection? See my simple explanation at right.) This series will systematically address each of them: figures and movements with bend, transitions that skip a gait, and half-halts.

Be cautious about directly asking for collection. When you concentrate

too much on collection for collection's sake, it's human nature to get a little greedy and overuse the aids, which can cause horses to tighten their bodies and thus lose some of the basic qualities you worked so hard to gain. Instead, keep "collection" in the back of your mind and focus on the prerequisites and components of collection. Then collection just happens automatically.

To that end, this month, we'll look at how you can develop collection using figures and lateral movements (movements with bend): specifically, circles, shoulder-in, haunches-in (travers), renvers (haunches-out), and half-pass. These figures and lateral movements help to create collection because they put your horse in a collected shape while at the same time retaining all the basics that we discussed last month.

In a nutshell, your lateral work will be successful if you are able to retain the qualities we discussed last month in part 1, and also achieve the following add-on difficulties:

- *Control the bend.* The rider's bending aids shape the horse in whatever degree of bend is required. The position of those bending aids never change, regardless of whether your horse is doing a ten-meter circle, a shoulder-in, a travers, a renvers, or a half-pass.
- *Control the line of travel.* Be very precise about your line of travel. If your horse is deciding where he's going, you'll lose the bend, the throughness, and the balance required for collection.



THE MOTHER EXERCISE OF DRESSAGE: *Shoulder-in* (shown by Fourth Level USDF-certified instructor/trainer Mica Mabrugaña on Infanta HGF) is the classic collecting exercise for dressage and a cornerstone of the Second Level work

Collection: A Simplified Definition

The definition in the USDF Glossary of Judging Terms is longer and more detailed, but this easy version works for my students and me.

Collection: an improvement in the horse's natural balance such that he carries more weight over his hindquarters. He takes shorter steps without losing impulsion, thereby causing the hind legs to bend more and the hindquarters to lower, giving him a shorter, "uphill" outline with an arched, upward-reaching neck.



THE RIGHT DEGREE: *Correct bend on a ten-meter circle. This is the amount of bend you want for shoulder-in and other lateral movements.*

Bonding with Bend

The ten-meter circle that was homework last month should be easy by now. Your body should know what ten-meter bend feels like, and your horse should know, too. Then it will be possible to retain that ten-meter bend when you go on a specific straight line in lateral movements.

How does ten-meter bend help create collection? In these three ways:

1. In bend, the positioning of the horse's inside hind leg is directly under his center of gravity, so it's in a po-

What's the Purpose?

According to the US Equestrian Federation Rule Book (online at usef.org), the purpose of Second Level is: "To confirm that the horse, having achieved the thrust required in First Level, now accepts more weight on the hindquarters (collection), moves with an uphill tendency, especially in the medium gaits; and is reliably on the bit. A greater degree of straightness, bending, suppleness, throughness, balance and self-carriage is required than at First Level."

sition to carry the weight of the horse and rider.

2. In bend, the inside leg-to-outside-rein connection is improved and creates leverage that helps lighten the forehand when the inside hind leg is carrying.

3. In correct bend, the outside hind leg doesn't drift out. Rather, it carries and connects to the rider's outside connecting and collecting aids.

The shape of ten-meter bend creates a Second Level degree of collec-

tion. Eight-meter bend helps create a higher degree of collection. Collection develops.

Try this exercise: Trot down the long side, and walk at the letter before the corner. Walk through the corner. Treat this corner as one quarter of a 10-meter circle. Keep your horse shaped on a 10-meter arc through the corner. This is harder than it looks, but when you can walk the corner, it will be easy to trot and canter correctly through it. ➔

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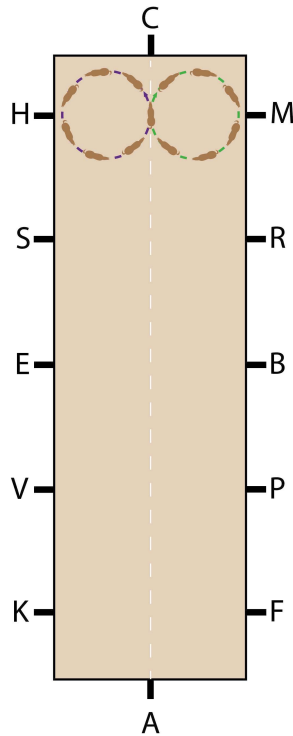
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Love Your Line

Use your eyes to help you be very specific about your horse's line of travel. Focus on the letters in your arena; if you're not in a marked arena, use a tree, a fence post, or some other landmark to define your line. The rider who can control her horse's bend and line of travel—and retain last month's prerequisite qualities—will be successful. It's that simple, so monitor those qualities when you try these prerequisite exercises:



Exercise 1: Ten-meter figure of eight (pictured above). On the right rein in walk, make a ten-meter circle right at M. When you come back to the center line at G (facing C), make a ten-meter circle left to complete the figure of eight.

