



Lynn Palm
with Stacy Pigott

The Rider's Guide to
REAL COLLECTION

Achieve Willingness, Balance, and the Perfect Frame
with Performance Horses



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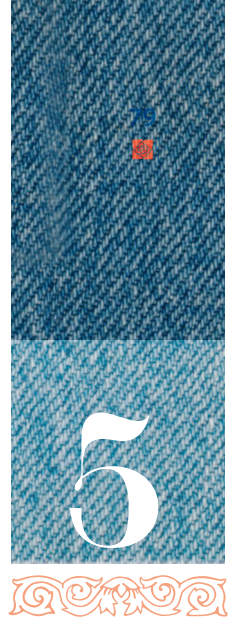


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Rider Aids

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HE NATURAL AIDS YOU USE TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR HORSE ARE THE RIDER'S seat, legs, and hands (fig. 5.1 A & B). I discuss *artificial aids* a little later (see p. 84).

Natural Aids

First in the sequence of communication is the seat, which controls speed and is used to increase or decrease it through transitions. Second in sequence are your leg aids, which work with the seat as driving aids to *go forward*. Third are your hands, or the rein aids. When your horse has a confident knowledge of your aids, you should be able to use them with lightness. It is your responsibility to control your horse's balance by controlling his body alignment through your legs and reins, thus recognizing your horse's response to your aids.

Riding a horse from "back to front" is a simple concept when you understand what parts of your horse your leg and rein aids control. The legs influence the horse from the withers to the dock, which includes the back, barrel, hips, and hind legs. The hands control the forehand—the head, neck, shoulders, and front legs. Because the legs control a majority of the horse's body they are always used before the hands, which results in the horse being ridden from back to front.

◀ 5.1 A & B Your natural aids—seat, legs, and hands—are used to communicate with your horse.



▲ 5.2 A–D The rein effects: A left open rein (A); indirect rein (B); direct rein (C); and a right open rein and left indirect rein being used together (D).

Three Necessary Rein Effects

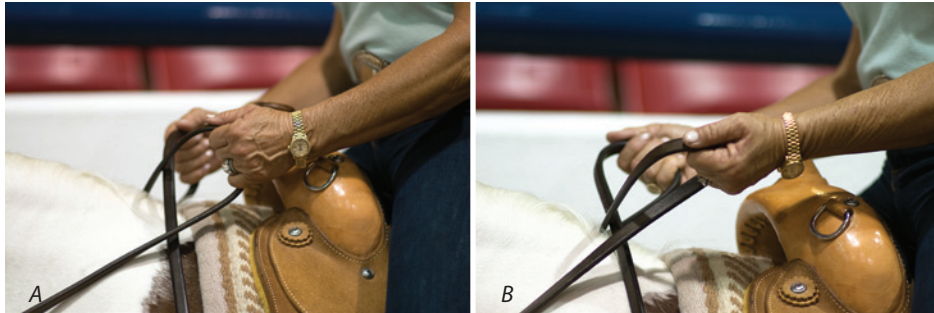
There are three different rein effects—*open*, *indirect*, and *direct*—needed to complete the training exercises in this book. The first two, *open* and *indirect*, are for all levels of riders and horses. The third, the *direct* rein, is only for advanced riders and horses.

With an *open rein* the rider's hand moves away from the horse's neck and opens sideways to achieve control of the horse's head position (fig. 5.2 A). The horse gives to this light pressure by flexing his head left or right, just enough so you can see his eye on the inside.

The *indirect rein*, which is an English riding term, is the same as the Western rider's *neck rein* (fig. 5.2 B). The horse yields from the pressure of the indirect rein against his neck. Do not cross your hand over the crest of the horse's neck.

A *direct rein* is when you make a fist with your hand on the reins and “hold” (fig. 5.2 C). In advanced training exercises, the direct rein is used primarily to turn without losing collection, especially at the canter. I use the direct rein sparingly, as there is a fine line between “holding” and “pulling.” It is a subtle rein effect that can be quite effective with experienced horses when used correctly (fig. 5.2 D).

