

DRESSAGE *for the* NOT-SO-PERFECT HORSE

Riding Through the Levels
on the Peculiar, Opinionated,
Complicated Mounts We All Love



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with Nancy J. Jones

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CHAPTER

6

Leg-Yield

Riding a leg yield at the beginning of the warm-up is the perfect exercise for a horse at any level of training to test the horse's reaction to your lateral moving (sideways) aids. Keep in mind that you must always test your aids or your horse will test you.

The leg-yield is the first movement called for in dressage tests that asks the horse to move forward and sideways at the same time. Generally, it is helpful to train the turn-on-the-forehand prior to training the leg-yield.

Imperfections and Evasions

Your horse:

- 1 Drags his haunches.
- 2 Leads with his shoulders.
- 3 Lacks "crossing" in his legs.
- 4 Tilts his head.
- 5 Changes his tempo.

Before I discuss how to train the turn-on-the-forehand and leg-yield, and then address these imperfections, look at the USEF Rule Book definition for the leg-yield (see sidebar, p. 51).

The leg-yield is part of a pyramid of increasingly difficult movements that require the horse to move both forward and sideways. Here is what you should master at each level of what I call the "Pyramid of Lateral Movements" before progressing to the next level (fig. 6.2):

- 1 Turn-on-the-forehand
- 2 Simple leg-yield (on the diagonal)
- 3 Leg-yield tail-to-wall and head-to-wall
- 4 Shoulder-in
- 5 Travers (haunches-in) and renvers (haunches-out)
- 6 Half-pass

How To Ride and Train

Turn-on-the-Forehand

I prefer to always teach my horses turn-on-the-forehand before introducing the leg-yield. This teaches them to move away from the leg without having any impulsion or forward movement and is the first lesson in the inside-leg-to-outside-rein connection. I use this simple exercise all the way up through the levels to reinforce the horse's reaction to the "move sideways" aid.

Even though it is said that horses doing dressage are only doing what they do by nature, I don't believe I have ever seen a horse running sideways in the pasture, "naturally" performing a half-pass or a leg-yield. I do think that teaching the horse to move sideways and still a bit forward at the same time, which encourages him to cross his legs, requires a bit of time and suppling.

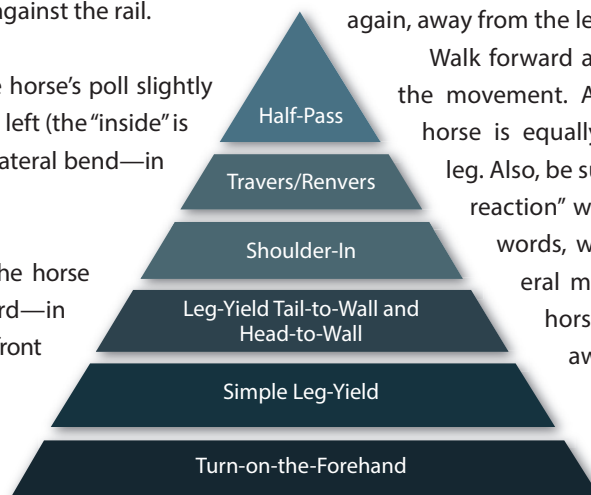
Rider's Aids

When performing a turn-on-the-forehand off your *left* leg, first halt the horse on the rail, with your left hand and leg against the rail.

1 *Inside rein*: Flexes the horse's poll slightly toward the rail or to the left (the "inside" is in the direction of the lateral bend—in this case, the left).

2 *Outside rein*: Keeps the horse from walking forward—in other words, keeps the front legs in the same spot.

6.2 The Pyramid of Lateral Movements.



3 *Outside leg*: This is not necessary behind the girth. You want the horse's hindquarters to step to the right, so you might need to move your outside leg forward toward the shoulder to help support the outside rein and act as a barrier to keep the entire horse from moving to the right.

4 *Inside leg*: This leg now becomes the lateral moving leg and therefore moves about 3 inches behind the girth. This is the active leg.

