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DRESSAGE SCHOOL

A Sourcebook of Movements and Tips

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“A great reference book for all levels.” –USDF CONNECTION

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Note for the Reader

Please see the Important Note from the Publisher on p. iii.

At the end of every movement described in this book, you'll find the "Training Pyramid Factor"—a list marked with stars, which tells you how much the exercise furthers the respective element of the Training Pyramid: * means a little; *** means a lot.

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Riding Down the Centerline

Traveling on a straight line down the middle of the arena (from short end to short end) without changing direction.

How It's Supposed to Look When executed correctly, the rider turns just before reaching the middle of the short side of the arena, enters the centerline via a quarter-volte, and rides straight down the centerline toward the middle of the opposite short side. Upon arrival there, you turn back onto the track through a quarter-volte *without* changing direction. Thus, if you begin the exercise tracking right, you also complete it tracking right, and vice

Riding down the centerline requires a high degree of concentration—and a straight horse.



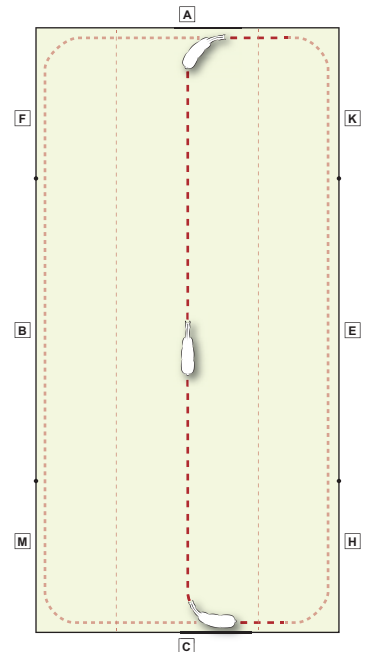
versa. During the turn, the horse must be flexed to the inside and bent around your inside leg. When riding down the centerline, however, the horse must be perfectly straight.

Most Common Mistakes *The Horse:* evades through the outside shoulder during the turn; “wanders”; sways; is on two tracks coming down the centerline. *The Rider:* turns too early or too late; doesn’t ride exactly on the centerline; overshoots the centerline.

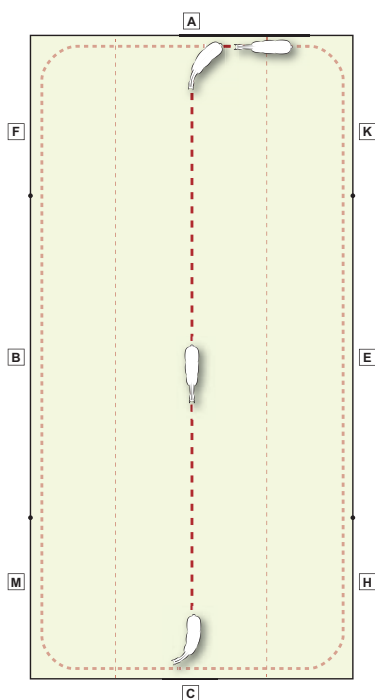
Correct Aids Especially when riding down the centerline, it’s highly important to ride an accurate turn (p. 1). This is because when the turn is ridden incorrectly, you will not be able to hit the centerline at the right spot. In order to turn onto the centerline you must, depending on the level of your horse’s training, initiate the turn before the middle of the short side while focusing on the letters “A” or “C” (depending on which end you start). Note: the letters should set the *outer* boundary for the turn, so give yourself ample space to begin your turn *before* arriving at the letter. Shortly after initiating the first turn, look toward the middle of the opposite short side until you turn again at the end of the centerline. Focusing on the letter will help you remain in better balance, making it easier to keep the horse straight.

In order to avoid the horse evading the turn through his outside shoulder, make an effort not to overuse the inside rein and instead yield with this hand at the right moment. The outside rein and outside leg should keep the horse’s shoulder and haunches under control. If the horse still tends to evade to the outside despite these aids—perhaps because of his natural crookedness—it most often is helpful to briefly counterflex him (for one or two strides).

