

RELAXATION EXERCISES FOR HORSES

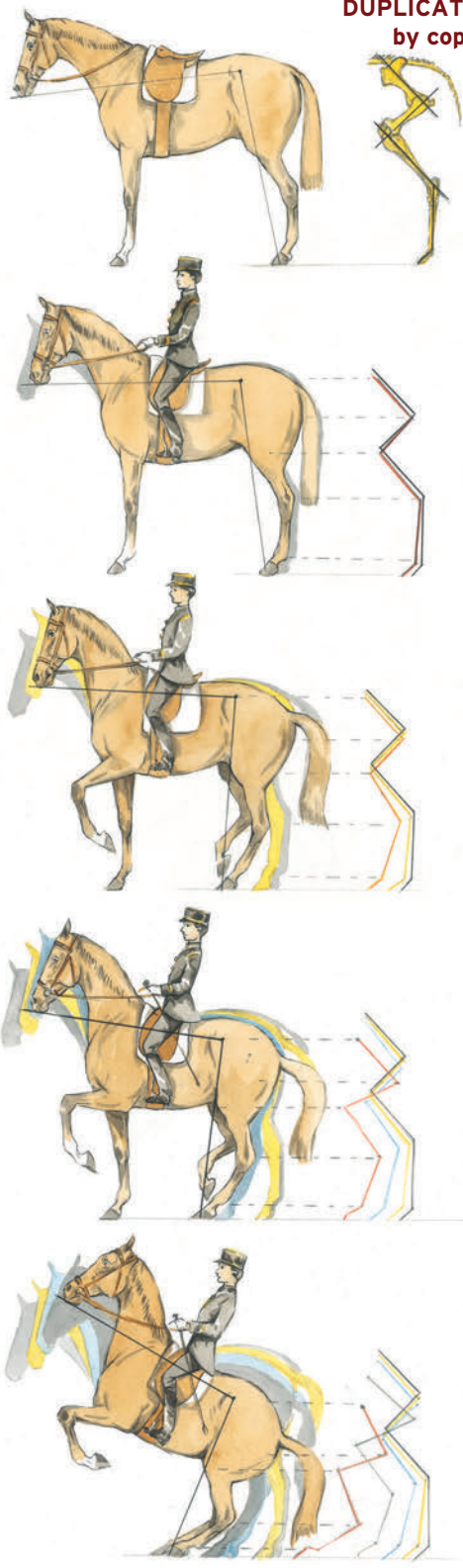


GUILLAUME HENRY

A Guide to Soft, Supple, and Light

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The principal stages of raising the forehand and collecting the horse. **1.** Young horse. **2.** Early collection. **3.** Increased flexion of the hips. **4.** Piaffe. **5.** Levade.

Types of Relaxation Exercises

Dressage isn't about performing difficult movements, but rather making the horse more receptive and more flexible, and giving him the ability to carry himself in balance.

Nuno Oliveira

There are many, many relaxation exercises out there, if only because basic stretching and suppling movements can be infinitely combined and recombined with each other. It's worth mentioning the distinction between *localized* stretching and relaxation, and *full-body* stretching and relaxation.

Localized stretching addresses only one part of the horse's body. The set of flexion exercises developed by that respected classical equestrian of the nineteenth century, François Baucher,²⁶ belongs in this category. This book doesn't deal with these localized exercises; while they can be effective in the hands of experts, they can also be harmful to the horse if done incorrectly. If you want to use exercises like these, you need to consult a rider or trainer who specializes in classical equestrian technique and can show you in person how to execute them, taking the necessary precautions.

Full-body stretching is aimed at the whole horse, involving the entire musculoskeletal system. These stretches are done in motion, with a calm, relaxed horse who's in front of the leg, on the aids and on the bit.²⁷ Relaxation exercises in this category are the focus of this book.

These exercises can also be divided, theoretically, into two categories:

- “Longitudinal” relaxation exercises, which mobilize the horse along the length of his body.
- Lateral relaxation exercises, which mobilize the sides of the horse's body.



Karen Tébar and Fallada performing a half-pass in trot, to the left.

The Purpose of Longitudinal Relaxation Exercises

These exercises improve the flexibility of the vertebral column—and, as a result, increase the engagement of the hindquarters and the mobility of the hips—by enhancing the range of motion of the sacroiliac and coxo-femoral joints. These

joints are what allows (or doesn't allow) the horse to bring his hocks underneath his body to support his weight, and they give the horse control over how much ground he covers, through an increase or decrease in the energy transferred from his hindquarters. Beyond serving as the

source of impulsion, the hips become “a genuine rudder that presides over changes in direction.”²⁸

The hindquarters are able to move laterally, and not through a passive “skidding” by the croup, but via the engagement of the haunches, and the lowering of the hip and flexion of the hock on one side.