5 *Seat*: Sit in the middle of the saddle.

With the horse halted next to the wall, flex him slightly in the direction of the wall. Use your leg (the one closest to the wall) just behind the girth and, with a gentle pressure, ask the horse to move one step *sideways*. The opposite rein (the one furthest from the wall) will be the "whoa" rein. If the horse moves *forward*, halt again. He must understand that the outside rein says, "Stop. Don't move forward." Reinforce this aid and then "give"—let the horse stand a few seconds. Then ask the horse to move sideways again, away from the leg nearest the wall.

Walk forward a few steps and repeat the movement. Always make sure the horse is equally responsive off each leg. Also, be sure to allow an "action/reaction" with your aids. In other words, when you use your lateral moving leg (action) the horse should quickly step away from it (reaction). This is followed by the reward (praising, petting the neck,

sugar, voice, relaxing aids). Do not allow the horse to just do the exercise on his own without your aids.

Turn-on-the-forehand is also the beginning of the lateral bending aids. The “dining car” and the “caboose” of your choo-choo train will move outward away from the leg. Later, when you ask the horse to bend correctly, your outside leg behind the girth will “catch” the caboose. For now, allow both “cars” to move out!

Leg-Yield

Once the horse understands the turn-on-the-forehand, you can begin to sequentially train the *three* types of leg-yield:

- 1 On a diagonal line
- 2 Tail-to-wall
- 3 Head-to-wall

On a Diagonal Line

Rider's Aids

Begin by leg-yielding off the left leg to the right, away from the wall. Note that the horse's left side is his “inside,” since his poll is flexed slightly toward the wall. The horse is on four tracks, which means that if you stand in front of the horse, you can see all four of his legs.

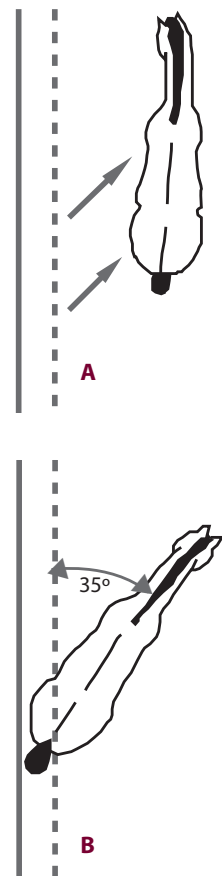
1 Inside rein: Keeps the horse flexed in the poll slightly to the left.

2 Outside rein: Controls the speed as well as helps to support the horse's balance by not allowing him to fall on the outside shoulder.

USEF Rule Book LEG-YIELD

The horse is almost 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 the eyebrow and nostril on the inside. 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 on, 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, in which case the horse should be as close as possible 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 (figs. 6.1 A & B).



6.1 A & B Leg-yield on the diagonal (A) and along the wall (B). Note that leg-yield along the wall can be either tail-to-wall or head-to-wall (see p. 53).

3 *Inside leg:* In this direction, your left leg is the lateral moving leg, positioned 3 inches behind the girth. This is also the active leg.

4 *Outside leg:* You may use the outside leg (in this direction, your right leg) behind the girth when the horse's haunches are leading. Use this leg near the shoulder to help support the outside rein when the horse is falling over the outside shoulder. And, when the horse is going sideways *too much*, you can use this leg as the active leg for a few strides in order to encourage the horse to move more forward and less sideways.

5 *Seat:* Sit in the direction of travel—in this case, to the right.

Here, the horse's body stays *parallel to the wall*. This is the easiest way to begin the leg-yielding as it requires the least amount of suppleness and crossing of legs. In addition, start by asking the horse to move *toward* the wall from the quarterline so you ask him to do something he likes—most young horses like to stay near the wall, as it gives them confidence and a place to find their balance.

Once the horse is more proficient at leg-yielding and has more lateral reach, the angle of the leg-yield can be increased to add more difficulty. You can then begin to ask the horse to move *away* from the wall toward centerline.