Goal of The Movement Riding down the centerline is a school figure that tests the rider’s influence on his horse as well as the horse’s level of training. Mistakes that occur repeatedly, such as evasion through the outside shoulder when turning or “wandering” on the centerline, are signs of incorrect aids and a lack of “straightness.” If, on the other hand, the exercise can be ridden without difficulty, it shows that the rider uses her aids correctly and the horse exhibits a certain degree of “throughness” to the aids.



When riding down the centerline, you do not change direction but stay on the same rein.



When changing the rein down the centerline, you change direction when you reach the end of the centerline.

Fast Facts Basic exercise; can be ridden at all paces and basic gaits.

Pyramid Factor Rhythm, relaxation/suppleness*, contact*, impulsion, straightness*, collection.

Changing Rein Down the Centerline

Riding down the centerline and changing direction on the opposite short side of the arena.

How It's Supposed to Look This movement should be ridden like riding down the centerline (p. 34)—at least until just before it's completed. The difference is that the rider changes direction at the end. This means that if you started out tracking left, you finish the exercise by tracking right and vice versa.

Most Common Mistakes *The Horse:* evades through the outside shoulder; leaves the centerline; “wanders”; is on two tracks down the centerline. *The Rider:* turns too early or too late; is not exactly on the centerline; overshoots the centerline; forgets to change direction.

Correct Aids See riding down the centerline, p. 34.

Goal of The Movement See riding down the centerline, p. 34.

Fast Facts Basic exercise; can be ridden at both medium and collected paces, with extensions possible on centerline.

Pyramid Factor Rhythm, relaxation/suppleness*, contact*, impulsion, straightness*, collection.

Simple Change of Lead

Changing from a left-lead canter to a right-lead canter—or vice versa—through the walk.

How It's Supposed to Look A simple change goes well when the horse, from a clear, three-beat canter, promptly and smoothly transitions into the walk without hesitation and while remaining securely on the aids. Then, when given the canter aid after three or four walk steps, the horse spontaneously picks up the other lead.

Most Common Mistakes *The Horse:* “dribbles” into the walk; changes via the trot (“jigs” before resuming canter); doesn’t exhibit a clear transition to walk prior to resuming canter; is tense;



The right lead canter.

Canter on the left lead...



uses too few or too many walk steps; is on the forehand; is tight in the neck; is against the hand; doesn't exhibit a spontaneous canter depart. *The Rider:* requests change too early or too late.

Correct Aids Two basic requirements allow the rider to execute the simple change successfully: 1) the horse is securely on the aids; and 2) the quality of the canter is good. Only when both conditions are in place will the change work correctly in all its individual parts.

First of all, you must focus on the point where the change is to be performed. If, for example, you are asked to "do a simple canter change in the middle of the short side of the arena," you must begin by transitioning to the walk just before reaching "A" or "C," continuing with three to four walk steps until just passing "A" or "C," then promptly cantering off again on the new lead. To initiate the simple change, give a half-halt to prepare your horse for the new task ahead, then follow up with additional half-halts. At the same time, slide your outside leg, which has been placed behind the girth at the canter, forward into its original position. For a brief moment, the restraining aids prevail while simultaneously driving the horse evenly forward with both legs. When done correctly, the horse compresses his body a bit, takes up more weight on his hind legs and transitions from the canter right into the walk. At that moment, you must react quickly and "let" him walk by moving both your hands very slightly forward, followed by a



...the simple change, and stepping off onto the right lead.

gentle, forward-driving aid from both legs. This allows the horse to stretch into your hand and find his rhythm at the walk.

