

BASIC EXERCISES AND DRESSAGE MOVEMENTS

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Turns and Circles

The rider can ride a turn or circle correctly when he is able to bend the horse's body laterally according to the curvature of the line which he follows. He must be able to cause the hind feet to follow exactly in the tracks of the forefeet.

In a correctly executed turn or circle the horse's inside hind leg carries more weight than the outside one. Before every turn or circle the rider should prepare the horse with a half halt and transfer his weight a little to the inside seat bone, in the direction of the movement.

The horse should then be flexed in the same direction. The inside rein should guide the horse into the turn, the rider's inside leg, close to the girth, causing the horse's inside hind leg to reach further forward. The outside rein should yield just enough to allow the horse to flex to the inside, while at the same time it restrains the horse from falling out over the outside shoulder. The outside leg should control the quarters.

When the horse's forehand is guided from the straight line into the direction of the turn, the influence of the inside rein is decreased again. The rider should 'straighten' the horse with the outside rein, keep the horse exactly on the line of the circle. ('Straight' on the circle means making sure that the hind feet follow in the tracks of the forefeet, and that the horse is bent from head to tail according to the curvature of the line.)

The correct distribution of the rider's weight is most important. In transferring his weight to the inside seat bone he should push the inside hip forward with a deep knee. This will also prevent him from collapsing his inside hip and slipping the seat to the outside. At the same time he should make sure not to leave the outside shoulder behind.

Only when sitting correctly with correct distribution of weight can the rider bend his horse as needed.

Riding a Corner

To ride a corner correctly it is necessary to apply a half halt six metres (20 feet) away from the wall ahead. The horse should be flexed to the inside, then the corner should be ridden like a quarter volte (6-metre circle). Aids and bend should be similar to those riding a circle.

If the horse tried to cut the corner, not bending laterally, the rider must counteract with strong inside aids. A rider at preliminary stage is advised to practice riding a corner at a walk, and to give the aids one after another rather than simultaneously. Also he should not make the mistake of guiding the horse's head and neck too deep into the corner, thus coming out of it with the wrong bend.

It is also incorrect to ride the horse deeper into the corner by bringing both hands to the outside, with the inside hand crossing the mane. This causes the horse to fall out over the shoulder.

When riding a turn out of doors the rider must ensure that the horse does not try to avoid bending correctly by approaching the turn not on a straight line but on an outward curve.

Before changing rein on the riding school diagonal the rider has to ensure that the horse does not turn too soon. After the corner, inside leg and outside rein keep the horse straight on the track for one horse's length. Only when the horse's outside shoulder reaches the marker should the rider start the turn across the diagonal. If there is no wall the outside aids have to keep the horse on the curvature of the turn and not allow him to fall out.

After each turn the horse should be ridden actively forward.

Riding a Circle

When riding on a circle the horse's hind quarters must be guided and controlled by the rider's legs; his forehand by the reins. The circumference of the circle is determined by the circle markers.

The rider's inside leg, close behind the girth, activates the inside hind leg, helping to maintain the lateral bend and preventing the horse from falling into the circle. The rider's outside leg should be positioned further behind the girth, controlling the quarters. The rider's outside leg, together with the inside rein, should maintain the lateral bend and cause the outside hind leg to step further forward.

When changing rein on a figure of eight the horse should be straightened for a moment before flexing and bending him in the new direction. The same applies for changing 'through' the circle. The rider must be careful not to ride too wide a first half-circle so that the second half-circle can be of equal diameter.

When changing either out of or through the circle the rider must shorten the new inside rein, transferring his weight to the new inside seat bone, and changing the leg aids accordingly.

The Volte

The volte is a small circle 6m (20ft) in diameter. It calls for the most acute lateral bend that a horse can perform on one track, and can be ridden only in collected paces. Should a volte of a smaller diameter (5 metres or 16 feet) be attempted, the horse could no longer bend laterally according to the line of movement. The quarters would fall out and the rhythm of the pace would become irregular. Therefore in preliminary training, when the horse is not yet able to move in collection, a volte should not be attempted. On the subject of turns or circles, it is absolutely essential to avoid over-use of the inside rein aid, which causes the quarters to fall out or the rhythm to be broken. Remember, too, that the outside rein must maintain an elastic contact. Pressing down the inside heel will ensure correct distribution of weight, bringing it more on to the inside seat bone.

Otherwise the aids for riding a volte are the same as for riding a circle.