For this first type of leg-yield, turn onto the quarterline and walk straight ahead. Be sure the horse understands he must *go straight first* and that he doesn't begin to fall sideways in anticipation. He must wait for your leg-yield aids. Then, use a little outside rein to "close the front door" a

bit, put your inside leg slightly behind the girth, and move your weight in the direction you want the horse to travel. The movement must be a forward and sideways one. The horse should remain flexed or positioned *away* from the direction of travel, but I find it helpful to change the flexion a bit to keep the horse supple in both reins.

Once the horse understands the aids for the leg-yield on the diagonal, you can move into trot. Again, start from the quarterline or centerline and move *toward* the wall first. When the horse is proficient in this exercise, leg-yield at the trot *away* from the wall to the quarterline or centerline, as well.

The Stair Step Exercise

When you find the horse starts to fall sideways out of balance, there is an exercise to solve this problem. If you review the aids I've described for leg-yielding on the diagonal (see p. 51), you'll see that your outside leg can also be used up near the horse's shoulder. Also note that when one leg sends the horse sideways, your other leg is either the *holding* leg or the "*forward-sending*" leg.

In leg-yield, the horse should be moving away from the *inside* leg ("inside" the bend), but when he falls through the outside rein and leg, you can correct the problem by changing the active leg: use the *outside* leg to send the horse a bit forward and straight ahead. So, go sideways from your inside leg a few strides, and then use your outside leg to send the horse straight ahead for a few more strides. It is what I call the "Stair Step Exercise." The horse needs to learn which leg is in charge of what job.

Tail-to-Wall

Rider's Aids

Begin with a leg-yield on the right rein, moving away from the right leg (inside).

1 Inside rein: Leads the forehand off the wall and flexes the poll slightly to the right.

2 Outside rein: Controls the speed as well as helping to support the horse's balance by not allowing him to fall on the outside shoulder.

3 Inside leg: The right leg will be your active and lateral-moving leg—positioned about 3 inches behind the girth.

4 Outside leg: Can be used behind the girth if the haunches fall too much to the left, or may be used closer to the shoulder to help support the outside rein.

5 Seat: Sit in the direction of the movement—in this case, to the left.

Again, this type of leg-yield is on four tracks. The inside hind and inside front legs will cross over the outside legs (see fig. 6.1 B, p. 51). This is a good way to start the “idea” of shoulder-in (a movement on three tracks—see p. 77).

Be sure to start at the walk. You will lose a bit of angle in the trot and of course until the horse becomes supple, you will also lose some impulsion. Be sure to only do about 12 meters at first and then straighten and reward the horse. Don't keep going until you have no impulsion left, or until the horse gets fed up with the exercise.

Head-to-Wall

Rider's Aids

Begin with a leg-yield off your left leg (the “inside” leg).

1 Inside rein: As in turn-on-the-forehand (see p. 50), the inside rein will slightly flex the horse's poll to the left. The inside rein also helps the horse understand that the forehand should be positioned to the left, away from the direction of travel.

2 Outside rein: Controls the speed as well as helping to support the horse's balance by not allowing him to fall on the outside shoulder.

3 Inside leg at the girth: This is the left lateral-moving leg, positioned about 3 inches behind the girth. It's the active leg.

4 Outside leg: Can be used behind the girth if the haunches fall too much to the right, or used closer to the shoulder to help support the outside rein.

5 Seat: Sit in the direction of the movement—in this case, to the right.

This type of leg-yield is also on four tracks. The horse's head and shoulders face the wall and the outside front and outside hind legs cross over the inside legs.

This exercise is the beginning of travers, renvers, and half-pass (see pp. 84, 85, 121). It teaches the horse to displace his hindquarters from your outside leg behind the girth. It also teaches the horse not to throw the “caboose” of your choo-

Personal Story

Applause (real name Rocket Launcher) was an unbroken three-year-old purchased by me as my first “really good horse.” He was 16.3 hands and a half-brother to Bruce Davidson’s famous event horse, J.J. Babu. Applause finished in twenty-first place in the USDF Horse of the Year awards at First Level one year. Little did I know that his registered name was actually a fitting one.