The range of longitudinal relaxation exercises includes all transitions from one gait to another, or within the same gait (lengthening or collecting), from the simplest to the most complex; halting; backing; extending the neck; lowering the neck; counter-canter; and working on a slope (whether you’re going uphill or down).

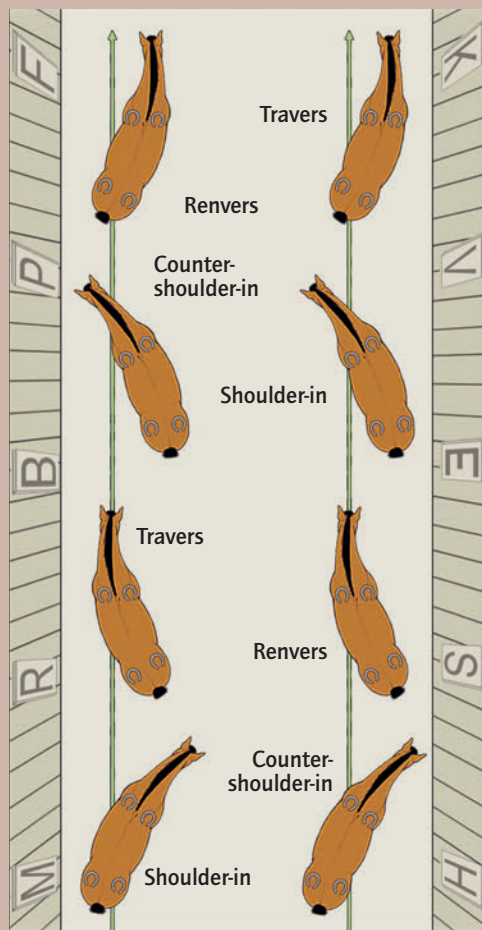
The Purpose of Lateral Relaxation Exercises

These exercises relax and soften the horse’s sides and help the horse’s muscles work symmetrically; they also give the rider a greater ability to direct the haunches, and, as a result, straighten the horse. The basis for lateral stretches is working the horse on a circle; they should be tackled only once the horse maintains elastic contact with the rider’s hand at all times (when he is consistently “on the bit”²⁹), and when he understands the meaning of aids given with one leg only. These exercises will let the rider confirm whether the horse is round, and assess his position and the way in which he’s holding his back.

The range of lateral relaxation exercises includes, above all, voltes and work on a circle (15 meters maximum) and on curving lines, and all the exercises that are derived from those basics: larger or smaller circles, riding corners, serpentine, changes of direction, widening circles, and lateral movements of the hips or shoulders on a circle—which serve as the basis for the turn-on-the-forehand³⁰ and turn-on-the-haunches.³¹

Finally, the category of lateral relaxation exercises also includes the standard two-track lateral movements. In order of difficulty:

- Leg-yield.
- Shoulder-in and related exercises: shoulder-fore, shoulder-in on three tracks, shoulder-in on four



Similar but different: lateral movements.

tracks, counter-shoulder-fore, counter-shoulder-in on three tracks, counter-shoulder-in on four tracks.

- Half-pass and related exercises: haunches-in (travers) and haunches-out (renvers).

The Benefits of Work on Two Tracks

- It refines the horse’s responsiveness to the aids.
- It makes the horse more flexible as a whole, by increasing the freedom of the shoulders, the suppleness of the hindquarters, and the elasticity of the connection that runs from the mouth to the neck, down the neckline and along the back, to the hips.
- It improves rhythm and cadence.
- It harmonizes the horse’s balance and gait.
- It develops and increases the engagement of the hindquarters.

“ One can, by poking and prodding and pulling, obtain a stretch. But to be useful, stretching must not be forced—otherwise, we lose all the benefits of any preceding work.”

Nuno Oliveira



Longitudinal Relaxation Exercises

Transitions

Definitions

A *transition* is a shift from one gait to another, or a change of amplitude in the same gait (which is referred to as “a transition within the gait”). Transitions encourage responsiveness and mobility in the horse.

They should be clear, smooth, and without abruptness; you have to keep an eye on the position of the neck (its stability—or instability—will let you know whether the transition poses a problem for your horse) and maintain the rhythm of the gait appropriately (the cadence of the previous gait should remain intact until the instant the horse takes up the new gait or comes to a halt). Also, take care to ask for downward transitions with the chest more than with the hands.

The degree of difficulty here depends on the transition you’re trying to achieve, and on your horse’s level of training.

Generally speaking, practicing transitions is just as important for the horse and for the rider:

- They encourage the horse to pay attention to the aids of the legs and hands.
- They make it possible to soften the back (and a flexible back allows transitions without head tilting or shaking, with greater stability in the forehand).
- They invite greater involvement from the hindquarters, during transitions to a slower gait.
- They promote relaxation in the hocks, and, in general, greater activity in the hips, during lengthening.