During this brief walk phase, silently and calmly count the number of steps, and on the third or fourth *at the latest*, give the aid for resuming the canter (p. 4). Again, give a half-halt on the outside rein, slightly flex the horse in the poll to the inside with the inside rein, while at the same time positioning your outside leg behind the girth, while the inside leg is at the girth providing a brief, go-forward aid. At the moment the horse is about to pick up the canter, soften the inside rein slightly, allowing “room” for the canter stride to happen.

Goal of The Movement First of all, a simple canter change is used to move from one canter lead to the other without having to perform a flying change of lead (p. 40). It is also—when ridden correctly—an incredibly useful and good exercise to gymnasticize the horse—it improves “throughness,” especially when you frequently ride several simple changes in a row. The orchestration of the various aids, the alternating between “gathering” the horse together and riding on (which you need for the downward transition to the walk as well as the canter depart), sends the horse more toward your hand from back to front and causes him to flex his hind joints and lower his hindquarters a bit more. At the same time, the frequent changing from the left to the right lead, or vice versa, alternately stretches and contracts the muscles on both sides of his

body, which improves the horse's "straightness." For these reasons, you cannot ride simple canter changes too often. They are ideal at the end of warm-up and during the work phase to either prepare the horse for collection or improve it, as well as to build muscles in the hindquarters and encourage the "letting through" of the aids.

Fast Facts Progressive exercise; suitable for both the end of warm-up and the work phase; can be ridden in a working and collected canter; improves coordination and "carrying power."

Pyramid Factor Rhythm**, relaxation/suppleness**, contact***, impulsion**, straightness***, collection***.

Flying Change of Lead

Changing from left lead canter to right lead canter—and vice versa—at the moment of the highest point of the canter suspension phase, without transitioning downward to the walk or trot.

Taking Breaks

Take a break! This applies to riding, also. Just like us, horses get tired. Strenuous work tires their muscles (creating lactic acid) and disrupts concentration. For this reason, repeating the same movement over and over is useless. In the long run, the movement will just get worse and worse, and in the worst cases, produce resistance. Instead, after 15 minutes of work—at the most—take a break and rest at the walk. And, by performing a variety of exercises rather than the same one, you'll relax the horse, which helps to further his training.

How It's Supposed to Look Flying changes of lead are an advanced exercise. When executed correctly, the horse changes from one canter lead to the other at the rider's request during the "highest" point of the canter suspension phase when all four feet are off the ground. The new "leading" front and hind leg should change simultaneously (when the front lead changes while the hind does not, the horse is said to be "cross-cantering"; and when one leg changes before the other, the horse is said to be "late"—see below).

The prerequisite for a good flying change is a correct, balanced, and "big" canter stride. When this is the case, the moment of suspension gives the horse enough time to switch leading legs cleanly. The better quality the horse's canter, the more beautiful the flying changes can be.

Most Common Mistakes *The Horse:* is late (new front "leading" leg changes before the hind); changes his hind leg first (new hind leading leg changes before the front); lacks impulsion; responds slowly to the rider's aids (horse changes one canter



The moment of suspension when the horse changes his canter lead.

stride or more after the rider gives the aid); has a high croup; has a tight neck; does a “flat” or “shallow” change; “sways” through the changes; is crooked; goes against the rider’s hand; is rushed or tense; breaks from canter.

Correct Aids To give a correct aid for the flying change on a trained horse is one thing; to train flying changes to a green horse another. The latter requires a lot of experience and therefore should only be done by advanced riders. After all, the flying change under saddle presents quite a demanding sequence of motion for the horse. When at liberty and without a rider, young horses often manage to perform flying changes naturally, since they are generally in a

state of balance. The addition of a rider disturbs this balance so it must be recreated through systematic training—and when a rider makes mistakes during this process, they are destined to become problematic later when training flying changes. Once mistakes have been learned, such as changing late or not “jumping through,” they are very difficult to eliminate since they are quickly “automated” in the horse’s movement pattern.