If you've practiced your ten-meter circles for the last month, this shouldn't be too difficult, and it should put your horse in a wonderful balance. You may notice that your horse has less neck bend than you're inclined to ask for. When you start your first lateral movement, shoulder-in, remember this correct amount of neck bend. It will be a continuation of the arc your horse's body makes.



BEND IN THE CORNER: Mica and Infanta walk through a corner in ten-meter bend

The constant changes of direction in this exercise will help you to keep your horse's shoulders moveable and straight. As a result, he will carry more weight with his hindquarters and his shoulders will be lighter: That's collection. The figure itself, if ridden correctly, creates a small degree of collection for you. You might need to practice this more than a few times before it becomes balanced and easy, so make some straight lines on the long sides and repeat your figures of eight in oth-



SHOULDER-FORE LEFT: Rear view shows slight left positioning. Infanta has narrowed the track of her inside (left) hind leg, which is stepping in the space between her two front feet.

Strength WITH Integrity



photo: Sharon Packer Photography

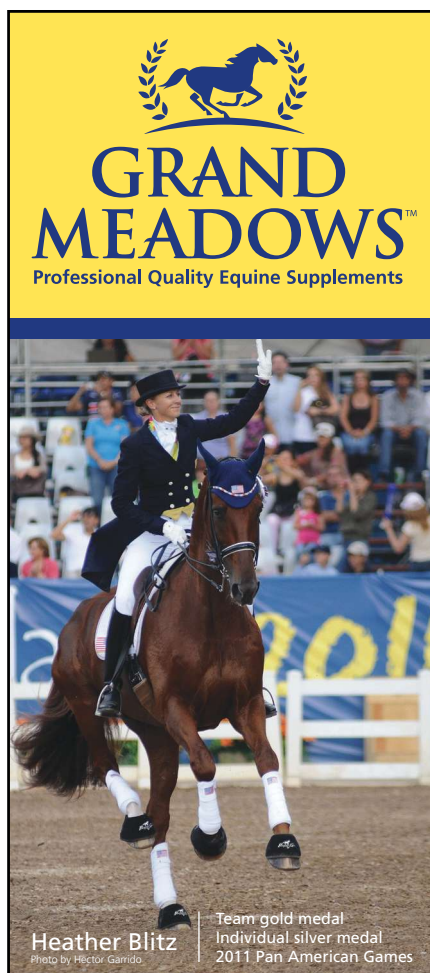
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er locations in the arena. When you can do it in walk, try it in the trot; later, do it in canter with changes of lead through the walk or trot.

Exercise 2: Shoulder-fore. Shoulder-fore positioning collects the horse very slightly because the horse in shoulder-fore steps with his inside hind under his center of gravity. He's in the best position to carry himself and you too. He steps toward both reins and balances on the outside rein.

When do you use shoulder-fore? All the time. Shoulder-fore isn't an exercise per se; rather, it's the position in which experienced dressage trainers ride all the time. It's simply riding in balance (as opposed to out of balance).

Here's how to ride shoulder-fore. I've broken the aids down into steps, although they actually happen simultaneously.

- Ask for slight inside flexion, primarily from your inside leg and encouraged by your supple inside fingers and wrist. Your horse's nose should stay centered in front of his chest. Don't bend his neck.
- Using your inside leg in the direction of the bit, think of narrowing the track of the inside hind hoof so that it steps in the space between the front hooves.
- Your outside rein is passive and "receiving." When your horse is in the correct balance, he will naturally "connect" to it.
- Control the outside hind leg with your "guarding" outside leg so that it doesn't stray outside the track of the outside foreleg. There's no sideways tendency in shoulder-fore.

Try it: I'm a big fan of working in walk. Typically, you and your horse won't be able to do anything in trot or canter if you can't do it well in walk. Keeping away from the rail, ride in shoulder-fore straight toward a mirror. No mirror? Ask a friend to stand directly in front of or behind your horse to give you feedback. Your helper doesn't need to even be a dressage person. She just needs to be able to tell you when the inside hind hoof steps between the two front legs and the out-

side hind steps in the track of the outside fore. There should be very slight flexion and imperceptible bend on a straight line, with no sideways tendency. Ride shoulder-fore in walk to the right and to the left. When you go from shoulder-fore right to shoulder-fore left, your horse's hindquarters must stay on exactly the same track.

