

TRANSITIONS

Definition

A change or passing from one gait to another or from one pace to another pace within a gait or from a gait to a halt.

Gymnastic Purpose

The gymnastic purpose of transitions is to develop throughness by improving balance, longitudinal and lateral suppleness, and impulsion.

“Transitions are important because they test, reveal and contribute to the correctness of training. The quality of the aids will determine the success of the transitions. Transitions make the training. This is why there is such emphasis on transitions in the competition arena. Good transitions must reflect all the properties of the training scale.” [Michael Poulin]

“The transitions reveal the truth about the training of the horse. If the rider can send him on and bring him back to hand in a supple and quick way, with good engagement of the quarters, he should be satisfied, knowing that he has done a good job.” [*Practical Dressage Manual*, p 114]

Qualities Desired

The changes of gait and paces within the gait “should be clearly shown at the prescribed marker; they should be quickly made yet must be smooth and not abrupt. The cadence of a gait or pace should be maintained up to the moment when the gait or pace is changed or the horse halts. The horse should remain light in hand, calm and maintain a correct position.” [*USEF Rule Book DR107*]

Transitions should be visible, but not abrupt. The change should be smooth. The horse should stay connected, and not rise or fall abruptly as if cut or broken off.

“The rhythm must be maintained up to the moment when the pace is changed or the horse halts. The horse should remain light in hand, calm and in a correct position. He must be straight.” [*Practical Dressage Manual*, p 113]

Aids

In upward transitions, “the rider sends the horse forward with his leg and weight at the same time yielding with his hands but still maintaining a soft contact.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 92] The rider prepares for downward transitions with a half-halt or a series of half-halts.

“In the transition to a higher degree of collection, the horse must be clearly pushed together from behind to the hand. In the transition to more free strides, the horse must lengthen obviously with the neck stretching and the line of the face coming noticeably in front of the vertical.” [*The Dressage Horse*, p 127]

Training Advice

“The horse’s ability to perform transitions must be developed gradually, with higher and higher demands until the rider can execute them directly without intermediate steps.

The horse should be like a rubber-band, which can be lengthened and shortened without resistance. Laziness should not be tolerated. After each transition to another pace the harmonious rhythm (cadence) must be established as soon as possible, without hesitation. At the transition to the walk, for instance, the rider must immediately urge the horse forward into a marching walk. The half-halt is the key to all transitions.” [*Practical Dressage Manual*, p 114]

Half-Halt

Definition

“The half-halt is the hardly visible, almost simultaneous, coordinated action of the seat, the legs and the hand of the rider, with the object of increasing the attention and balance of the horse before the execution of several movements or transi-

tions between gaits or paces. In shifting slightly more weight onto the horse's quarters, the engagement of the hind legs and the balance on the haunches are facilitated for the benefit of the lightness of the forehand and the horse's balance as a whole." [USEF Rule Book DR108]

"The half-halt is a call to attention to prepare the horse for the next command of his rider." [Classical Training of Horse and Rider, p 40]

"The half-halt is a combination of your driving aids plus your bending aids plus a rein of opposition sustained for a period of about three seconds." [Dressage Insights: Excerpts from Experts, p 35]

Gymnastic Purpose

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"Half-halts are the tools that you use to bring your horse to a more perfect state of balance." [Dressage Insights: Excerpts from Experts, p 35]

"Half-halts are used when riding a transition from one gait to another. They are used to shorten or adjust the strides within a gait. They are used to alert the horse prior to a new exercise or movement. They are also used to improve or maintain the horse's collection and carriage within a movement." [Principles of Riding, p 97]

"It can be employed to shorten the stride, improve the contact and collection, and give notice to the horse that an exercise requiring greater proficiency is about to be demanded. The half-halt will help the horse to carry himself better and take a lighter contact with the bit. It may be used as a corrective, especially with a horse that is inclined to lie heavily on the reins." [Classical Training of Horse and Rider, p 40]

Aids

"The rider places more weight on his seat bones by tightening his back muscles, pushes the horse forward with his legs, and uses a carefully measured asking or non-yielding rein aid followed with minimum delay by a yielding rein." [Principles of Riding, p 97-98]

"The same aids are employed as for a full halt but to a lesser degree and are discontinued the moment the horse has responded." [Classical Training of Horse and Rider, p 40]

Qualities Desired

The forward-driving aids should always be dominant in the half-halt, as it cannot work without them. It can only fulfill its purpose if the hind legs are asked to come closer to the horse's center of gravity, and if the horse is pushed on a straight line into both, and on circles into the outside rein.