No matter which rein effect you are using, *never pull back* on the reins. The reins must be used *sideways*. Whenever you pull on the reins, you put a “wall” in



◀ 5.3 A & B The correct position of your hands on the reins (A). To avoid pulling on your reins, turn your palms up, as though you were turning the ignition key in a car or unlocking a locked door (B).

front of your horse, blocking forward motion and giving him the perfect opportunity to lock, brace, and resist with his neck muscles, jaw, and mouth.

To avoid pulling, turn your hands so the palms are toward the sky, like the action of turning the ignition key in a car or opening a locked door (figs. 5.3 A & B). I tell my students to “turn the key” or remember my name, “Palm,” and think “Palms up!” This action brings your elbows close to your sides and helps you learn to steer with a sideways action of the rein aids instead of what we naturally want to do, which is pull the reins toward our body.

Holding the Reins: Two-Handed or One-Handed?

Every training exercise in this book should be initially learned with two hands on the reins. Once your horse is confident in the exercise—and has reached the intermediate level (see p. 121)—you can begin to ride with one hand. It is more difficult to control the horse’s forehand with your reins in one hand as opposed to two; it is also a coordination test for the rider that requires practice and preparation.

I like to start riding one-handed with split reins before advancing to normal reins. Split reins allow me to adjust my inside rein an inch to an inch-and-a-half shorter in the direction of travel, so I achieve the same rein effects in one hand—an open rein on the inside and an indirect rein on the outside—as I would with two hands. Similar to the English rider who switches to a full bridle in the advanced stages of training, a Western rider advances to a curb to improve the back-to-front connection while gaining lightness, enhancing roundness of the spine, and increasing uphill balance.



Rider Aids for Bending

Your *inside aids* are the primary aids used to bend your horse. The most active aid sequence needs to be inside leg to inside hand. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, the leg aid comes first (see more about leg aids on p. 83). When you apply pressure with your inside leg behind the girth, the horse should respond by moving away from pressure and starting to arch or bend his body. Your open rein flexes the head inward. Use an indirect rein if the horse tries to turn instead of just bending.

Your *outside aids* are active, supporting aids. The outside leg needs to be slightly farther back than the inside leg in order to support the bend by keeping the horse's hips inward—not swinging out. The outside indirect rein should lie against the horse's neck to keep the head from flexing too far inward or the shoulder from bulging out.

When you're on a curving line, not only do you have to bend your horse for balance, you have to turn the horse on that curving line. You turn with your *outside leg* and *indirect rein*, while your *inside leg* and *open rein* support the horse's bend, forward motion, and balance. For you to achieve balance, both legs and both reins have to actively tell the horse to control his entire body alignment every stride.

This is the foundation for creating a happy, willing horse. You must thoroughly understand the aids and aids sequence to control your horse's body alignment and straightness, and thus to achieve correct collection.

Rider Aids for Upward Transitions

The first and most important natural aid you use in transitions is your seat, followed by your legs, and then your reins. The seat is the most important because it is the least obtrusive aid. A stronger cue with the seat will not cause a horse to resist as he might with a stronger leg or rein aid.

Seat Aids

First, the seat is the aid that you use to increase or decrease speed and/or length of stride. As a rider you have to be in a nearly perfect position and balance. When you are sitting correctly on your seat bones, your hips will be tilted slightly forward, which allows them to freely move back and forth as you follow your horse's leg movements. When you correctly follow with your hips, you have the most comfortable ride and your horse is able to relax his back muscles, which makes it easier for him to lift his back as he engages his hind legs.



▲ 5.4 A–C The rider's correct leg position is the first position used to apply pressure when communicating with the horse (A). Second position: You can move your leg slightly back to find a more sensitive spot on the horse's side and get a reaction, rather than squeezing harder in its original position (B). Third position: This is the furthest back you can place your leg without losing your seat. The rider's leg is in the middle of the barrel—70 inches from the first leg position—and close to the hindquarters, which are controlled by the leg aids (C). You only use this position in training.