Our early training on the long line went smoothly. However, it turns out Applause was a bit cold-backed. Once he was mounted, he would either quietly walk forward or start bucking like a saddle bronco. Even having someone lead me forward wasn’t safe—at least for the person trying to lead him. You could never really tell which decision he would make. I remember not

really wanting to get on...I had to just hope he would outgrow the habit, which he did, thankfully. And I never did hit the dirt!

Our next obstacle was leg-yield. I was out at Keenridge preparing for the Regional Championships, and in a lesson, Hilda Gurney thought it was time for Applause to learn head-to-wall leg-yield. My horse was

not happy with the idea of crossing his hind legs and found his family eventing history handy as he jumped out of the dressage ring and raced through the walnut orchard. I told Hilda that head-to-wall really should be taught with an actual wall in front of the horse...not an 18-inch fence.

6.3 Here I am on Applause, a young horse I trained. During one early lesson he decided leg-yielding head-to-wall did not hold his interest!



choo train to the outside of the circle when asking for lateral bending.

In this exercise it is important for you to move your weight into the direction of travel. This aid will then be established when you add bend in the more difficult lateral exercises. The horse must move away from your leg, under your weight.

JUDGING TIP

The difference between a “7” and a “10” in leg-yield in a test is that while both horses go from Point A to Point B correctly, the horse that receives the higher score takes fewer strides to get there. Later in training, you can use the leg-yield to increase the lateral reach in the half-pass.

Cures and Solutions

1 Problem: My horse drags his haunches.

This is usually a lack of responsiveness to your lateral-moving leg aid. Go back to turn-on-the-forehand (see p. 50) and use your whip if you need to reinforce your leg aid. The horse must answer your quick and light aid to be successful later in the half-pass.

2 Problem: My horse leads with his shoulders.

This is a bit like when the horse drags his haunches (see above). Remember, once the horse is leading with the shoulders, you cannot make his hind legs go faster. You will need to slow the shoulders down. You can stop going sideways for a few strides and get your alignment (see the Stair

Step Exercise on p. 52). You can also counterflex the horse a bit in the direction you are going. This will help “stand up” the outside shoulder.

3 Problem: My horse lacks “crossing” in his legs.

As mentioned in the Judging Tip at left, the difference between a high score and a modest score from the judge is really the amount of lateral reach the horse can show. From Point A to Point B, your horse may be able to do it in ten steps, but another can do it in eight steps. Some horses, by nature, have quite a lot of lateral reach—but since the horses reading this book are *not* perfect, they will need a bit of work here!

You may have to feel that you are actually pushing the horse sideways out of balance in order to increase his lateral reach. The horse must really open up the angles of his shoulders. Don't ride leg-yield at home as you would at a show. Your job in training is to raise your standards and develop more lateral reach and suppleness than you would need in competition. If your horse can easily do a leg-yield at home with energy and ease, then when it comes to show time and the requirement is easier, he will be a star!

Try counting the number of strides it takes you to get from Point A to Point B. Do this in both directions. One direction will take more strides because the horse will be less supple this way. First, work on this more difficult direction until it matches the other side. Then, when both sides are equal, start working again on improving overall lateral reach. You should be able to take out a stride or two each direction.

4 Problem: My horse tilts his head.

This is caused by the horse not staying even in both reins. You will need to change the flexion in the poll to keep the horse supple. Your goal in the show ring is to maintain flexion away from the direction of travel, but in training, the suppleness and even contact is more important than maintaining flexion in one direction.

5 Problem: My horse's tempo changes.

This is a balance issue. For a high score in the show ring, the tempo must be the same. In schooling, work first toward a good response to the leg aid and good lateral reach. At each show you can then find the exact balance that works for your horse on that particular day.

CHAPTER

13

Strengthen the Pendulum— Third Level and Above

There is a fine line between brilliance and resistance.

