



GEOFF TEALL

with Ami Hendrickson

Foreword by

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Note to the Reader by

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Develop
a
Winning
Style

Geoff Teall ON RIDING
HUNTERS, JUMPERS
AND EQUITATION



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Riding Factors

Identifying the Intangibles

Regardless of your preferred riding discipline, the point of training is to teach the horse to push himself from his hind end and move forward while staying straight and light. He should “look for the ground” through the bridle, reaching out and down with his neck. He should accept your hands. He should be well schooled for his job and maintain an alert, willing attitude (fig. 10.1).

Several factors contribute to the art of riding. These include:

- Maintaining lightness
- Developing a feel for the horse
- Perfecting and coordinating your aids

When you add jumping over fences to the mix, fine-tuning your performance means you must also develop an awareness of such things as line, pace, and distance.

Since these critical elements are intangible and not easily quantified, they often fall into the “You’ll Know It When You Do It” category and, as a result, can be difficult for riders to master.



10.1 The horse that moves off a light leg and responds to a light rein is a joy to watch and ride.

When you want to better understand a particular part of your riding, you must first identify where to concentrate your efforts. Don't use the "blanket approach" and try to work on everything at once. Decide what you want to improve. Isolate that area of your riding and spend some time focusing only on it.

This chapter contains some simple exercises to help increase your proficiency in the essential intangibles.



10.2 *Lightness involves knowing how the horse responds to a given aid and then using just enough to get a reaction. It means always looking for a way to do less.*

Developing Lightness and Feel

From the moment you get on your first horse—as soon as your instructor tells you to keep your heels down or corrects the position of your hands—your work on developing lightness and feel begins.

No one masters lightness or feel right away. No one expects you to. You must immediately start developing an awareness of the concepts, however, if you ever want to ride effectively, effortlessly, and invisibly.

Lightness Defined

Working a horse with *lightness* means using the least amount of an aid possible. It doesn't matter whether the aid in question is your hands, your legs, your seat, or your weight. The object of good riding is to always use the least amount of force or pressure necessary to get the result you want (fig. 10.2).

Riding with lightness does not mean that you are ineffective. If you use too little of an aid, your horse receives no direction—and nothing happens.

Lightness leads to responsiveness. The lighter you are as a rider, the less resistant your horse will be.

Finding Feel

Feel relates to both the rider and the horse. “Riding with feel” means knowing what is going on with the horse underneath you. It means being aware of aspects of your course without looking directly at them. It means having a sense of where your horse’s feet are landing. It also involves being mindful of your position without looking to check it.

Feel is a developed awareness of the horse. It is the ability to connect with specific areas of the horse’s mouth through the reins. Feel allows you to identify the horse’s individual footfalls and determine what parts of his body are at rest or in motion at any given time.

Many instructors teach visually. They will instruct until a rider’s leg *looks* good, or the horse *looks* flexed, or the horse *looks* like he’s jumping with correct style.

But the rider can’t see how he looks. He can only know how something feels.

Riding is based on feel. You want to feel what is happening beneath you and be able to accurately assess it. Developing feel will help you assimilate the good habits that lead to instinctive riding.

Though some riders have an instinctive sense of the horse, I believe *feel* is a skill that can be learned, just as you can learn to keep your heels down or learn to post on the correct diagonal.

Visualization can help develop feel. While your horse moves forward, visualize where his feet are falling as you feel the rhythmic pattern of his gait.

You can learn to feel straightness—whether or not your horse’s hind feet are following exactly in the tracks of the front feet. You can learn to feel when your horse is moving at a normal, 12-foot stride. Furthermore, a feel for your position can help you determine that your hip angle is closed, or that your leg is correctly placed under you.

JUDGE’S CARD AVOIDING EXTREMES

When the rider is doing things right, his position complements the horse. Then, both horse and rider move in harmony with one another. Riding with feel is the antithesis of riding with exaggeration.

In my experience, anything exaggerated or extreme on a horse is probably wrong. If I am judging and a rider does something obvious that draws attention to itself, more often than not, that “something” is wrong.

If the rider’s leg is too far out, too far back, too far down, or too far in, it is an exaggeration. The same is true if someone is riding with a swayed back instead of a slightly arched back. Overemphasizing any one aspect usually tips the balance and takes the rider’s position from correct to wrong.