Common Faults

"A half-halt performed with a pulling hand and no driving of seat and legs is more damaging than helpful." [Practical Dressage Manual, p 43]

"In the beginning there can be confusion, especially if the rider doesn't have very sensitive hands. Too much leg will make the horse pull and lean on the reins. Too much seat will make him hollow his back and resist right through his body." [Dressage for the Young Rider, p 95]

Training Advice

The success of this movement depends on whether the horse is far enough along in his training to be responsive to the aids of the rider. A young horse that has not yet reached that level of training will not be able to comply.

"In the beginning I like to teach the horse and rider to develop the half-halt by slowly developing the strength of the

horse through transitions, such as trot-walk transitions. I start by doing 5 or 6 walk steps and back to the trot and again 5 or 6 walk steps and back to the trot. It is important that the horse stay balanced through the downward transition and keeps a clear walk into the transition back up to the trot. As this is obtained, I try to shorten the number of steps and work towards one step of walk. Then it seems that the rider has the correct aids to close and drive under the horse's hind legs without stopping the forward motion." [*Dressage Insights: Excerpts from Experts*, p 29]

The degree of emphasis with which the half-halt is employed should be geared to the sensitivity of the horse. "There are many degrees of half-halts and the requirements should be increased as the training of the horse progresses. A green horse should not be asked for much engagement, and will probably resist the bit in the beginning. Do not hang on stubbornly; inhale-exhale, that is the length of a half-halt. If the half-halt does not work, repeat it." [*Practical Dressage Manual*, p 43]

Any new movement requested of the horse should be introduced with a half-halt. This technique makes the horse more alert.

"When a rider understands the connection of hand to hind leg, and leg into hand, they will be able to make a more effective half-halt." [*Dressage Insights: Excerpts from Experts*, p 33]

Developing The Lengthening Of Stride In Trot And Canter

By Cindy Sydnor (September 12, 2009)

The lengthening of stride in trot is required in all First Level tests. The lengthening of canter is required in First Level tests 2, 3, and 4. Lengthenings are one of the main differences between Training Level and First Level, and this makes these exercises important. If a young horse, or horse of any age that is in training, cannot yet lengthen stride, it might not be wise to enter First Level competition yet.

This exercise demonstrates that the pushing power from the hind legs of the horse and a degree of balance and throughness have been achieved. The horse is asked to stay on the bit, meaning supple in the poll, round over the topline including neck and back. He is asked to maintain the tempo of the working trot, which should have a clear, brief moment of suspension. When the strides are lengthened, the overtrack increases from tracking up in the working trot to whatever overtrack the horse can achieve and maintain. The suspension phase of the trot ideally stays confirmed and is partly responsible for the length of stride becoming longer.

The best foundation for a trot lengthening is an excellent quality working trot. It is in the working trot that the horse develops the strength to push with each hind leg in rhythm. For some horses with naturally good gaits, it is only necessary to close your legs and "ask" for a lengthening, and it happens. This is wonderful. But for many good horses with good quality working trots, they merely trot faster when asked with increased driving aids.

All of the previously mentioned also applies to the canter, although most horses seem to find it easier to lengthen the stride in canter. For those that don't, the following trot exercises are also helpful in the canter.

One element must not be overlooked: when the horse has good quality lengthenings, he will want to take a more defined contact toward the bit. This should happen in both trot and canter. Then, the rider must move the hands very slightly forward, taking care not to let the horse "fall" onto his shoulders, and allow the horse to open up his frame a little. This allows him more freedom of the forehand, enhancing the scope of his stride.

Therefore, there are good exercises that make it clear to the more average horse that does not have a natural lengthening. Here are some of those techniques.

- Using the whip correctly and with the right timing can be very helpful. Let's assume the horse is used to his rider carrying a normal length dressage whip and is not afraid to be stroked at the halt, nor to have the whip changed from the rider's right hand to his left hand. The horse should also allow the rider to touch or tap lightly with the whip on the horse's barrel, close behind the rider's lower leg. If all of this is confirmed, the rider can practice touching the horse at the working trot rising in the moment the rider sits in the saddle. This is the moment that the horse's inside

hind leg is pushing off the ground, if the rider is posting on the correct diagonal. Depending on the horse's sensitivity, the rider can touch for several strides consecutively, pause with the whip, and then possibly use it again on the same long side of the arena or diagonal. But the best effect is in the transition into the lengthening.