Does your horse have the ability to move on to Third Level and above? Can your horse maintain the correct balance and carriage? Please review chapter 7 (see p. 57). I am now going to be talking about the transitions required for Third Level through Intermediate I.

In this chapter, I'll talk about some of the more sophisticated transitions and paces you and your horse must accomplish to advance up the levels. While not all horses can achieve success at Intermediate II and Grand Prix, with the right training and instruction, you and your horse may indeed find success at Third Level and above.

Here are some challenges you may encounter with your horse as you advance beyond Second Level.

Imperfections and Evasions

Your horse:

- 1 Changes leads behind, either at the beginning or end of medium or extended canter.
- 2 Has transitions that judges say are "vague" or "gradual."
- 3 Lacks groundcover.
- 4 Loses his clear, three-beat canter rhythm.
- 5 Gets crooked.
- 6 Falls downhill.
- 7 Gets stiff in his back, neck, and/or topline.

USEF Rule Book

MEDIUM TROT

This is a pace of moderate lengthening compared to the extended trot, but “rounder” than the latter. Without hurrying, the horse goes forward with clearly lengthened steps and with impulsion from the hindquarters. The rider allows the horse to carry the head a little more in front of the vertical than at the collected and the working trot, and to lower the head and neck slightly. The steps should be even, and the whole movement balanced and unconstrained.

EXTENDED TROT

The horse covers as much ground as possible. Without hurrying, the steps are lengthened to the utmost as a result of great impulsion from the hindquarters. The rider allows the horse to lengthen the frame and to gain ground while controlling the poll. The forefeet should touch the ground on the spot towards which they are pointing.

The movement of the fore and hind legs should reach equally forward in the moment of extension. The whole movement should be well-balanced and the transition to collected trot should be smoothly executed by taking more weight on the hindquarters.

MEDIUM CANTER

This is a pace between the working and the extended canter. Without hurrying, the horse goes forward with clearly lengthened strides

and impulsion from the hindquarters. The rider allows the horse to carry the head a little more in front of the vertical than in the collected and working canter, and at the same time allows the horse to lower the head and neck slightly. The strides should be balanced and unconstrained.

EXTENDED CANTER

The horse covers as much ground as possible. Without hurrying, the strides are lengthened to the utmost. The horse remains calm, light, and straight as a result of great impulsion from the hindquarters. The rider allows the horse to lengthen the frame with a controlled poll and to gain ground. The whole movement should be well-balanced and the transition to collected canter should be smoothly executed by taking more weight on the hindquarters.

VERY COLLECTED CANTER

In executing the pirouette or the half-pirouette in canter, the rider should maintain perfect lightness of the horse while accentuating the collection. The quarters are well-engaged and lowered and show a good flexion of the joints. An integral part of the movement is the canter strides before and after the pirouette. These should be characterized by an increased activity and collection before the pirouette and, the movement having been completed, by the balance being maintained as the horse proceeds.



13.1 Gwen Blake and Sancette in medium trot at Third Level.

- 8 Won't lengthen his frame.
- 9 Gets "earthbound."
- 10 Shows no clear difference between the medium and extended paces.

I'll give you exercises to correct these deficiencies later (see p. 108), but first let's turn again to the USEF Rule Book for definitions of the new paces: *medium and extended trot and canter* and "very collected" canter, also known as the *pirouette canter* (see sidebar, p. 104).

New Transitions and Paces

Review the diagram of the Pendulum of Elasticity on p. 58. We are now ready to move the Pendulum more to the left and more to the right in order to introduce the following transitions:

- 1 Medium trot and canter to and from collected trot and canter.
- 2 Extended trot and canter to and from collected trot and canter.

Personal Story

When Linda Ohlson first brought Moshne to me for a lesson, I thought, “Hmmm, very ‘earthbound’ and flat.” Linda wanted to move her horse up the levels. He was a Thoroughbred/Akhal Teke cross, seven years old at the time, and schooling about First Level. His favorite trick to escape when the work got hard was to bolt off across the arena, usually through the left shoulder. Linda weighed about 100 pounds and was really taken for a ride.