– For the rider, they're a driving lesson: "they teach [the rider] to create, maintain, and regulate impulsion, and to give aids that act or release independently from each other."³²

No matter what transition you're riding, up or down, you have to achieve stability in the forehand. You won't get it by clenching your fingers tight around your reins; it's a combination of all kinds of important elements, including the way the horse is holding his back, the flexibility of the back, the degree of activity in the hips, and much more. The most important contribution, though, comes from the momentum "contained" in the gait before the transition happens. If the horse goes from walk to trot while raising his head, there wasn't enough impulsion in the walk. Conversely, when you go from trot to walk, you have to keep the momentum of the trot, and release as soon as the transition comes while maintaining the contact.

For young horses, as for young riders, transitions must be approached with this principle in mind: hand without leg, leg without hand. It's only logical, when working with a young horse, to avoid using the "brake" at the same time as the "accelerator," and for the rider, it's worthwhile to practice keeping the aids independent, and to experience their effects one at a time. "By avoiding the simultaneous use of the hand and the legs, [the rider can ensure] the horse understands more clearly what is asked of him, and the rider is obliged to be more precise in the use of her aids, because any errors she commits are immediately apparent to her without delay."³³

In all cases, "the position comes before the action," and you should always indicate your intentions to your horse by positioning yourself to apply the aids (sitting up tall to slow down, shifting your body weight, arranging your legs to signal canter, and so on) before you actually apply them.

Transitions from One Gait to Another

Transitions from one gait to another are assessed according to their difficulty. In general, they're approached in order following this progression:

- First, halt/walk/halt, walk/trot/walk, trot/canter/trot.
- Then halt/trot, trot/halt, canter/walk.
- Then backing up/walk, backing up/trot.
- Finally canter/walk, canter/halt, halt/canter, backing up/canter.

This classification, is very loose, because the actual difficulty of any given transition, in practice, depends on the "level" of the gait and the degree of precision requested by the rider. So the transition from working trot to halt may be easier than the transition from working trot to collected trot; by contrast, if the transition from working trot to collected trot is "easy" for an experienced horse, that doesn't mean it isn't going to be very complicated for a youngster learning it for the first time. And you won't require the same things from a canter-to-trot transition for a young horse who's just begun training as you will from the same transition with an older horse.

How to Perform a Downward Transition

Sit up tall, raising yourself upward, and, while decreasing the motion of your pelvis, use your "hands"³⁴ to gently discourage forward motion. Your horse will slow down and transition to the lower gait. The voice can be a valuable help in reducing the amount of action needed from the hands. The legs should remain in contact with the horse's body, without pressing or closing, because:

- It isn't logical, from the perspective of the young horse.
- You should try to keep your aids as simple as possible.
- You should always aim to reduce the intensity necessary in repeated requests for the same result.
- A well-prepared transition (adapted to the appropriate level of dressage) rarely requires a significant use of aids.
- This is how you will achieve lightness.
- If the horse makes his transitions without engagement, or stumbles in transition, you can, request the same transitions in shoulder-fore.

– Your horse's transitions will become clean with work and time.

How to Perform an Upward Transition

An upward transition is requested through the action of the legs³⁵ (and potentially a vocal cue). Maintain the contact with the horse's mouth, without moving your hands either forward or backward. Be careful not to keep your fingers closed on the reins, which would force the horse to strike off from a halt into a trot, or from a walk to a canter, against the hand.

Once the simpler transitions feel easy to you, you can perform them closer together, which will increase your horse's responsiveness and attentiveness. After that, you can also try more complex transitions (halt/trot or walk/canter, for example) as your dressage training progresses, mastering the upward transitions before their downward equivalents.



Lengthening at trot.

Mistakes During Downward Transitions	Mistakes During Upward Transitions
<p>Mistakes by the Rider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leaning back (which strains the horse's back and leads to disengagement of the horse's hindquarters and loss of roundness). – Leaning forward (this often causes the rider's legs to move backward). – Pulling on the reins (this contracts the horse's forehand, which also leads to tension and a loss of roundness). – Not preparing properly for the transition (this means the horse won't be ready for it, and the transition will be either hesitant or rushed as a result). 	<p>Mistakes by the Rider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Leaning forward, fidgeting. – Pulling on the reins and giving aids with your legs at the same time. – Trying to maintain the horse's head carriage by closing your fingers on the reins. – Not preparing properly for the transition.
<p>Mistakes by the Horse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Crossing his legs during the transition (performing it in shoulder-fore). – Making hesitant transitions. – Not striking off with energy in the new gait (the action of the legs needs to be addressed, if this is due to a lack of impulsion; it's a matter of patience, if the horse is young; and the aids may need to be refined, if this is due to muddled cues from the rider). 	<p>Mistakes by the Horse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lacking clarity or rhythm in the new gait (review and refine the aids, ensure he has enough impulsion). – Inconsistency in the contact and movement of the head (review and refine the aids, work on roundness and relaxation).