The “Goldilocks Factor”: Feel and Lightness Combined

Feel and lightness are closely related to each other. In order to be an effective rider, you need to learn to feel just the right amount of hands, legs, seat, and weight. The more you can feel what that right amount is, the more lightness you will have in your riding.

To better understand the relationship, remember the story *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Think in terms of “Not Enough,” “Too Much,” and “Just Right.”

For example, if you want to bring the horse back but are too light with your rein aids, you will not get any reaction. If, however, you apply too much pressure with your hands and reins, you will only feel the horse’s resistance.

You need to find a point where the horse willingly accepts the aid and responds to it. When that happens, feel how light your aid is. Feel your horse willingly accept it. Remember that feel for future reference. Then reward the horse and move on, maintaining that level of lightness in your riding.

Exercises for Developing Lightness and Feel

● DEVELOPING THE LIGHT LEG

A horse that readily moves forward in response to the rider’s leg aids is an asset to your riding. A dull and heavy horse lacks forward motion and makes riding a chore.

The following exercise can help your horse pay attention to you while simultaneously keeping your leg aids light.

Schooling

- 1 At the halt, look ahead. Choose a point to ride toward.
- 2 Relax pressure on the horse’s mouth and allow him to go forward. Lightly close your legs against his side.
- 3 As soon as the horse responds and moves forward, relax and reward him. He is doing exactly the right thing.
- 4 If the horse doesn’t react to a light leg, immediately cluck and use your stick to reinforce your leg. Use the cluck and the stick together. When the horse responds and goes forward, stop clucking, stop using the stick, and



10.3 A Relax your reins and close your leg. If the horse doesn't move forward, cluck and use your stick.



B Relax all pressure as soon as the horse responds.

relax your leg (figs. 10.3 A & B).

- 5 After a few strides, bring the horse back to the halt.
- 6 Repeat the exercise. Every time you start again at Step 1, choose a different point to ride toward.

The Point

Remember to relax your reins before asking the horse to move forward. Use a light leg aid, even with a dull or heavy horse. If the horse responds, relax. If he doesn't respond right away, use a cluck and a stick rather than increasing your leg pressure.

The cluck and the stick teach the horse to pay attention and to be responsive to a light leg. Consistent exposure to this exercise will ultimately result in a horse that moves forward and responds quickly to a light leg.

● “GOLDILOCKS” BACKING-UP

Though this particular exercise focuses on getting a feel for the amount of hand pressure needed to get the horse to back up effectively, the principle applies to a variety of situations. You can use the Goldilocks Factor to help develop a feel for lightness in all your aids.

Keep in mind, however, that the amount of pressure required to get a horse to respond to an aid varies. Over time, as you practice this exercise, the



10.4 A *Not enough: if you have contact with the horse's mouth, but don't do anything, the horse won't do anything either.*



B *Too much contact causes resistance, even if the rest of your position is correct.*



C *Just right: instead of resisting the rider, the horse has accepted the pressure on the bit and is yielding to it.*

horse should become more and more responsive, and your aids should become lighter and lighter.

Schooling

When working on the flat, bring the horse to a halt.

- **Not Enough** Do nothing with your hands and try to back your horse. Nothing will happen. That's the "feel" of not enough hands.
- **Too Much** If you grab on to the horse's mouth and are very dead and heavy on the reins, chances are he will immediately resist you. He may set his jaw or raise his head. He might even brace back against his front feet and refuse to move. That's the "feel" of too much hand pressure causing resistance.
- **Just Right** Experiment between varying degrees of "Not Enough" and "Too Much." Find the level of contact that puts pressure on the horse's mouth without creating resistance to that pressure. When you find that point, keep the pressure steady and wait (figs. 10.4 A–C).

Wait until the horse accepts your hand and relaxes.

You will feel him relax his jaw, his poll, and his hocks. This puts him in a position to back up.

The Point

You won't know what level of lightness is the right amount unless you practice and see for yourself. You must know what "Not Enough" and "Too Much" feel like in order to cultivate a feel for what is correct.

● PUSH, DON'T PULL

When schooling at home, your goal should always be to get your horse working longer, lower, and lighter. You want him to work with his muscles stretched out, as opposed to working with his muscles tight or bunched together.

Just as you would stretch your own muscles before doing any strenuous exercise, stretching your horse's muscles will enable him to perform better. Tight muscles produce a sore horse. Long and stretched muscles produce a relaxed horse.

