

Lesson Topic: Leg-Yielding

Definition

The horse is almost 'FEI Rule Book' straight, except for a slight flexion at the poll away from the direction in which he moves, so that the rider is just able to see his eyebrow and nostril. The inside legs pass and cross in front of the outside legs. Leg-yielding should be included in the training of the horse before he is ready for collected work. Later, together with the more advanced movement, shoulder-in, it is the best means of making a horse supple, loose and unconstrained for the benefit of the freedom, elasticity and regularity of his gaits and the harmony, lightness, and ease of his movements. Leg-yielding can be performed "on the diagonal" (FEI) in which case the horse should be as close as possible to parallel to the long sides of the arena, although the forehand should be slightly in advance of the quarters. It can also be performed along the wall, in which case the horse should be at an angle of about 35 degrees to the direction in which the horse is moving (2012 USEF Rule DR111).

In leg-yielding, the horse moves forward and sideways on two tracks away from the rider's inside leg. Leg-yielding is performed in walk and trot. It is generally considered the easiest of the lateral movements and should be taught before shoulder-in, haunches-in and half-pass. However, some classical purists argue that leg-yielding should be called a two-track movement, not a lateral movement, as it does not require bend.

Purpose

Leg-yielding is an exercise that loosens and supples the horse as he responds to the sideways-driving aids of the rider. The crossing of the legs, especially the slightly increased lowering of the inside hip, facilitates the loosening effect. Leg-yielding is particularly useful in the warm-up phase but can also be helpful at moments of correction throughout the work when the horse's response to the sideways driving aids is not as desired (e.g., haunches falling out, problems in the half-pass). Leg-yielding is also a rudimentary tool to straighten the horse before he has learned shoulder-in and is ready for collected work.

In training the rider, leg-yielding is of great benefit. For many beginners, this is really the first time they have become fully aware of the fact that they have two reins and two legs and how to use them independently from each other. They realize, for instance, that a horse slowing down cannot be corrected with the sideways-driving leg. Most important, it makes riders aware of the cooperative effect of the aids and how they should harmonize together.

Aids – in General

The horse is basically kept straight; however, the inside rein is shortened and flexes the horse slightly away from the direction of movement and just enough that the rider can see the top of the inside eye and nostril. (This side is called the inside, irrespective of whether the horse is facing the rail or into the arena.) The outside rein has to keep the neck straight at the shoulder. The rider's weight is shifted more onto the inside seat bone. The inside leg should be moved a little behind the girth to cause the horse to step sideways and cross over. The outside leg has to be behind the girth as well to prevent the angle from becoming too great. In principle, the inside aids create and the outside aids receive. This also promotes the rider's feel for the effect of diagonal aids, from the inside leg to the outside rein.

Aids – Fine Tuned

Both reins have to harmonize in such a way that the inside one keeps the horse sufficiently flexed and supple in the lower jaw and poll to avoid resistance and stiffening in the neck; the outside rein has to prevent the horse from over bending the neck and falling through the outside shoulder. This can become more of an issue in the trot, where the added quality of impulsion lacking in the walk requires more skill from the rider to keep the horse straight. Moreover, the horse must be encouraged toward a forward and downward tendency, which is contained by the outside rein. This is of the greatest importance when leg-yielding is done in the walk, particularly with novice riders, so that the horse's top line can open up, thus allowing the desired relaxing and suppling.

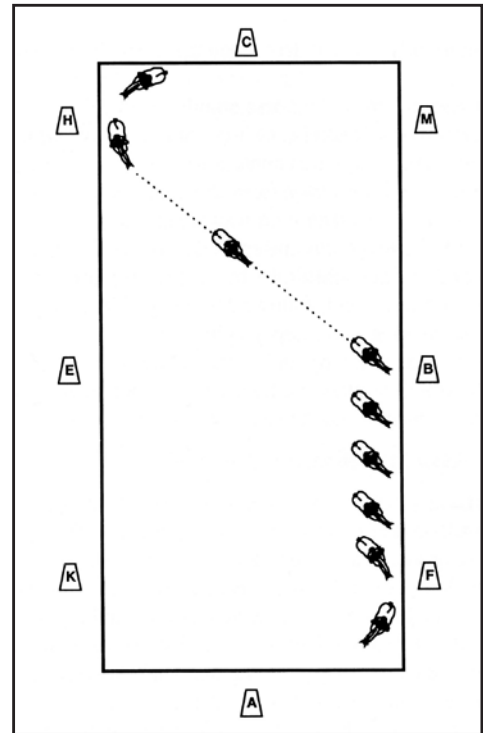
When the weight is shifted onto the inside seat bone, the rider's torso must remain perpendicular behind the horse's withers. Care must be taken not to collapse the inside hip or to tilt the torso to the inside. Both these faults would weaken

