

Lesson Topic: Simple Change of Lead

Definition

This is a change of lead where the horse is brought back immediately into walk and, after 3 to 5 clearly defined walk steps, is restarted immediately into a canter on the opposite lead with no steps at the trot. (USEF Rule Book)

Purpose / Gymnastic Benefit

Simple change of lead teaches horse and rider the feeling of collection in canter and it is a preparatory exercise for flying lead changes.

The simple change of lead is introduced at Second Level. Horse and rider must be well confirmed in the requirements of First Level and now beginning to accept more weight on the hindquarters (collection); moves with an uphill tendency, especially in 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.

Prerequisite

In order to execute a well balanced transition from canter to walk a horse and rider must be able to collect within the canter. On a 20 meter circle, in working canter, collect for several strides, then ride forward to working canter, back to collection, and then forward again.

The rider's aids and the timing of them are very important when asking for collection. One must have a well balanced seat that is strong yet supple and independent enough to be able to execute leg, back and seat, and rein aids with tact. When asking for collection the rider encourages more engagement of the horses hind legs with seat, back and legs while softly receiving and containing the energy and power through the hand and rein aids. These aids are given when you feel your seat swing forward in the canter stride. This is when the horse's hind legs are jumping under and the forehand is coming up. With this exercise the horse learns to take the weight back into the hind quarters by flexing the hocks, stifles and hip. In time, as the horse develops strength the collection can be held for longer periods of time but at first just ask for a few strides and then back forward again. If the horse leans heavier into the reins most likely he is not taking the weight into the hind legs but leaning on the forehand. The rider must stay very focused on the tempo of the canter stride while collecting so that the horse doesn't cheat by simply slowing down and making shorter strides. The rider keeps the activity of the hind legs, jump and power to the canter stride maintaining a clear 3 beat rhythm. If a horse has a tendency toward a 4 beat rhythm then the rider must ride forward and try the transition again.

Various Patterns and Exercises

Walk to canter and canter to walk transitions on a 20 meter circle

When a few strides of collection can be done then the horse is in good balance to be asked to walk. At first you might get a couple of trot steps in between but in time as strength of the hind quarters are developed more clarity from canter to walk can be expected. Too often a rider loses focus on the important details of collection and instead rides for a very prompt transition which is often too abrupt and on the forehand.

When asking for a walk canter transition be sure to shorten the strides of the walk keeping the hind legs active. Ask for the canter when the outside hind leg is on the ground or when the horse's outside front leg is back. It is very important that the horse stays completely straight in his body. If the horse has a tendency to swing the haunches in during this transition one can use a few steps of leg yield away from the inside leg or shoulder-fore to keep the shoulders and the hindquarters in alignment. For the rider, be careful not to use too strong an outside leg or an outside leg that is too far back encouraging the horse to swing the haunches in.

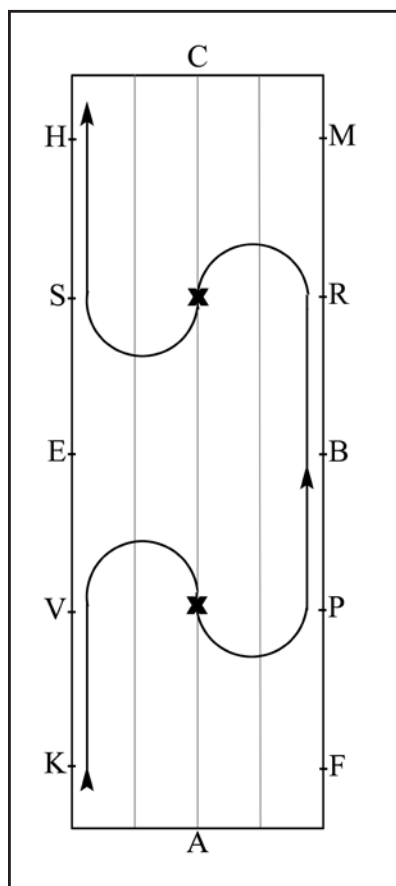
Simple change of lead on a 3 loop serpentine

With this exercise the goal is to place your canter walk transition several strides before approaching the center line so that you have time to straighten and change the bend before asking for the new canter lead. The amount of walk steps will vary depending on the horse's suppleness and relaxation. It is important at first to take your time in the walk paying close attention to the quality of the walk and the rider's ability to change aids through the change of direction and to establish a good connection from the new inside leg to outside rein before asking for the canter depart. In time, as horse and rider learns this exercise, only 3 to 5 walk steps will be needed before asking for the new canter lead.

Simple change of lead on a straight line

Let's start on a 20 meter circle to the right at A in working canter. Once your canter is established, ride out of your circle onto the long side. As you come through the corner between A and K begin to collect the canter stride and walk near K. Shorten the strides of the walk, change the bend and ask for left lead canter (counter canter). As you approach S collect the canter and walk. Near H ask for right lead canter (true canter) and continue around the short side. If a 20 meter circle is needed to regroup and organize the canter it is best to take the time to do this. If not, proceed with this same exercise down the long side of M to F.

Another variation to this exercise would be to ride on the inside track or the quarter lines. By doing this you have no support of a fence or wall of the arena to help with straightness. The horse must stay straight and even between the rider's aids.



Simple changes over L and S

Figure eight patterns

Some horses need the help of 10 meter circles to develop collection in preparation for a walk transition. Let's start in right lead canter at A. At V ride a 10 meter half circle right to L and then 10 meter half circle left from L to P placing a simple change of lead on the center line at L. Continue straight on the left lead canter and repeat the pattern from R to I and I to S placing the simple change on the center line at S. The challenge with this exercise is straightness on the center line while executing the entire exercise of the simple change of lead.

Another variation to this exercise would be to ride onto the diagonal line in canter placing a 10 meter figure eight at X. Example, in right lead canter ride onto the diagonal line at K. At X ride a full 10 meter circle to the right. At X simple change of lead followed by a full 10 meter circle to the left. Continue along the diagonal line to M.

Remember, a simple change of lead is a preparatory exercise for flying lead changes. All these exercises and patterns are introducing you and your horse to a variety of exercises that can and may be used in the future of your training. Be sure to take your time, be patient, and keep the elements of the training scale in mind as the degree of difficulty in training is increased. If problems arise such as tension, lack of thoroughness, etc., it may be necessary to go back to a simpler or easier version of the exercise you are working on in order to reestablish one's confidence and quality of training.