The first thing I suggested was that Linda start Moshne on Legend® and perhaps an oral supplement, such as Cosequin®, as well. I have always felt that once horses start collection, we as their riders, should help them out a bit with something to help “lube up” the joints. (Now that I am approaching 60, I admit liking my own morning dose of Aleve®!) Correct work will also help the muscling of the topline, which takes away a lot of stress from the knees and hocks down. Good riding reinforces the saying, “Motion is lotion,” for the joints.

Due to Moshne’s natural lack of suspension, it became clear that if Moshne were going to progress and be able to learn movements such as passage and extended trot, he could only do so if he was strengthened via the Pendulum of Elasticity (see p. 58).

Individual movements were quite easy to teach—except the flying changes, which was a problem because his canter lacked suspension. Over two years, Linda gymnasticized Moshne’s body through the use of the Pendulum, he developed more suspension in the trot, and he became able to do some passage. The canter became much more elastic and suspended, and now he can also do a few one-tempi changes.

I love the photo here of Moshne, showing his great muscles and new body. He did quite well for Linda through Prix St. Georges, enabling her to win her Silver Medal from USDF.

13.3 Linda Ohlson Gross on Moshne showing off his well-muscled and gymnasticized physique.



3 Collected walk to extended walk to collected walk (see chapter 8, p. 69).

4 Collected canter to very collected canter back to collected canter.

I like to think of the medium paces as the ones that come the most off the ground. A good medium trot makes me think that training this horse in passage will be easy.

The extended paces lose some of the airtime because they are the paces that go the most over the ground. There must be more overtracking in them. The frame should also lengthen. The horse should be strong enough now so that he can stay uphill and lengthen his frame without losing balance.

JUDGING TIP

You must be careful not to ride the same trot and canter for both medium and extended paces. Years ago, I was at an FEI dressage judge’s forum with Eric Lette. He was explaining to the judges that we must be clear with our marks, and ensure

that riders ride the correct trots and canters. Kyra Kyrklund raised her hand and said, “Well, Eric, that is good, but if I ride the same I will get an ‘8’ for my medium and a ‘7’ for my extended.” I agreed with her, as at that time it was how I had been coached to ride them, as well. Now, judges and trainers agree that they should be different.



13.2 Here I demonstrate extended trot on Halloh.

How to Ride and Train

Don't Bore the Horse

It is very important that the horse is kept happy and involved with his training. I see many riders who just ride around in the same trot, in the same direction, doing the occasional movement. The horse “falls asleep” in these situations. Creative riding is important for the dull horse because you can keep him “awake” with your requests for reactions from him. In the case of the very smart horse, you keep his brain engaged with your requests, rather than letting *him* get creative—and possibly take over!

Try to make the work session interesting. Use your corners to collect and make smaller, more

active steps. Then go forward out of the corner and ride a movement. Change direction and gait frequently. Do a lot of transitions within the gaits. Give the horse short breaks and rewards. Try not to keep him working for more than three or four minutes before a break or a stretch. This is so much more beneficial than riding around for 45 minutes doing nothing interesting.

Muscles and Strength-Building

FEI dressage is all about building quick and correct reactions in the horse, and about building muscle strength. The next time you are at a show, look at the Training Level horse's physique compared to a top Grand Prix horse. A horse without the correct muscling will not be able to perform the movements required in the correct balance.

This muscle building and strength building takes time. Also, teaching and confirming some of the more difficult movements takes time. You cannot just decide that next year you are going to ride Grand Prix and try to teach your horse one-tempi changes, the piaffe, and the passage in 12 months. Your work for these upper level movements should have started when the horse was doing First Level work. Consider the learning process of the horse—he needs at least a year to learn and confirm each movement.

13.4 Kelly Boyd
on Nikko of
Noble, owned by
Michelle Guest, in
medium canter.

Have a Checklist

Every time you ride you need to think of a pilot completing his checklist prior to takeoff. Is the horse quick off my leg? Check. Is the horse supple to the bend? Check. Is the horse straight? Check.