the rider's outside leg and make it largely ineffective. Sometimes it may be helpful to tell the student to bring the inside shoulder a little in the direction of the horse's inside hip. This puts additional pressure on the inside seat bone and supports the intent of the outside leg. The inside leg should be brought a little behind the girth with adequate pressure to make the horse step sideways and to cross over. The aid should be given just as the inside hind leg is about to leave the ground. The instructor may have to call out the precise moment so that the student can acquire the correct feel.

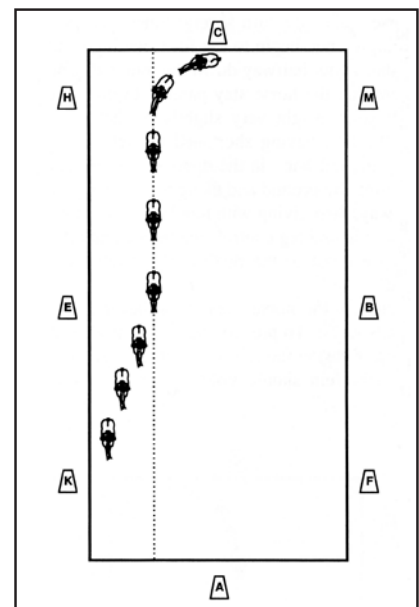
With green horses, it may be necessary to put the inside leg somewhat more behind the girth to convey a clear message to the horse. However, some horses stiffen their bodies when the leg is in an exaggerated position, and some may even kick at the leg if it is too close to the flank. To teach the horse the correct response, it may also be helpful to reinforce the leg aid occasionally with the spur or whip. Some horses learn very well when they are first taught from the ground to cross over from the whip. Soon the handle of the whip can be applied at the correct place on the horse's rib cage to make him understand the purpose of the aid. Later on, when the horse is very sensitized to the aids and the rider has achieved excellent coordination, the fine-tuning may be such that an almost imperceptible shifting of the rider's weight to the inside seat bone, together with a steady leg just slightly behind the girth, will produce the desired result. In general, the outside leg should be behind the girth to prevent the haunches from falling out, which would create too much angle when going down the rail or cause the haunches to lead when leg-yielding on a diagonal line. However, the outside leg may have to be moved more toward the girth to a forward-driving position if the horse slows down. Thus, the position of the outside leg is conditional to the desired effect.

Variations of Leg-Yielding

- 1. Head to the Rail** - Considered by some to be the easiest and most plausible format to start with a green horse or a beginner rider. The rail provides an obvious guideline for the angle. Generally, this should be about 35 degrees sufficient to get maximum benefit from the exercise; however, initially, it may be quite in order to ask for only 20 degrees. This will not induce much crossing of the legs but will allow the student to learn the application of the aids without running into any major problems caused by over using any single aid. If the angle approaches 45 degrees, most horses will bang their knees together or step on their coronet bands, causing them at best to slow down or back up or at worst to rear. For the same reasons, horses that are base-narrow may have to be kept at a lesser angle. The rail also helps the student to be effective with the outside rein without becoming too restrictive, for the rail helps in keeping the horse on the desired track.
- 2. From the Quarter Line back to the Rail** - This is somewhat similar to a 20-degree angle along the rail. The drawback is that most horses have an inclination to gravitate back to the rail, causing the horse to fall through the outside shoulder unless the rider has learned to prevent it. As a result, the haunches would be lagging and there would be very little crossing if any.
- 3. Haunches to the Rail** - This is more challenging than head to the rail. There still is a clear guideline as to the correct angle, but keeping it consistent is more difficult and requires more skill in the application of the diagonal aids, particularly the outside rein. When a student is proficient in this format, he or she ought to be ready for the next variation.