This trotting exercise is an easy way to help you develop the lightest aids possible while you cultivate a feel for riding a horse with long, stretched muscles.

Schooling

- 1 Ask your horse to trot around the perimeter of the arena. Post the trot. Use your legs to tell him to move forward. Your hands lightly balance him so he doesn't pick up a canter. Hold yourself centered, relaxed, and balanced on the horse.
- 2 Pay attention to where the horse's impulsion comes from. If he is pulling himself along with his front legs, feel how slightly altering your balance or changing your hand position affects him. Practice until you can feel the horse using his hindquarters to push himself forward.
- 3 When the horse consistently pushes himself forward with his hind end, encourage him to stretch his body. Gently close your legs around his sides. Pay attention to how his neck feels as he trots. Ride him forward so that his neck starts to get *longer*, not *shorter*. Think: forward, out, and down.
- 4 Once the horse is stretching his head and neck forward while pushing from behind, feel the difference in his trot. Practice until you can have the horse push forward with his hind end and stretch forward with his head whenever you ask him to.
- 5 When your horse will consistently stretch his front end and push off with his hind end, pay attention to your weight. While the horse moves forward, concentrate on keeping your weight down in your heels. Feel how that anchors you to the horse.
- 6 Once your heels are well down, consciously pay attention to the position of your hands. Feel how light they can be while still being effective.
- 7 Trot on a circle, tracking to the right. When it feels good going to the right, change directions and track to the left. Periodically reevaluate how well your horse is moving, how well you can feel him, and how strong and correct your position is.



10.5 Focus on the horse's forward motion. Feel him push himself forward rather than pull himself along. The rider, however, neither pushes nor pulls, but rides in balance.

The Point

This exercise makes you aware of where the horse's impulsion comes from (fig. 10.5). You always want the horse to work from his hind legs and move forward from his hind-quarters. The more you can get him working through his topline, the more comfortable and relaxed he will become. Moving forward correctly will also keep him sounder longer.

If you develop a feel for riding a horse lightly while he is working correctly, soon that will become the norm. Then you will always ride with that feeling as your goal.

● LOOKING AND SEEING

This simple exercise over fences is an excellent way to focus on riding with lightness and feeling the horse underneath you. It has the added benefit of developing your peripheral vision and honing an awareness of your surroundings.

Preparation

Set up a line of two low fences, 4 or 5 strides apart (for information on determining strides and distances, see "Relating Stride and Distance between Obstacles," p. 159). In the early stages, you may want to just use ground poles between jump standards.

Schooling

Find an object (such as a tree or a fence post) at the end of the line. Pick up a canter and focus your eyes on the object.

Continue to look at the object. As you allow the horse to navigate the line, pay attention to what you see with your peripheral vision (fig. 10.6). Notice everything—for instance:

- See your horse's head in front of you.
- See the oxer to your right that you don't want to run into.
- See the cone on the left that your horse might spook at.

- Be aware of traffic on the road nearby and take into consideration how that might affect your horse.

While your eyes are looking straight ahead and your peripheral vision is registering possible hazards, let your body feel what the horse is doing. Among other things:

- Feel how he reacts when he sees the fence in front of him.
- Feel how he responds when you close your legs on him.
- Feel the moment of suspension in each stride.
- Feel him tracking in a straight line toward the object you are looking at.
- Feel him accepting your hand and moving forward off of a light leg.

The Point

This exercise encourages you to be hyperaware of what happens as you ride a line. Remember, you only look straight ahead to where you are going. You also pay extra attention to your surroundings while you feel what is happening underneath you.

Coordinating Aids

Riding with lightness while maintaining an accurate feel for the horse requires effective coordination of aids. When you use the correct amount of seat, balance, hand, and leg together, your horse can understand what you are telling him to do. He can accept your instructions, relax, and respond to them.

Balancing Primary and Secondary Aids

Do not confuse “coordinating aids” with “equal aids.” Coordinating your hands and legs does not mean that you must use equal amounts of pressure with both. Instead, it means that you need to balance the use of your hands and legs in order to get the desired result.



10.6 As I ride the two-jump line, I raise my eyes and focus on a tree straight ahead. I can see all the potential distractions around me, including what remains of the tent, the open field, and the next jump.