When riding a flying change on a horse that has been trained to do them, it is best to begin by changing from the counter-canter to the correct-lead canter, as this is easier for most horses. To develop a feel for the changes, it is helpful to change across the short diagonal (p. 32). Doing so changes your direction and allows you to vary the angle at which you approach the opposite track (as opposed to changing across the long diagonal—p. 30—where you end up in the corner of the arena).

On the counter lead, travel across the short diagonal and approach the point where you will ask for the flying change just before reaching the track. Apply pressure with your outside leg behind the girth to “wake up” the horse’s inside hind leg and encourage him to “jump” forward when given the aid for the change (note: you are not driving him sideways, you are driving

Flying changes require the horse to have a solid canter, and the rider, excellent coordination.



Counter-canter or flying changes, first?

“Should a horse be able to perform a solid counter-canter before attempting flying changes? This is a question many riders ask in the course of training. I believe a rider should accept everything a horse offers of his own accord. When a young horse changes his leads on his own, accept it gratefully, and reward him. This is because every horse learns counter-canter, but not necessarily the flying changes. For this reason, you should not adamantly practice the counter-canter first or even punish the horse if he switches leads but praise him instead. The more a horse comes into balance, the easier the counter-canter is anyway. Flying changes, on the other hand, are more likely to cause problems. Therefore a rider should view a changing of the lead as a gift and accept it gratefully.”

Dr. Uwe Schulten-Baumer Sen.

Olympia Trainer, dressage patron

him forward). Give a half-halt to prepare the horse and when you are ready, apply the following finely coordinated aids at the same time: slightly flex the horse toward the new leading canter leg and switch the position of your own legs (the old inside leg that was at the girth should now be behind the girth, and vice versa). At the moment of the flying change, give with your new inside hand, allowing the horse's new leading hind leg to “jump” through and the canter stride to appear “uphill.”

During the flying change your hip and weight shift slightly toward the new “inside.” However, do not exaggerate this weight shift as it can unbalance the horse, deteriorating or even preventing the change. The best—and most correct way—to ride the flying change is with only the slightest use of your body. This is possible, however, only when on a trained horse. A green or young horse often requires the rider to give much more explicit aids in order to help him understand what you want, and exerting a stronger influence with your upper body can sometimes be quite useful—in essence, deliberately unbalancing the horse, and thereby causing him to switch leads.

Goal of The Movement The flying change is, just like the simple change (p. 36), an opportunity to change direction without hav-



When schooling difficult movements remember to take plenty of breaks.

ing to ride too many rounds at the counter-canter. However, it allows you to do so without transitioning to another gait first. Flying changes are also a good way of testing a horse's relaxation and suppleness, and his "straightness"—the second and fifth elements in the Training Pyramid. Only a horse that is relaxed and correctly aligned is able to perform clean and beautiful flying changes. Tension that's latent or new often erupts at the moment of changing and signals an absence of relaxation, just as a lack in "straightness" will prevent an even flying change.

Note: a single well-executed flying change is the prerequisite for tempi changes (p. 123), which are required in upper level dressage tests.

Fast Facts Advanced exercise; suitable for both the end of warm-up and the work phase; can be ridden in a collected, working, and medium canter; improves coordination.

Pyramid Factor Rhythm, relaxation/suppleness, contact, impulsion, straightness, collection.

Full Halt

The concurrence of all aids resulting in the horse coming to a complete, square, straight stop.

How It's Supposed to Look A full halt is successful when the horse transitions smoothly yet promptly into the halt from the walk, trot, or canter; remains quietly and securely on the rider's aids; and distributes his weight evenly on all four legs.

Most Common Mistakes *The Horse:* "dribbles" into the halt (via the walk or trot); is on the forehand; goes against the rider's hand; is tight in the neck; is crooked; evades through his haunches; stops too abruptly. *The Rider:* uses too much hand; falls forward or backward.

Correct Aids According to the definition of the movement, at the full halt all the rider's aids must be simultaneous. When you plan

to transition to the halt—that is, to *apply a full halt*—you must drive the horse forward while maintaining rein pressure and giving a weight aid.