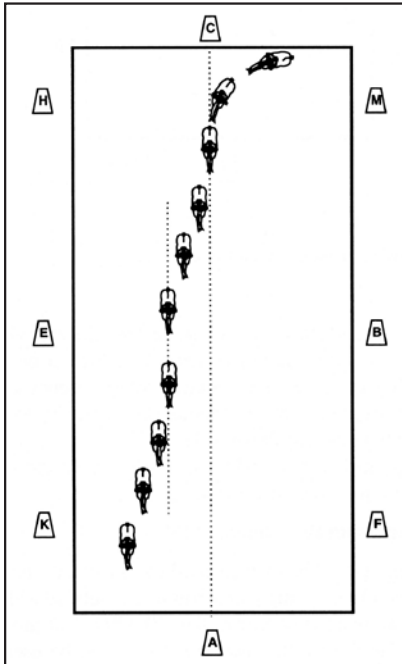


Short diagonal to leg-yield along the long side, horse's head to the rail.



Leg-yield from the quarter line to the rail.

- 4. From Center Line to Rail or from Rail to Center Line** - The horse moves more or less parallel to the rail, but it is important to keep the forehand slightly leading the haunches. If this version is done precisely from one designated letter to another, it adds to the difficulty of the movement.
- 5. Decreasing and Increasing the Square** - In the 40-meter arena, this format is started at the corner marker, with the horse and rider moving toward the quarter line and arriving opposite B or E. On the quarter line the horse is straightened for one horse's length and then yielded with the other leg back to the rail arriving at the next corner marker. In the 60-meter arena this pattern can be taken to the centerline. Both these formats are similar to a counter change of hand.



Leg-yielding steps separated by riding several steps between leg-yields on a straight line.

6. Increasing the Difficulty of Format #5 - Another variation of the previous format can be done in the 60-meter arena from the corner marker to the quarterline and returning to B or E and then repeating this a second time completing the movement with the arrival at the next corner marker. It is important to remember that before every change of direction the horse must first be straightened. This format has the elements of a zig-zag and can also be done on the center line.

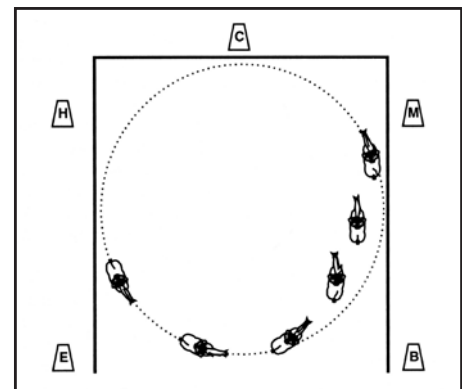
7. On a Circle - This is probably the most effective leg-yielding format. The additional difficulty of staying consistently on a curved line induces a more pronounced crossing over of the inside hind leg and consequently somewhat more lowering of the inside hip. When attempting leg-yielding in this format, it very quickly becomes obvious whether the rider has acquired good coordination of all the aids. If this is not the case, the horse will fall in and out of the circle like a drunken sailor.

8. Leg-Yielding on Circles for Reschooling

(Corrective Riding) - Horses which are inordinately stiff in the back and neck require specialized work for loosening up the tight musculature. They can benefit from leg-yielding on a circle; however, with this work there is significant deviation from the normal concept of leg-yielding. For example, the horse's neck should be bent quite a bit to the inside as much as necessary to induce longitudinal stretching just in front of the withers, resulting in complete relaxation of the muscles along the underside of the neck. In addition, it is useful to activate the inside hind leg with the whip, causing accentuation of the flexion of the joints. Frequent half-halts should be used to prevent the horse from rushing away from the aids and to gradually get him accustomed to this work so that he will eventually relax and swing through his back. Patience and feel are required, and breaks are important for the muscles so as not to fatigue and overstress the horse.

When reschooling such horses, it is also advisable to consult an equine chiropractor to make certain there is no underlying problem that has not been addressed. Most often, the chiropractic work in conjunction with loosening work under saddle will lead to significant improvement.

The instructor should not encourage students to attempt this work unless he or she has an educated seat. If this is not the case, the instructor should take over the reschooling of the horse and have the student remount and feel the results when a session has been successful.



Leg-yielding on a circle.