Arnaud Serre et Hélio II transitioning from collected canter to pirouette.

Transitions within a Gait

The term “transition within a gait” refers to changes in the degree of extension or collection while riding the same gait.

Whatever the gait, “extension” doesn’t mean “rushing.” In an extended gait, the horse increases the lengths of his strides (which therefore cover more ground than before) while maintaining a cadence³⁶ identical to the cadence of the working gait. Rushing, by contrast, means the horse is just going faster—not lengthening his strides, only taking more of them and doing it more quickly, which means his cadence is going to accelerate. When a horse rushes this way, his withers collapse, his back turns hollow, and his hindquarters disengage.

The difference will be obvious to most riders who have a little experience; but if you aren’t sure, you can count the number of strides your horse needs to cross the diagonal of the arena (for example) in his working gait, and then ride it again and count his strides in his extended gait. If the second number is smaller, then that means your horse’s stride length increased—since he needed fewer strides to cover the same amount of ground—and you’re headed in the right direction.

Generally speaking, you should be happy with the best your horse can give you. If you try to force him to give you more, you’ll only cause distress, discomfort, or both, which will always lead to tension and a duller, less responsive atti-

tude. Ask for extension “by lowering the belt [of the rider’s pants] forward, without putting the shoulders too far back.”³⁷

Don’t push while the horse is in extension, or you’ll lose momentum. You have to “store” impulsion in advance, during the preparation along the short side of the arena and in the corner preceding the transition to the extended gait.

The self-carriage of the horse changes, in extension, because it’s dependent on the length of his stride. In collected gaits, *the neck rises*, allowing greater engagement of the hindquarters. In extended gaits, *the neck stretches out*, allowing the horse full use of the muscles of his topline, which lets him lengthen with ease.

An extended walk is correct when the horse changes:

- His frame: he must stretch out, lengthen his neck, and move the tip of his nose forward and down.
- His stride length: his strides have to get longer without the cadence of his gait changing. In addition to the counting method described above, you can check the length of your horse’s stride by looking at his hoofprints; in the extended walk, as in the extended trot, he should be overtracking.

How to Perform an Extended Walk

It’s important to maintain your upright position in order to avoid weighting the horse’s forehand (in which case he’ll start rushing instead of extending). Use your leg aids and your seat, increasing the motion of your pelvis,³⁸ and gradually open your fingers around the reins, allowing the tip of the horse’s nose to reach forward and letting the horse stretch out his neck. As mentioned, it’s essential for the horse to be able to extend his neck—apart from the fact that this is a judging criterion for the extended walk, it’s also what allows the horse to lengthen his stride fully and achieve the extension you’re asking him for. When the horse begins to extend, help him lengthen even further by relaxing your abdomen completely, so you’re following his

motion—and only following, without pushing and jostling him out of his rhythm.

To slow down, reduce the following motion of your pelvis and abdomen, straighten your upper body, and gradually shorten your reins, asking for the transition “with the chest and not the hands.”³⁹

In extension, your horse should be overtracking.

As a reminder:

- Your horse is **tracking up** when his hind hoof lands in the hoofprint of the front hoof on the same side.
- Your horse is **undertracking** when his hind hoof lands short of the hoofprint of the front hoof on the same side.
- Your horse is **overtracking** when his hind hoof lands ahead of the hoofprint of the front hoof on the same side.

The lengthening of the horse’s neck and the increase in his stride length, when you open your fingers on your reins, are two important indicators of a good extension at the walk—and they also confirm that your training is on the right track, if your horse willingly extends into the space your opened fingers give him.

Mistakes in the Extended Walk

Mistakes by the Rider

- Suddenly letting go of the reins (and losing the contact).
- Letting the horse lose his impulsion.
- Moving too much, fidgeting.
- Failing to give the horse space to move into, and failing to move with him (which will disrupt his balance, and also create problems when it’s time to “gather” the horse back in at the end of the extended walk).
- Asking for the extended walk too timidly.

Mistakes by the Horse⁴⁰

- Rushing, or transitioning all the way to trot.
- Losing the contact.
- Making errors in gait sequence.
- Losing engagement.
- Losing rhythm and regularity, or drifting laterally.
- Positioning the head at the vertical or behind the vertical.



Working trot: the rider prepares to practice the gait.