Think of the Classical Training Pyramid as your checklist (see p. 11).

I hope that my pilot never takes off without completing the checklist successfully. Too many riders never have a checklist. They just start right into the movements and wonder why they fail. If you take care of the basics and the correct reactions, the movements will take care of themselves.

Training Exercises and Solution

Exercise One: Use Cavalletti

This exercise will help to deal with Problems 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9—see p. 103.

I love cavalletti. If you don't have Reiner and Ingrid Klimke's book *Cavalletti: The Schooling of Horse and Rider over Ground Poles* (Trafalgar Square Books, 2008), buy it. Horses love to do something different. These exercises will really improve your horse's trot!

If you have a horse that is a bit "earthbound," use your cavalletti and place them close together at to the lowest level off the ground—the distance is determined by the length of your horse's stride. Usually about 3 to 4 feet apart will work. Ride through them once and if the horse is having difficulty, either move them closer together when the horse is having to reach out too much, or spread them out a bit if he is stumbling over them.

Trot the horse through several times during your workout. This teaches the horse to articulate his joints more and gain a bit more "air." Think of the "Flying Tomato"—what makes champion snowboarder Shaun White great is his airtime.



One of the thrills of watching the Winter Olympic Games in 2010 was to see Shaun fly through the air with multiple gymnastic movements all flowing together in a way that made it look easy!

If your horse gets a bit tense in the back, cavalletti are a great way to encourage him to look down and stay stretched over his back into the contact. This also helps the horse learn to lengthen the neck a bit.

You can put the cavalletti closer together and a bit higher to encourage more suspension and more articulation in the joints. Also, lengthen the distance between them to encourage more groundcover.

If you are a bit nervous about riding your horse through the cavalletti the first few times, then set them up on a circle and longe the horse over them in the beginning until you both have some confidence. Remember, always use an odd number of cavalletti, otherwise the horse will visualize an “in-and-out” jump!

For the canter, some free jumping or jumping over a small pole on the ground or raised cavaletti, will encourage the horse to “snap” his back and bascule. This will lift his loins and belly muscles, which are the muscles he needs to use to improve the quality of the canter.

Exercise Two: **Make Sure the Horse Is Listening to the Seat and Outside Leg**

This exercise will help with Problems 1, 2, and 8—see p. 103.

Once the horse has an idea about flying changes, he can use them against us in the medium canter on the long side or diagonal. At either the begin-

ning or the end of the medium canter movement, the horse will sometimes change his lead to the outside lead; he may only change behind and end up cross-cantering. Usually this is because the horse misunderstands the rider’s aid. The rider goes on the long side or the diagonal and rides the horse forward off the inside leg. The horse thinks, “Aha! Here comes a flying change!” And so, trying to be a good boy, he makes a change. The judge may be amused by the antics, but can only score the mistake with a “4.” So, what to do?

Simply ride the horse forward with the *outside* leg when doing a medium or extended canter on the diagonal. Then, be sure to collect with the outside leg being active, or the horse will change on his own accord.

The other reason a horse will change leads behind is stiffness in the back. If the horse is tense, or changes, first check your weight and your seat aids. Make sure *you* are not the problem. If you are correct, push the haunches in the direction of the lead first and then collect.

At Training Level, the horse is 90 percent on the leg and hand. By Third Level, the horse should be at least 50/50. At Grand Prix we like it to be 10 percent hand and leg, and 90 percent seat. The horse should have been educated to understand that the seat says “go” by allowing the energy to cover more ground. This is not a heavy, driving seat. That type of riding will make your sensitive Arabian or Thoroughbred hollow and stiff in the back. It is an “allowing” seat. Then if the horse doesn’t listen, the leg can reinforce the seat.