The most common rider fault when riding a volte is to change its shape into an oval. The volte must be absolutely round and must end where it began. A novice rider can make sure of this by placing the volte intentionally a little in front of where it touches the track.

To improve this movement it is helpful to ride a few voltes, one after another, in the same place.

Half-Circles

When riding a half-circle and inclining back to the track, the aids for the first part of the movement are the same as for the volte. A half-volte is ridden in a 5m (16ft) diameter. It is usually ridden in the second corner of a long side. At the widest part of the half-volte the rider inclines toward a straight line back to the track, touching the same 10.50m (35ft) after the corner.

Loops

Depending on their number and size, loops are used either as exercises for making the horse supple or as preparation for collection. The number of loops to be ridden depends on the size of the arena and the stage of training or horse and rider.

The simplest loop is a single 5m (16ft) one on the long side. After the first corner of a long side the horse should be straightened for a moment and then guided into the arena in a shallow loop. At the E or B markers the horse will be at a distance of 5m (16ft) away from the track. The rider then rides an equally shallow turn back to the track, reaching it at the marker before the second corner of the long side.

When riding a double loop each loop will be only 2.50m (8ft) deep.

Serpentines

When riding serpentines the rider turns at the marker after riding through the first corner of a long side. He spaces out the required number of loops (usually three or five) at equal distances over the whole arena, and ends at the changing marker before the second corner of the long side. The loops are counted from centre line to centre line. The first and last loops are then only half-loops, but count as full ones. Riding a serpentine as in international competitions – i.e. starting and ending at the centre of the short side – should be avoided. This is because in training horses it is very useful to be able to use the first and last corner of a long side to prepare the horse for the bending that is necessary when riding a serpentine.

To ride a serpentine correctly the weight aids are most important for turning the horse. On entering each new loop the horse has to be both flexed and bent in the new direction by shortening the new inside rein and changing weight and leg aids. When riding in canter with a simple change of leg, the new canter should be asked for when entering each new loop.

The constant changing of flexion and bend in a serpentine is very beneficial for both horse and rider.

Turns at a Halt

Turns at a halt can be executed either around the forehand or around the haunches.

When riding a turn around the forehand the pivoting point should be close to and at the side of the inside forefoot. When riding a turn around the haunches the pivot point should be at the side of the inside hind foot.

Turn around the Forehand

The turn around the forehand is a suppling exercise and teaches horse and rider the effects of the one-sided aides (side-ways driving aids).

First of all, the horse – being on the bit – is flexed slightly away from the direction of the turn. The rein, which has now become the inside rein, is shortened accordingly. The rider's weight is transferred to the inside seat bone.

The inside leg should be applied a little behind the girth, pushing the horse's quarters step by step around the forehand until the turn is completed. The horse's inside hind leg crosses in front of his outside one. The rider's outside leg, giving support behind the girth, meets the quarters distinctly, after every step, creating a little pause. This prevents the quarters from turning too fast.

During and after the turn around the forehand, the rider's legs and seat keep the horse on the bit and prevent him from stepping backwards. If the horse should step forwards, he most likely would fall out on to the outside shoulder. This should be counteracted by the outside rein. If the horse steps backwards during the exercise it is considered to be a lesser fault.

In an indoor school the turn around the forehand cannot be executed on the track (as there would be no room for the horse's head and neck in the turn). The turn should be executed on the inner track. The inner track is an imaginary track about 0.80m (3ft) inside the ordinary track.

Turns Around the Haunches

The turn around the haunches creates collection. First of all, the horse – on the bit – should be flexed well in the direction of the turn, then the inside rein should guide him into the turn. The rider's weight should be increasingly transferred to the inside seat bone. The outside should be brought a little forward. The inside leg should act close to the girth, driving the horse forward. This leg and the supporting outside leg activate the horse's hind legs to step rhythmically forward and closer to his centre of gravity. Both the rider's legs inhibit the horse from stepping backwards; the outside supporting leg prevents the outside hind foot from deviating sideways.

The outside rein should control the amount of flexion, but must yield enough so that the horse can move uninterrupted in the direction of the turn.

In this movement it is essential for the hind legs to maintain an even and regular 4-beat rhythm.

It is a minor fault if the horse steps a little forward. For a novice rider it is even advisable to start the turn by asking the horse to take one or two small steps forward, and only then to begin the turn around the haunches.