How to Perform an Extended Trot

You need to let your horse bring his head forward and lengthen his neck a little bit—but don't let him go all the way into a full extension of his neckline. The extension⁴¹ of a gait “is a forward and downward contact, but it is not about letting go of the reins. [...] In extension, the horse must lengthen his neck a little but remain rounded⁴² and in your hand. Extension at the trot (when done on the diagonal) benefits from being preceded by shoulder-in or haunches-out (in the corner or along one side of the arena); these movements “compress” your horse, so to speak, which means all you need to do is open your fingers and allow your horse to “release” that impulsion and use that energy to lengthen himself on the diagonal. If he starts at a canter or gets “carried away” by his own speed and energy, then above all, you must avoid punishing him by bringing him firmly to a halt, because this will discourage him from developing as much impulsion in the future.

Instead, put him into shoulder-in, which will lead him to slow down on his own as he engages his hindquarters, or guide him into a circle and

Ideally, extension only occurs when the horse is able to remain rhythmic in his working trot, and stays round, with a flexible back that rises, instead of tightening. The first requests for extension should be made only at the rising trot

then make that circle smaller and smaller until, again, he naturally slows down on his own. Then resume at the trot, and ask for the extended trot again, more gradually, with less intensity.

The extended trot is at its most valuable if your horse is increasing the length of his moment of suspension with very strong thrust from the hind-quarters, and good horizontal balance. The result will be the natural extension of the forelegs forward, because they are “looking for the ground.”

To drop out of the extended trot, ask in the same way as at the walk, straightening your torso and shortening the reins. The voice can be a useful aid,⁴³ and can replace, through repetition, the action of your hands—limiting the amount of direct action by the rider on the body of the horse.

Mistakes in the Extended Trot

Mistakes by the Rider

- Suddenly letting go of the reins (and losing the contact).
- Letting the horse lose his impulsion.
- Moving too much, fidgeting.
- Failing to give the horse space to move into, and failing to move with him (which will disrupt his balance, and also create problems when it's time to “gather” the horse back in at the end of the extended trot).
- Asking for the extended trot too timidly.
- Letting the neck stretch out too far (so much so that the horse becomes unbalanced).

Mistakes by the Horse

- Losing rhythm and regularity, or moving with asymmetry.
- Failing to respond, failing to change his way of going.
- Moving jerkily, with the motions of the forelegs starting from the knees instead of from the shoulders (this is an indication that the horse is hollow, and therefore lacking roundness).

How to Perform an Extended Canter

The principles of extension at the canter are the same as at the trot, but—as at the walk—you need to be careful to follow the horse's movement

smoothly. The real difficulty of extension at the canter (apart from problems caused by asking for it too timidly) comes less from the extension itself and more from gathering the horse again at the end of the extended canter to slow him down: it's almost always the hardest thing, slowing down.

All too often, we develop the canter without worrying about straightness. However, when we ask him to extend, the horse will tend to shift laterally (which is to say he'll move his hips toward the inside of the track, adopting a position that feels natural to him), which makes it impossible to gather him back up properly at the end of the extended canter.⁴⁴ To avoid this, when asking for extension and when bringing extension to an end, the horse should be kept in shoulder-fore.

In any case, **be satisfied with your horse's best effort to give you what you're asking for.** If you don't think he's extending his gait enough, or if his extension doesn't meet your expectations, be careful not to press him for more than he's able to offer—this could disrupt his rhythm, throw off his balance, or teach him to develop his gait with his back tense and hollow, which will inevitably reduce his ability to engage and any possibility of improving his extended gaits going forward. It's better by far to return to the working gait, prepare, and try again. If you take care to relax the horse, this “accordion” sequence (lengthening for a few strides, returning to the working gait, and then lengthening again) will naturally and gradually develop your horse's ability to extend well.

Keep in mind that it's always best not to “extend” more than you can “regather” at the end of the extended gait. If slowing down is posing a problem, don't force it with your hands—guide the horse into a movement that will slow him naturally, such as shoulder-in. Here, again, the “accordion” sequence can help you: practice both going into and collecting the horse out of extension, without pushing to the point where slowing down is difficult, and you'll improve your horse's ability to manage extension, a bit at a time.

Finally, you can also:

- Alternate lengthening the horse and collecting him again at gradually decreasing intervals, to help bring the horse's hindquarters under him during the latter and relax his haunches and hocks during the former.
- Ask for clearer and more distinct lengthening and collection, to develop your horse's strength and to get a feel for how to “balance” the horse between your hands and your legs.

“A horse that speeds up or slows down by raising his neck is performing anything but equitation.”

“To perform passage, all the books say the horse must keep his neck at the same height, but I want more: I want the horse to make this transition while keeping the same state of mind.”

Nuno Oliveira



This horse is moving in the extended canter and preparing to drop back down into the working canter.

– Let your horse move into the “corridor” of your aids and bend to the right for the turn.