Let's begin with the restraining rein aid, which acts like a car's brake, so to speak. However, on a horse, you "brake" only briefly and always in combination with using the "accelerator"—your driving leg aids. Why? The reason is simple: pressure causes counter-pressure; traction causes counter-traction. If you pull on the reins alone, the horse will just get long in his back and pull



Halt and salute.



The full halt consists of “gathering” the horse together, driving him “through,” and halting.

against you with his neck and body, as if he were pulling a carriage. The rider keeps pulling, as does the horse—and the full halt has failed. In contrast, when the rein aid is combined with a forward-driving leg aid, the horse’s hind legs are animated to step more forward and carry more weight. The process prevents the horse from becoming “longer,” and in fact, the horse appears to compress himself or “close up,” and his forehand is unburdened as he comes to a halt.

Controlled use of the seat and weight aids during the full halt is also important. After all, the horse is supposed to compress in order to be able to halt correctly. In order to do this, he must be encouraged to raise his back. This is only possible, however, when you cease the forward-driving aids and remain still, sitting vertically on the horse in perfect balance. Many riders tend to lean backward during the full halt, perhaps even throwing their legs forward as if stepping on the brakes in their car. A horse, obviously, is *not* a car, and on top of that, is very sensitive, especially in his back! By leaning backward, a rider puts an enormous amount of pressure on the horse’s back muscles, which the horse will try to escape by moving forward. And when the rider pushes his legs forward as well, the horse’s hind legs trail out behind him, his back hollows, and the pressure he feels on his back is intensified. If anything, when riding a horse that tends to lean against the hand, you should slightly and briefly lean *forward*. It is ideal, of course, to sit vertically and completely balanced, and execute the full halt with the slightest of aids.

Repeat the correct restraining and driving aids until the horse has halted. With a horse that allows the aids to come “through,” this can happen after your first combined application of aids. But, with horses that are less “through” or not yet well trained, you can expect a delay in their response, which can only be eliminated in the course of further training.

Goal of The Movement Full halts, like almost all movements, serve a variety of purposes. First of all, they are an absolute necessity for controlling a horse, and consequently are the equivalent of skiing’s “snow plow,” or even its emergency brake—sitting down! Only the rider who is able to stop—whether on the ski

slope or in the saddle—is able to prevent potentially dangerous situations and accidents.

In a dressage test, full halts test the horse’s “throughness” to the aids, and give judges an idea of how the horse has been worked and whether the rider is influencing the horse correctly. In addition, full halts are a wonderful tool to use in the training of a horse. Integrating as many of them as possible in work at the walk, trot, and later, the canter, together with the combination of the various aids and physical actions requested of the horse (lowering the haunches, raising the back, and stretching toward the bit) provides an excellent gymnasticizing effect—provided, of course, they are executed correctly. The more correct the full halt is executed, the suppler the entire horse will become.

Fast Facts Basic exercise; suitable for both the end of the warm-up and the work phase; can be ridden from all basic gaits; improves “carrying power.”

Pyramid Factor Rhythm*, relaxation/suppleness**, contact***, impulsion***, straightness**, collection***.

“Breathing” hands

A “quiet” hand must not be confused with a “firm” hand. And, “yielding” the hands should not be “throwing the reins away.” Imagine your hands are “breathing.” Visualize this to keep just enough flexibility.

Salute

Performing a halt and facing the judges in order to physically greet them at the beginning and the end of a dressage test.

How It’s Supposed to Look Saluting is one of the very first requirements in a dressage test and for this reason, should not be underestimated. The rider leaves a positive or negative impression on the judges at both the beginning and the end of a test, depending on the quality of the salute. This movement isn’t commonly viewed as a rider’s signature for nothing!

In general, the salute is made on the centerline (except when riding in a group) and most commonly at “X”—though it is sometimes also at “G,” in front of the judges. To salute, take both reins in one hand and greet the judges with your free hand. Female riders simply let their free hand drop to the side of their