Horses feel a cue from a rider's seat through muscles that extend from the poll, across the topline, to the hocks. This allows a direct message to go from the brain to the hind legs of the horse, and is therefore a natural way to communicate with the horse.

In upward transitions at the walk and trot, as you move your hips forward, use the seat a little more assertively and "with thrust." For a canter transition, move your hips forward with a "scooping" action. The best way to describe it is the feeling you have when you are on a swing, and you push your hips in front of your body to make the swing go higher. Your seat action will be from the back of the saddle to the front.

Leg Aids

Your seat is supported by your leg aids. With your legs in the proper position just behind the girth, apply light contact with both legs to propel the horse forward for your walk and trot work (first position—fig. 5.4 A). When you quickly grip with your legs or just squeeze harder, you will get poor responses because you have given your horse the tools to ignore you.



▲ 5.5 I am demonstrating poor balance while looking down and using the spur incorrectly by lifting my heel and making contact too far up on the barrel of the horse. Note the worried and confused expression of the horse in his eye, ears, and tail.



Horses have a 10-inch zone from the heart girth to the middle of the barrel where they're the most sensitive. So if you don't get an immediate response, move your legs back slightly to find a more sensitive spot on your horse's side while still using light pressure, or add a light vibrating motion with your legs (second position—fig. 5.4 B). If you don't get a reaction after three tries, give the horse a whack with your leg to get his attention, and then immediately go back to asking with a light pressure (third position—fig. 5.4 C).

When your horse still isn't responding to seat and leg aids, there are three *artificial aids* for use in conjunction with your leg aids. You can use your *voice*, such as a cluck, to go forward. Also, a *crop* on the horse's shoulder can "wake him up" when needed, and when you're skilled in its proper use, a *dressage whip* behind your leg. An advanced rider can add *spurs*. All of these artificial aids *assist your leg aids* and are never your sole cue to ask your horse to go forward (fig. 5.5).

Rein Aids

Third in sequence for upward transitions are your rein aids, which are used to guide the horse. Slightly shorten your reins before each transition. This allows a good connection from your legs to your hands. With your reins you control the straightness of your horse's forehand, keeping the head, neck, and shoulders in line with the hips; or you can lightly flex the head right or left. You can slightly lift upward on the reins to help the horse lift his front end when he is too long in his body and/or heavy on the forehand (fig. 5.6).

Rider Aids for Downward Transitions

For downward transitions, your seat works directly *opposite* of the way it does for upward transitions. You want to stop the movement of your hips by tightening the muscles in front of your hips—your lower abdominals—as well as tightening

◀ 5.6 Your rein aids are always used third in sequence to communicate with your horse. The seat and leg aids are so important that they can be used without rein aids at all, as I'm showing here without a bridle.



▲ 5.7 Pulling on the reins puts a “wall” in front of the horse and gives him the opportunity to lock his jaw and resist with his neck and mouth.

your buttock muscles. Make sure your upper body and shoulders stay back and in line with your hips because the momentum of the moving horse will cause you to fall forward. Keeping your shoulders back will put more of your weight in the saddle, which helps the horse transfer more weight to his back legs.

Your legs should still be touching your horse’s sides during downward transitions. This keeps his hind legs engaging and moving forward so he can slow down with power. You also use your legs to keep your horse’s body and hindquarters straight, or “straight while bending” (see p. 87), during transitions of any kind.

Following the same sequence, use your hands to slow the motion of the horse by either closing your fingers on the reins or raising your hands slightly upward. *Do not* pull back on your reins by bringing your hands toward your stomach! You will get a “slow down,” but you will also get resistance, as the horse can lean, pull up, or down, or go behind the vertical when your hands are fixed and pulling (fig. 5.7).