Remember to “sink” into your saddle as deeply as you can, in order to make yourself as steady, as fixed, and as precise as possible in the use of your aids.

Relaxation Exercises on a Circle

If a young horse does a simple job well, know how to appreciate his willingness; if an old horse overcomes his stiffness to satisfy you, know how to appreciate that, too.

Nuno Oliveira

The Four Basic Exercises

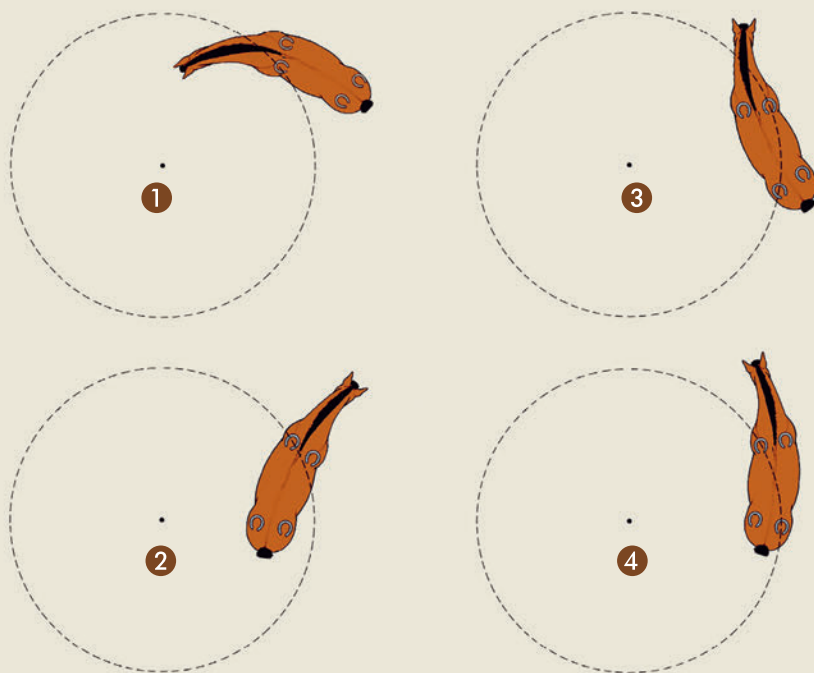
Relaxation exercises based on the circle consist of changing the work the horse is doing, on a

large circle or the curved part of a half-circle, by changing the degree of bend in his neck, the bend in his body, and the placement of his hindquarters.

So you can work:

- Bending to the inside, keeping the haunches to the outside of the circle (which favors work on the shoulders, and softens the inside hind leg) (1).
- Bending to the outside, keeping the haunches to the inside (working the outside hind leg) (2).
- Bending to the outside, keeping the haunches to the outside (counter-bending) (3).
- Bending to the inside, keeping the haunches to the inside (working in the same direction as the bend) (4).

Practiced in this order, these four exercises encourage the engagement of one hind leg, and then the other, and confirm the contact on one side, and then the other. Done in each di-



The four basic exercises on the circle.

rection, they soften, stretch, and relax the horse; the horse will be straighter and more consistently on the bit,⁷¹ when ridden in a straight line, and his hindquarters will engage with greater energy.

Put together, they form a reasonably complete whole, as long as they're performed in a spirit of forward movement but without haste, in relaxed calm, beginning at the walk and requesting each for only a few strides.

You'll know these exercises have been successful if:

- The horse can move through them in a state of relaxed calm, with impulsion but without haste.
- They can be performed without any change in the horse's gait, and with the rhythm of the gait remaining consistent throughout.
- On any given stride, you could ask for the exercise to end or you could ask the horse to continue, with equal ease.

The cadence and the quality of the gait should be a priority; if the horse freezes, trips, or rushes, that means that he isn't ready for the exercise yet, or if your horse's strides get a little shorter, that may be a sign that he's reaching a slightly more collected balance for himself; leave him to it, as long as he remains supple and relaxed. The aids for these exercises shouldn't be constraints—these are states of activity you can leave and return to gradually, depending on your horse's level of comfort.

You also need to be careful not to overdo it with these exercises. Do them four or five times during a training session—be precise about when you are and are not asking for them—and alternate them with long periods of walking or trotting with the reins long, where the horse is allowed to lower his head at least a few times. If your horse yanks his head down sharply (trying to relieve discomfort in his back), or gets “hot” during the exercise, it's a sign that you've asked too much and that it's time to move on to something else.

The great benefit with these exercises, apart from the way they stretch and relax your horse, is how they let you practice tact and lightness with



Working at a walk, in travers: bent to the inside, with the haunches kept to the inside.

your aids. In fact, performed at a walk, with the movement broken down into stages, they allow you to get familiar with the diagonal aids while remaining balanced (since you're at the walk) and in control of your horse's movements. They train you to feel your horse better, to tell when a movement has gone wrong so you can correct it.