- Naturally, it often happens that the horse misunderstands or overreacts and breaks to the canter. When this happens, as long as the horse is not really frightened, it is often good to maintain the canter and continue with the effort to lengthen. This reaction says to the horse, "I don't mind if you canter; I just want you to feel free to go forward!" Even an additional long side maintaining the canter and lengthening again is sometimes beneficial. This way the horse understands clearly that his rider really wants to allow him to make this effort. Then bring the horse quietly back to the working trot, and try again on the very next long side. Only this time, be a little more careful not to overdo the whip aid. When he responds well, praise him. Then take a little break, and perhaps try again. Or do so on the next day.
- Riding a 20-meter circle while schooling the horse to lengthen can be very helpful. The circle influences the horse's inside hind leg joints to flex more than on a straight line, providing the rider rides a correct circle, and predisposes the horse to having more engagement. Skillful use of the whip just as the inside hind leg is pushing off the ground (as described above) really gets the point across to the horse. Be considerate not to overdo the number of circles, keeping in mind to change direction. To begin with, an attempt at lengthening on half a circle is enough, usually on the open side of the circle. Later on, when the horse can lengthen without rushing, you can start on the closed side (the short side of the arena) and then carry on down the long side. Sometimes horses try to rush on the straightaway. In this case the rider must half halt back to working trot or canter and begin again. When using this exercise in canter, it is helpful to use the whip in the outside hand in order to motivate the horse's outside hind leg as it pushes off the ground.
- Another technique that is often successful in making the idea clear in the horse's mind to lengthen is to practice activating the hind legs in the transition down from trot to walk. When this is possible, the rider can begin this same exercise, as if preparing to walk, but instead, ask gradually for a trot lengthening. It is not as odd as it may sound here. The activation of the hind legs is exactly what the rider needs in order for the horse to "think" with his hind legs in producing more pushing power for a successful lengthening. When activating the hind legs in the trot-walk transition, the rider must be skillful with the timing of the whip by using it in the moment that the each hind leg is landing—in the rhythm of the hind legs. One must not just randomly start tapping the horse. Timing the use of the whip to the rhythm is important.
- Other traditional techniques are to ride shoulder-in in the trot, then go onto a diagonal line, at the angle in which the shoulder-in was ridden, and on this straight line to ask for the lengthening. Theoretically, the added engagement of the inside hind leg in the shoulder-in makes the transition into a lengthening possible.

Remember that if the horse gets the idea, even if he cannot perform perfectly, it is best to quit and praise him. The next time you try, he will have a good memory of the experience and be more likely to "give" you his best effort.

Halt

Definition

According to Webster: "Stop. To bring to a stop."

Gymnastic Purpose

"A halt correctly executed will improve the bending of the three joints of the hind legs, and will be a test of the degree of balance, suppleness and of the action of the rein going through the body that the horse has attained by his training." [*The Complete Training of Horse and Rider*, p 39-40]

Qualities

"At the halt the horse should stand attentive, engaged, motionless and straight with the weight evenly distributed over all four legs being by pairs abreast with each other. The neck should be raised, the poll high and the head slightly in front of the vertical. While remaining on the bit and maintaining a light and soft contact with the rider's hand, the horse may quietly chomp the bit and should be ready to move off at the slightest indication of the rider." [*USEF Rule Book DR102*]

Aids

“The halt is obtained by the displacement of the horse’s weight on the quarters by a properly increased action of the seat and legs of the rider driving the horse toward a more and more restraining but allowing hand, causing an almost instantaneous but not abrupt halt, at a previously fixed place.” [USEF Rule Book DR102]

“It does, in fact, seem paradoxical to halt a forward movement by driving the horse forward. But if one does not do it this way, one is acting contrary to the most basic truism in riding, namely that one directs one’s efforts to the whole of the horse and not to its mouth alone.” [Riding Logic, p 117]

“The rider will obtain the near perfect halt if he succeeds in bringing it mainly by bracing his back. .When the horse has come to a halt, the pressure of the legs and the action of the reins must cease. The rider sits straight and firmly in the saddle, his upper body neither leaning forward nor hanging back, and his legs remain applied to the horse’s sides in order to be able to prevent the horse from creeping back. After the halt, a light contact with the mouth will keep the horse on the alert and ready to continue any movement without having to be again collected.” [Complete Training of Horse and Rider, p 153]

Common Mistakes

(See diagrams from *Riding Logic*, p 116)

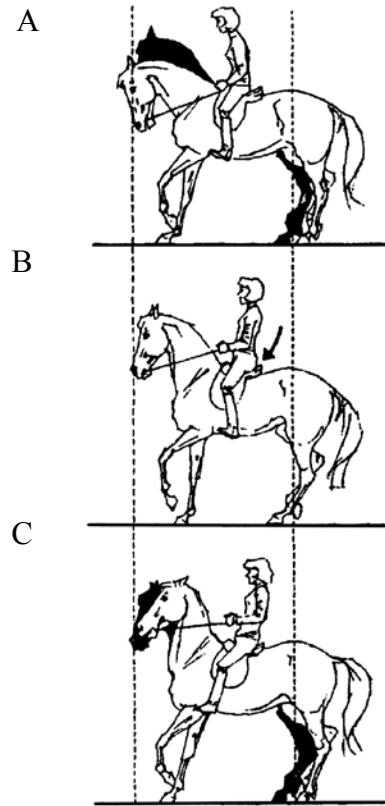
“If the action of the rein is too prolonged and too firm, it will have a restraining effect on the hind legs, thus making it difficult or even impossible for them to step well under the body. This is why horses that lie too much on the rein will get on to their forehead and lose the action of the hindquarters.” [Complete Training of Horse and Rider, p 153]