I always start my down transitions by closing my upper leg first. By my securing my upper leg a bit, my horse knows (by repetition) that a transition or a half-halt is coming. It also gives my seat



13.5 Gwen Blake riding Talisman in extended canter.

and back and overall position more security and strength in case the horse tries to lean into the reins at this moment. Then I restrict the motion of my seat. The lower leg should be saying, "Horse, take smaller higher steps." You need to make sure the hind legs are active in all downward transitions. If the horse needs a reinforcement to the "Whoa" aid, then the outside rein should be used.

Think of a car. In neutral, the driver revs the engine. Then he shifts into first gear. The horse should have the same rpms throughout the work. Your lower leg is the gas pedal or rhythm stick, and your seat is the gear shift. Reins are there to keep the shape and suppleness of the horse's topline and the position of the bend in the neck.

If you feel as a rider you need to create more energy prior to a medium or extended pace, then

you will not succeed. You should already have the energy packaged like a coiled spring in a supple horse so you can just *allow* the energy to cover more ground.

Exercise Three: **Working on Circles in Canter**

This exercise will help with Problems 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6—see p. 103.

Horses have more balance on a curved line. If you try to start working on your mediums on the straight line, often the horse will get crooked and fall on the forehand. Often with this loss of straightness comes a loss of rhythm.

Remember that your horse will not have enough strength at the beginning of schooling

this exercise to stay in an uphill balance on the entire long side. So, you need to think of your Pendulum to strengthen your horse and give him confidence. Ride a lot of transitions through the paces, work on the reactions, make sure the Pendulum and your transitions from collection to extension flow smoothly—and with suppleness and balance.

Start on the 20-meter circle with a little haunches-in. This keeps the horse submissive to the outside leg and should help him lower his hindquarters a bit and load his inside hind leg. Think of beginning to work now on the *very collected canter* you will need for Fourth Level and the start of your working canter pirouettes (see p. 147).

When the horse does lower his hindquarters and takes more weight on his inner hind leg, usually you will feel the tempo of the canter get slower. This is because the horse is “sitting,” or taking weight on the hindquarters, and staying for a longer period of time on the hind leg, which is what you want. Riders who do not have experience with this movement often panic and “chase” the horse with their legs and seat, immediately unloading the hind leg. If the horse trots by mistake, quietly walk, push the haunches in a bit, and return to canter. Try to use this mistake to teach him something. Kicking and whipping him back into canter will only make him fearful.

Once the horse understands what you want and can hold the increased engagement for four or so strides, you can ask for more activity. First, however, comes “sitting” and lowering of the hindquarters. This lowering of the hindquarters requires the horse to bend the joints of the hind leg more. When the horse first learns to carry more weight, or “sit,” often the tempo of the canter will slow down. This is okay for a while as the horse

gets stronger. Once he understands the half-halt and the “sitting,” you can ask him to increase the activity without fear that he will misunderstand and “unload” the hind leg.

This very collected canter is now how you want to start your mediums. Collect, straighten the horse, and allow him to take three to four larger strides. Remember, he won’t go from very collected canter directly to medium. Think of how the Pendulum swings. It is a smooth swing without abruptness. In the same way your transitions between the paces should be smooth and not abrupt. It will take two or so strides to get into the medium. Then, ride the medium canter for three or four more strides and begin with your half-halt to gradually bring him back to the very collected canter. Remember to begin the transitions with your seat. Then reinforce with the leg or hand, if needed.

Once you are succeeding 90 percent of the time, raise your standards and try to get into the medium canter in one or two strides and come back into collection in one or two strides.

One lead will be easier than the other. If your horse stiffens at the end, push the haunches in a bit prior to the collection. Try to keep the suppleness of the topline throughout the exercise. Many riders concentrate so hard on the “go” part that they stop communicating with the reins.

Once your horse is succeeding 90 percent of the time on the circle, move the exercise to the long side. Use the corner for the very collected canter. Make sure the horse is straight (that is, shoulder-fore) prior to allowing him to move forward into the medium. Check the straightness again prior to the collection at the end. Don’t school the entire long side in the beginning. Perhaps go half way,