1. Bent to the Inside, Haunches to the Outside

On the circle, maintaining bend to the inside, you move the haunches to the outside:

- First on one stride...
- ...then for several strides.

This exercise can be done in-hand⁷³ or under saddle, and encourages the horse to work through his shoulders and stretch his inside hind (which will be stepping in farther under his body); it also invites him to lower his neckline.

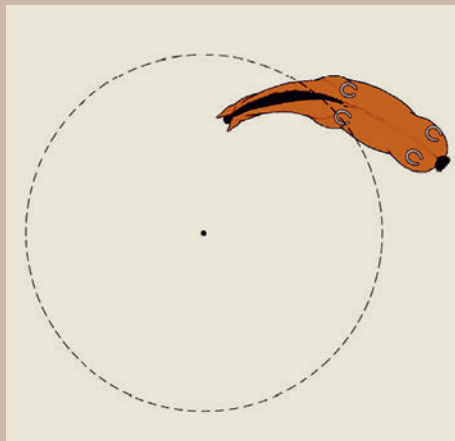
It should first be performed on a large circle (which you can gradually reduce to a 6-meter volte), or on a half-circle, and will become, when it's done on the spot, a half-turn on the forehand—the first step toward a reverse pirouette.⁷⁴ The smaller the circle, the more difficult the exercise becomes. For this exercise to be performed correctly, the inner hind leg has to step in under the horse's body and cross in front of the outer hind leg.

You can start by asking for this movement on a 16-meter circle around X.⁷⁵ This will give you a good reference point—one of the challenges of this exercise is getting the haunches to move to the outside without the shoulders leaving the track of the circle.

Step by Step

Starting from a circle to the left:

- Move the inside (left) hand wide to bring the tip of the horse's nose to the inside.
- Shift the inside (left) leg back, applying single-leg pressure to the horse's body.
- Slow the horse down slightly with pressure from the right rein, at the same time as your inside leg is acting.
- Encourage momentum (but not an increase in speed) with that inside leg.



Bent to the inside, haunches to the outside.

- Feel your horse move his haunches to the outside of the circle (to the right), and release your aids to reward him.

You can then choose to stop, and allow your horse to return to his previous path around the circle, or repeat this sequence of aids to keep your horse's haunches out.

Either way, let the horse know you appreciate his efforts with a pat. Progress comes from frequent repetition of essential exercises—as long as they're alternated with periods of rest and relaxation.

To perform the exercise starting from a circle to the right, reverse the aids. Some points to keep in mind:

Common Mistakes with This Exercise

Mistakes by the Rider

- Coordinating the aids poorly, which means the rider can't successfully ask for the right movements from the horse, and also prevents her from dealing with any mistakes made or difficulties encountered by the horse.

Mistakes by the Horse

- Failing to stay on the track of the original circle, and making it bigger or smaller instead.
- Speeding up or slowing down.
- Losing his balance (this means you should try again at a slower gait, as that will make it easier for the horse to stay balanced).

- Make sure your horse's shoulders stay on the circle. The horse's track shouldn't change in such a way that the shoulders move in and the circle gets smaller (one of the most common mistakes that gets made with this exercise).
- Be careful not to ask for too deep of an angle. "Avoid an exaggerated movement of the haunches (a maximum of 30°–35°) that would kill the movement of the shoulders, which must precede the movement of the hindquarters."⁷⁶

2. Bent to the Outside, Haunches to the Inside

On the circle, maintaining bend to the outside, you move the haunches inward for one or several strides.

This exercise, which follows the same logic as the previous one, can be practiced in-hand or under saddle. It encourages the horse to work through his shoulders and use his outside hind leg. It should first be performed on a large circle (which you can gradually reduce to a 6-meter volte), then in half-circles and finally in reverse half-circles. The smaller the circle, the more difficult this exercise becomes.

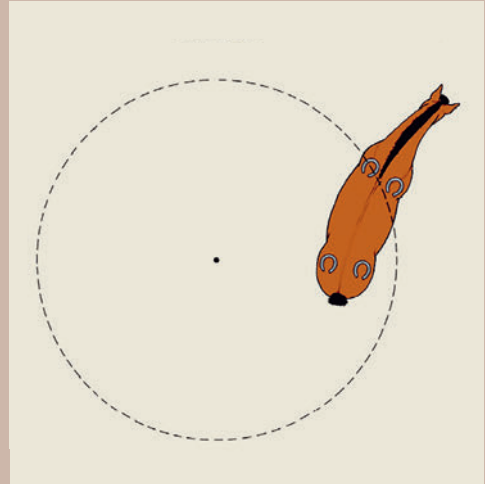
For this exercise to be executed correctly, the outer hind leg must step under the horse's body and cross in front of the inner hind leg.