Since the pivoting point of this movement is at the side of the inside hind leg, the horse, in executing the turn, leaves the track and ends the movement his own width away from the track. Therefore he has to be guided forward/sideways back on to the track while completing the last step of the turn. In this way it is possible to finish the movement correctly, with the horse standing squarely on the track, after the turn around the haunches.

Main rider faults in the turn around the haunches are:

- Too much outside leg.
- Wrong displacement of the weight (on to the outside seat bone).
- Collapsing the inside hip.
- Too much rein action.

These faults usually happen together and cause the horse to step backwards and flex incorrectly, against the direction of the turn.

Turns at a Pace

The turn around the haunches, executed at any pace, is called a *HALF-PIROUETTE*.

At elementary level a pirouette is performed at a walk or collected trot. (When performed at a collected trot the actual turn is also executed at walk.) The horse may not come to a halt before or after the turn. The aides are the same as in the turn around the haunches.

The half-pirouette has the advantage that the horse is already moving forward. It is easier, therefore, to prevent the horse from standing on the inside hind leg or even stepping backwards during the turn.

Leg-yielding

Leg-yielding is the most basic of all lateral movements. It is a suppling exercise, making the horse loose and unconstrained and teaching him to obey the sideways driving aids. It is an excellent means of teaching the novice rider to coordinate his aids.

When leg-yielding, the horse is straight from head to tail, with a slight flexion away from the direction in which he is moving. He moves forward/sideways on two tracks. The inside legs pass and cross in front of the outside legs.

Since the horse is flexed towards the sideways driving leg, this side is called his 'inside', even if it is facing the outside of the arena.

Leg-yielding can be performed at a walk or – for a short distance – at a trot, on the long sides of the school, on the diagonal, and on the circle.

When leg-yielding along the long side of the school, the novice rider or horse should start by yielding from the leg facing the wall. When facing the wall at an angle it is easier for horse and rider to get the effect of the sideways driving aids.

Later on it will be found more beneficial to leg-yield from the inside leg along the wall, with the horse facing the inside of the school.

When leg-yielding along the edge of the school the horse should be at a maximum angle of 45° to the wall.

The Aids

The rider should sit more on the inside seat bone, with his inside leg close behind the girth, pushing the quarters sideways. This leg aid should be applied at the moment when the inside hind leg is lifted off the ground to start a forward/sideways step. If necessary the aid is repeated with every step or stride. The forehand is guided along its track by the outside rein. By supporting action of the outside leg the rider counteracts any rushing away from the inside leg, and with the supporting outside rein he eliminates any falling out on to the outside shoulder.

When planning to leg-yield along the wall of the school, with the horse's head towards the wall, the rider should start the move in the first corner of the long side, the rider should apply a half halt. The fact that the horse is slightly facing the wall will help the half halt to have effect (which is another essential reason why this kind of leg yielding should be taught first to novice riders and/or horses). The horse should then be straightened and flexed towards the wall. From this position the rider should start the leg-yield.

To finish the leg-yield the horse should be flexed the other way and the forehand should be guided in a shallow turn to align with the hind quarters. The rider should then proceed straight ahead, and only at this point should he return to the track.

When leg-yielding along the wall from the leg which is facing the inside of the school, the rider should lead the forehand a step into the school as though he wanted to change the rein on the diagonal. The quarters should stay on the track. The rider should then apply a half-halt and start leg-yielding. To end the leg-yielding he should bring the forehand back to the track in line with the quarters.

Line-to-Line Leg-Yielding

To test and improve the horse's obedience to the forward/sideways driving leg aid and the guiding outside rein, leg yielding from line to line is a good exercise.

In Germany this exercise is carried out from the long side, about 5m (16ft) inwards and then back to the track.

It should be ridden in walk or working trot. The horse moves on two tracks, which are one step apart, with a slight flexion away from the direction of movement nearly parallel to the long side of the arena. The forehand should be slightly in advance of the quarters.

After passing the first corner of a long side the rider should straighten the horse for a moment. At the marker, he should flex the horse away from the direction of movement. Then he moves the horse with the – now – inside leg forward/sideways into the arena. The outside leg together with the weight aids keep the horse going well forward and prevent the quarters from preceding the forehand.

The leg-yielding on the first diagonal into the arena is finished when the horse's head is nearly in line with the middle of the long side. He is by the about 5m (16ft) away from the wall. Here the horse is ridden straight ahead for one horse's length. The flexion should then be changed to the opposite side and the rider's leg should yield the horse back towards the track, which he should meet at the marker before the corner of the long side.