BENDING (OR BROKEN) LINES

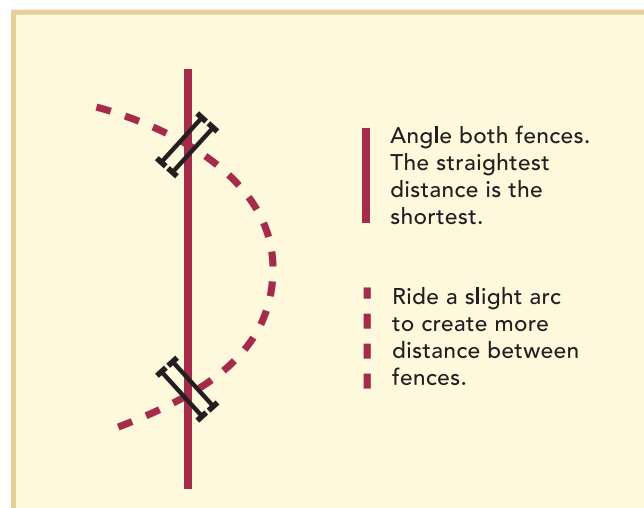
A bending line may follow a straight or a curved path between fences. It may also change direction, arcing from left to right.

A bending line may have two or three jumps in it. As with straight lines, two jumps in a bending line are easier to ride than three jumps, but the premise remains the same.

On the bending line you do not always ride in a straight path from the center of one jump to the center of another jump. You also don't necessarily jump each fence with the horse facing it head-on.

Generally speaking, your starting point involves an approach on a straight line that allows you to be perpendicular to the center of one obstacle as you jump over it. You then follow a curve, or arc, that brings you perpendicular to the second jump in the series so you can jump its center. Your departure continues the line of your jump straight away.

However, you may choose to ride less of a curve from one fence to another. You may also jump one or more fences in a line at an angle in order to make the distance between fences ride better or reduce your time (fig. 11.15). As you can see, bending lines introduce many variables.



11.15 *Path options of a bending line.*

Path + Pace = Distance

While straight lines rely solely on pace to regulate the distance between fences, bending lines offer many more options. The further out you go along the curve, the longer the distance you will have to cover. In the same vein, the straighter the line, the less distance you have between obstacles.

Let's say that you have a bending line that is exactly 72 feet on a curve from the center of a vertical to the center of an oxer. If you jump the vertical on a straight line and then make a gentle curve at an even pace to the center of the oxer, you should be able to do the bending line in 5 normal strides.

BENDING (OR BROKEN) LINES

Strategies for Bending Distances

If you have a horse that is *short-strided*, you can do several things to present him in a better light. For instance:

- If the line curves to the left, you could go a little left of center on both jumps. You would still face the fences head-on, but you wouldn't jump them from the exact center. This would make the distance from fence to fence slightly shorter, though the curve remains the same.
- You could also choose to angle across both jumps rather than facing each fence on the perpendicular. In this option, you would still jump the center of each obstacle, but the line that connects the two centers would be straighter, and therefore shorter.

If you have a *long-striding* horse on the same exercise:

- You would do best to go wide on your curved line to give him a little more distance and let him shine.
- Since, in our example, the line curves to the left, you might want to jump each fence a little right of center, to give your horse a more gradual, but longer, curve between the two.

● THE TWO-JUMP BENDING LINE

Preparation

Steps 1–6: Use Fence 3 and Fence 4 of your practice course. The centers of the fences should be set 84 feet apart, allowing you to follow a normal six stride bending line.

Steps 7–11: Use Fences 4 and 5 from your practice course. Walk the line before jumping it and determine the best path for even, normal strides.

Schooling (Beginner & Intermediate)

- 1 Use the vertical (Fence 3) for your first fence. Find a straight approach and establish your pace.
- 2 As soon as you see your distance to the fence, relax and raise your eyes to the center of the oxer (Fence 4).

- 3 Pay attention to your pace. If you are on your home base pace, follow an easy arc to the oxer. If you are slightly under pace, make a more direct approach. If you are slightly over pace, widen the curve a bit.
- 4 Jump the oxer (Fence 4) and maintain the new line through your departure.



11.16 A Approach the first fence on a straight line. As you jump the fence, look ahead and begin your curve to the second jump. Use just enough hand to guide the horse on your curve without interrupting his jump or follow-through.



B Continue the curve to the second jump. Use your rein to guide the horse. Use your leg to keep a bend in his body.