You can start by asking for this movement on a 16-meter circle around X.⁷⁷ This will give you a good reference point—one of the challenges of this exercise is getting the haunches to move to the inside without the shoulders leaving the track of the circle.

Step by Step

Starting from a circle to the left:

- Move the outside (right) hand to bring the tip of the horse's nose to the outside.
- Shift the outside (right) leg back, applying single-leg pressure to the horse's body.
- Slow the horse down slightly with pressure from the left rein, at the same time as your outside leg is acting.



Bent to the outside, haunches to the inside.

- Encourage momentum (but not an increase in speed) with the inside (left) leg.
- Feel your horse move his haunches to the inside of the circle (to the left), and release your aids to reward him.

You can then choose to stop, and allow your horse to return to his previous path around the circle, or repeat this sequence of aids to keep your horse's haunches in.

Either way, let the horse know you appreciate his efforts with praise.

Progress comes from frequent repetition of essential exercises—as long as they're alternated with periods of rest and relaxation.⁷⁸

Some points to keep in mind when you're performing this exercise:

- Make sure your horse's shoulders stay on the circle. The horse's track shouldn't change in such a way that the shoulders move in and the circle gets smaller (one of the most common mistakes that gets made with this exercise).
- Be careful not to ask for too deep of an angle. "Avoid an exaggerated movement of the haunches (a maximum of 30°–35°) that would kill the movement of the shoulders, which must precede the movement of the hindquarters."⁷⁹

Common Mistakes with This Exercise

Mistakes by the Rider

– Coordinating the aids poorly, which means the rider can't successfully ask for the right movements from the horse, and also prevents her from dealing with any mistakes made or difficulties encountered by the horse.

Mistakes by the Horse

– Failing to stay on the track of the original circle and making it bigger or smaller instead.
– Speeding up or slowing down.
– Losing his balance (this means you should try again at a slower gait, as that will make it easier for the horse to stay balanced).

3. Bent to the Outside, Haunches to the Outside

On the circle, maintaining bend to the outside, you move the haunches outward for one or several strides.

This exercise, which follows the same logic as the previous one, can be practiced in-hand or under saddle. It encourages the horse to work through his shoulders and use his inside hind leg. It should first be performed on a large circle (which you can gradually reduce to a 6-meter volte), then in half-circles and finally in reverse half-circles. The smaller the circle, the more difficult this exercise becomes.

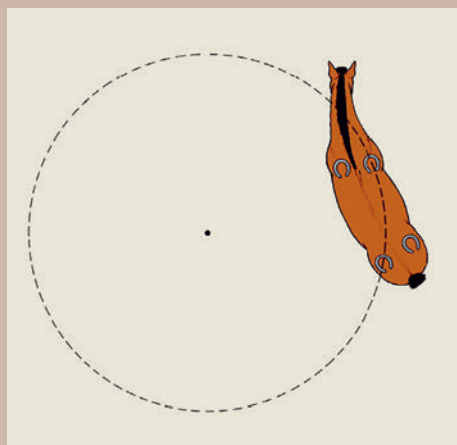
For this exercise to be executed correctly, the inside hind leg must step under the horse's body and cross in front of the outside hind leg.

Start by asking for this movement on a 16-meter circle around X.⁸⁰ This will give you a good reference point—one of the challenges of this exercise is getting the haunches to move to the outside without the shoulders leaving the track of the circle.

Step by Step

Starting from a circle to the left:

- Bring the outside (right) hand out wide to bring the tip of the horse's nose to the outside.
- Shift the inside (left) leg back, applying single-leg pressure to the horse's body.



Bent to the outside, haunches to the outside.

- Slow the horse down slightly with pressure from the left rein, at the same time as your inside leg is acting.
- Encourage momentum (but not an increase in speed) with that inside leg.
- Feel your horse move his haunches to the outside of the circle (to the right), and release your aids to reward him.

You can then choose to stop, and allow your horse to return to his previous path around the circle, or repeat this sequence of aids to keep your horse's haunches out.

Either way, let the horse know you appreciate his efforts with praise.

Progress comes from frequent repetition of essential exercises—as long as they're alternated with periods of rest and relaxation.

Some points to keep in mind when you're performing this exercise:

- Make sure your horse's shoulders stay on the circle. The horse's track shouldn't change in such a way that the shoulders move in and the circle gets smaller (one of the most common mistakes that gets made with this exercise).⁸¹
- Be careful not to ask for too deep of an angle. "Avoid an exaggerated movement of the haunches (a maximum of 30°–35°) that would kill the movement of the shoulders, which must precede the movement of the hindquarters."⁸²