If riding in shoulder-fore isn't a habit, you'll find it difficult at first, but persist. When you "get it," it will be reasonably easy to maintain it because your horse *likes* to be in shoulder-fore. He feels very well balanced, and you will too. After you can do it in walk, do it in trot and canter.

Advanced variation: Counter-shoulder-fore (i.e., shoulder-fore left while tracking right and vice versa) is often a wonderful way to straighten your horse and to improve the balance and the contact.

Shoulder-In

Shoulder-in (pictured on page 16) is the mother exercise of collection because it embodies the basics for all further lateral movements. The movement is first required in Second Level Test 1.

In shoulder-in, the horse's hind legs remain on the line of travel as they did in shoulder-fore, but the shoulders are brought to the inside until the outside foreleg tracks directly in front of the inside hind leg. As a result, when you stand behind or in front of a horse in shoulder-in, he moves on "three tracks." It's critical that the three tracks not be obtained by the hindquarters moving out, which would put the weight on the shoulders instead of lightening them. When you move the shoulders, you displace weight to the hindquarters, which is our goal.

Here's how to make your shoulder-fore into shoulder-in:

Confirm your horse's bend by riding a ten-meter circle at a corner letter. Before proceeding straight ahead down the long side of the arena, ride a momentary rebalancing half-halt in the shape of ten-meter bend: with a

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deep inside seat and leg and an outside guarding leg. This half-halt says, "Wait a second. Pay attention to these bending aids. Here's what we're going to do now."

From this bending half-halt, as you proceed down the long side, your inside rein leads your horse's shoulders to the inside while your outside rein allows the shoulders to go in. His hindquarters go straight down the long side, remaining on the rail. This is Second Level shoulder-in: The horse

goes straight down the long side, retaining ten-meter bend.

Shoulder-in improves the quality of the trot. After you have done shoulder-in in trot, straighten on the long side. You should feel you have a better trot.

Fatal Flaws in Shoulder-In

These two fatal flaws develop when the rider loses the quality of the horse's bend during shoulder-in:




IMPROVED TROT: After doing some steps of correct shoulder-in, Mica straightens Infanta and the result is a better-quality gait with more straightness and engagement

Flaw 1: Instead of the shoulders coming in, the horse straightens and the haunches go out. This happens for two reasons.

One, horses, by nature, are inclined to straighten on their own—but their version of straight isn't the kind of straight that we want in dressage. The equine version is a negative kind of straightening that means "stiffening." Given the chance, they lose the bend and therefore also the suppleness that bend ensures. When the haunches are mobilized to the outside, the horse's weight naturally shifts to the forehand.

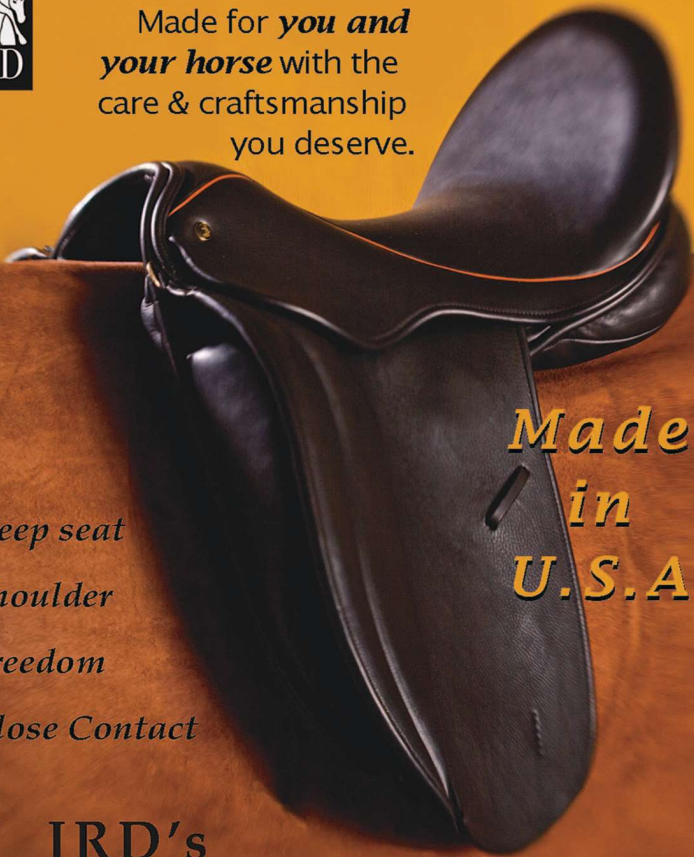
Two, riders often use the wrong aids for shoulder-in. Instead of using the bending aids, they bring the inside leg back (and often the toe points out), which further guarantees that the horse's haunches swing out and his weight is on the forehand. Riders need to be neurotic about keeping the correct bending aids in the shoulder-in.