C In the air over the second fence. Though you ride on a curve between fences, you should arrive at the second jump in a straight line. Use your hands and legs to keep the horse straight.

- 5 Practice the exercise until you can reach the oxer in *exactly* 6 even strides, even if you are slightly under or slightly over your home base pace (figs. 11.16 A–C).
- 6 When you are comfortable taking the fences from one direction, ride the same exercise from the other direction.

BENDING (OR BROKEN) LINES

Schooling (Intermediate & Advanced)

- 7 Make a straight approach to one oxer (Fence 4). Maintain your pace and your line until you see the distance to the fence.
- 8 Raise your eye to the center of the next oxer (Fence 5). Relax and jump the first fence.
- 9 Maintain your pace as you follow a curving path to the second fence. Adjust your path, rather than your pace, to get the correct distance.
- 10 Jump the oxer (Fence 5) and maintain your new line through the departure.
- 11 Practice the exercise until you can ride the bending line from either direction in *exactly* even strides, even if you are slightly over or slightly under your home base pace (figs. 11.17 A–C).



11.17 A Keep the horse absolutely straight on your line over Fence 4, but raise your eye and plan your path to the next jump.



B Focus on Fence 5 as you bend the horse around the curve.



C As you see your distance to Fence 5, guide your horse on a straight line over it.

The Point

This exercise is an excellent way to learn to use different paths to connect two fences. It also reinforces the concept of using pace to help you with distance.

Remember: if you ride the first fence at a strong, forward pace, you will have to arc more and follow more of a curve in order to make your distance to the second fence. If you ride the first fence more slowly, your line to the second fence will have to be straighter and more direct.

What Can Go Wrong & How to Fix It

- **Not Learning from Past Mistakes** Stay consistent until you find what works. For instance, maintain the same pace throughout the exercise, but change your line to make that pace work. Or, keep the line constant and experiment with pace to find one that works.
- **Choosing the Wrong Pace or the Wrong Line** Riding a bending line is an acquired skill. You learn it by doing it. The key is to approach the first fence on a straight, consistent line and pace. As you see the distance, keep the pace and softly redirect the line to the second fence.
- **Overtaxing the Horse** When you practice bending lines, remember to keep the fences low or use rails on the ground until you have a good grasp of how to ride the exercise. Low fences are just as effective as higher ones to teach you how pace and path affect distance.

Straightening Out the Bend

Your familiarity with angled fences (see “Angled Jumps,” p. 195) can be an invaluable help to you when negotiating bending lines.

● THE ANGLED LINE

Preparation

Beginner and Intermediate Work: Use Fences 3 and 4 of your practice course.

Advanced Practice: Use Fences 4 and 5 from your practice course.

Walk the straightest line possible between both fences before jumping them and determine the best pace for even, normal strides.

BENDING (OR BROKEN) LINES

Schooling (Beginner)

- 1 Jump Fence 4 perpendicular, meeting it head-on.
- 2 Continue in a straight line toward Fence 3. Maintain an even pace.
- 3 Keep your line straight. Jump Fence 3 at an angle.
- 4 Repeat the exercise.

Schooling (Intermediate)

- 1 Jump Fence 3 at an angle, heading toward the oxer (Fence 4).
- 2 Maintain your pace as you head in a straight line toward Fence 4 (figs. 11.18 A & B).
- 3 Jump Fence 4 facing it head-on, perpendicular to it.
- 4 Repeat the exercise.



11.18 A *Approaching the first jump in the line at an angle. I have seen my distance and have raised my eyes to the next fence. The horse is straight as an arrow. We will hold our line across the jump.*



B *Landing on the line after taking the angled fence. We are headed straight to the rails of the oxer (Fence 4) ahead.*

Schooling (Advanced)

- 1 Jump Fence 4 at an angle away from home. Continue on pace in a straight line to Fence 5.
- 2 When you find your distance, relax. Raise your eyes to follow a straight line after the fence. Jump Fence 5 at an angle.
- 3 Repeat the exercise. Get comfortable with the pace you need to make the line straight and take both fences at an angle (figs. 11.19 A & B).
- 4 Practice the exercise from the other direction, beginning with jumping Fence 5 at an angle and following a straight line to jump Fence 4 at an angle.



11.19 A Just before taking off over Fence 4 at an angle, raise your eye and look straight ahead at the next fence in the line.



B Ride a straight line between fences, then take Fence 5 at an angle.