Training Advice

“To produce the correct halt the horse must be pushed forward with both legs on the girth and held in a lively collected trot. The impulsion procured in this manner will then be absorbed by repeated short actions of the rein and the braced back of the rider in order to ensure that the hind legs step well under the body and to obtain a halt in the direct line of the movement. Experience has taught that if the action of the rein is too prolonged and too firm, it will have a restraining effect on the hind legs, thus making it difficult, or even impossible for them to step well under the body. This is why horses that lie too much on the rein will get on to their forehead and lose the action of the hindquarters. On the other hand the expert will be able to relate a weak action of the hind legs to a too-firm contact with the bit.” [The Complete Training of Horse and Rider, p 153]

If the halt is repeatedly exercised, the horse will be inclined to anticipate it, drop into a walk, and execute the halt on the forehead. The rider should not, therefore, practice the halt on the same spot too often, and when he notices a certain faltering in the movement of the horse; he should practice a few changes of tempo. [The Complete Training of the Horse and Rider, p 153]

Source: *Riding Logic*



The Halt

- A. Wrong: hands are too low and horse is on the forehand
- B. Correct: back and both legs are acting together
- C. Wrong: legs are not acting and the position is over the horse’s back

Rein Back

Definition

“The rein back is a movement in which the horse moves backwards by raising and setting down the feet in diagonal pairs. The feet should be well raised and the hind feet remain in line, and the direction of travel should remain straight.” [USEF Rule Book DR106]

“The rein back is a two-time movement in which the feet are picked up, moved back and set down in diagonal pairs. One diagonal pair of feet is set down before the other is picked up so that there is no moment of suspension.” [Principles of Riding, p 147]

Gymnastic Purpose

“The rein back serves to develop and test the horse’s suppleness and ability to “let the aids through” (Duchlässigkeit). Moreover, it helps to improve the collection since it causes the joints of the hind legs and quarters to bend more. It can also be used as an exercise in obedience.” [Principles of Riding, p 110]

“The rein back will be the proof of the degree of the suppleness of the horse, of the action of the rein going through the body, and above all, of his obedience. It will be proof of the correct bending of the joints of the hind legs.” [Complete Training of Horse and Rider, p 160]

Qualities Desired

“At the preceding halt, as well as during the rein back the horse, although standing motionless and moving backwards respectively, should remain on the bit maintaining his desire to move forward.” [USEF Rule Book DR106]

“When reining back, the horse must not oppose the action of the reins or move back with reluctance, dragging his feet along the ground. The diagonal legs must be seen to be lifted from the ground as a pair and moved back in a straight line, step by step, without faltering in the movement and without the hindquarters deviating to either side.” [Complete Training of Horse and Rider, p 160]

Aids

“Before attempting the rein back, the horse must be standing straight and square and well ‘on the aids’ with its weight distributed evenly on all four legs. The aids are then as follows:

- The rider uses his weight (on both seat bones) and legs as if to send the horse forward.
- The rider’s lower legs are placed in a ‘guarding’ position to prevent the horse moving its hindquarters sideways.
- The moment the horse responds and goes to step forwards, the rider ‘feels’ both reins, i.e. gives an asking rein aid; at a more advanced stage of training, a non-yielding rein aid is used instead – in either case the forward energy which has been created is converted into backward movement.
- As soon as the horse responds by starting to move backwards, the rider’s hands become light again, although they must still keep a contact with the horse’s mouth.” [Principles of Riding, p 110-111]

Training Advice

“With horses that find the rein-back particularly difficult, it is sometimes helpful to take some of the weight off the horse’s back. The rider should not lean forward, however since unless he is sitting upright, he is not in a position to send the horse forward out of the rein-back at any point or prevent it from rushing backwards, by ‘tightening his back muscles,’ pushing the horse forward with his legs and yielding with his hands.” [Principles of Riding, p 111]

“During basic training the horse is asked to rein back for a specified distance (e.g. one length, which equals three to four steps). Only at a later stage is a set number of steps required. If the rein-back is to end in a halt, the last step of rein-back will actually be a half step, though it counts as a full step. As a result of this half step, the horse finishes standing square.” [Principles of Riding, p 110]

“As a correct rein-back demands a strong bending of all three joints of the hind legs, the movement should not be practiced for too long at a time. The rider must be content at first if the horse steps back one or two paces.” [Complete Training of Horse and Rider, p 160]