Flaw 2: The horse's neck is overbent to the inside, thereby making it impossible for him to bend his midsection properly around the rider's inside leg. This common problem has a simple cause: overuse of the rider's inside arm. When you ask for flexion primarily with your inside leg, using your fingers and wrist only as an adjunct, the neck doesn't bend too much.



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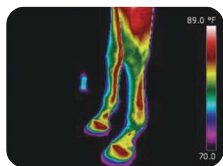
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As you can see, incorrect rider position and improper use of the aids contribute to both of these flaws. Mica Mabragaña cautions: "In the lateral work, it is crucial to keep your seat centered and relaxed. It is very easy to contract your body when you begin to do these exercises. Sometimes it is good to go straight ahead again to find your seat; don't go on if you are a pretzel in the saddle. A relaxed seat (yes, I mean relaxed butt muscles!) will allow the movement to flow from back to front."

Lateral Work: It's All Related

The other lateral movements in dressage are essentially variations on the shoulder-in concept. The common feature in all of these exercises is that you keep your ten-meter bending aids. As our photo model, Fourth Level certified instructor Mica Mabragaña, explains: "Your aid position doesn't change; what changes is the position of the horse's body in relation to the wall."

Here's how to transform shoulder-in into other movements you'll need for Second Level and beyond.

From shoulder-in to renvers. To confirm or improve the correctness of your shoulder-in, make it into a renvers (haunches-out). Start in shoulder-in and gradually, over a few strides, change the bend. Example: From shoulder-in left (with left bend), keep the shoulders in and gradually change from ten-meter left bend to ten-meter right bend. The horse's hindquarters remain on the track. The concept is simple, but the execution is not necessarily easy! Do it in walk first.

From shoulder-in to haunches-in. To turn shoulder-in into haunches-in (travers), ride shoulder-in and then, maintaining the bending aids, make a ten-meter circle. As you return to the track, keep the ten-meter bend but put the shoulders on the track and the haunches will be "in."

In haunches-in, your horse's blaze (imagine it if he doesn't have one) and his shoulders face straight down the track. If you haven't done this exercise before, try it in walk first.

From haunches-in to half-pass.

A half-pass is essentially a haunches-in on a diagonal line. Here's where being a stickler about being true to the line of travel will help you. You'll treat that diagonal line (say, from M to K tracking right) exactly the same as you did the track on the long side. Ride through the corner on the right rein; then at M point your horse's blaze and his shoulders precisely toward K. Ride the shoulders on that exact diagonal line, keeping the ten-meter bend to the right. Voila! If your horse is comfortable in the haunches-in, the transition to half-pass won't be too difficult.

Caveat: These suppling lateral movements are wonderful, but here's one word of caution: If you do them too much, your horse can start to lose his forward energy. Suppling exercises need to be combined with strengthening exercises that add power. For that reason, next month you'll be working on the medium paces.

Homework for Next Month

Be sure the building blocks for developing the medium paces are in place. Your horse should be able to:

- Lengthen the stride while reaching out to the bit without increasing the tempo
- Do the lateral movements from this month's article with confidence. ▲

Next month: Medium paces.

Thanks to our photo model, Fourth Level USDF-certified instructor/trainer Mica Mabragaña, of Bedford, NY; and Wellington, FL, for her assistance with this article. Mica is riding Infanta HGF, a seven-year-old PRE mare by Idilio, owned by Mary Magee and bred by Hampton Green Farm.

Beth Baumert is a Fourth Level USDF-certified instructor/trainer based at her family's Cloverlea Farm in Columbia, CT. She works with horses and riders from Training Level to Grand Prix. Beth was the technical editor of Dressage Today magazine for sixteen years. She is on The Dressage Foundation's Board of Directors and currently serves as secretary.