

The Road to Collection with Andrea Raves

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Mission Statement

**To provide the best possible coaching practices
to enable all New Zealand riders to reach their goal**

Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge my instructors who gave me the knowledge to improve a “dressage horse’s way of going” and to produce correctly working combinations.

Paul Nellehsen started my coaching development but I have also adopted practices used by Carl Hester, Adelinde Cornelisen, Klaus Balkenhol, Hubertus Schmidt, Isabell Werth, Steffen Peters, Michael Putz, Richard Weis and Gary Hermanson. “The Road to Collection” describes this collected information and the knowledge I gained during my apprenticeship to become a “Reitlehrer FN”, as well as my experiences over the years. Gustav Steinbrecht’s “The Gymnasium of the Horse” and the “The Principle of Riding” series of books from the German FN are my preferred literature.

My Coaching Philosophy

What are my lessons all about?

“To gain correct balance between rider and horse. To develop a proactive rider who gains submission from the horse through correct contact, straightens the horse by using Impulsion and therefore being able to produce collection”.

In my lessons I give the rider the “tools” necessary to “correct” the various problems that occur when riding dressage. Unlike German riders most New Zealand riders do not have the opportunity to have regular lessons. Following my system enables them to do their “homework” between lessons and still improve. An equestrian coach has to work with two living individuals and their shortfalls. Most books are written for “perfectly balanced riders and horses” when it comes to describing aids for various exercises. My coaching practice describes some of the common problems and gives a solution, taking into account that neither rider nor horse is born equally developed on both sides and their abilities mostly do not match.

Riding is a proactive sport; a fact is that horses would rather stand in a paddock and eat grass than doing 20m circles. So the rider has to “explain” what is expected in a way that the horse can understand through the aids applied. My lesson structure is built around the “Scale of Training”. Only by following this structure and allowing the horse the time it needs for its development, is it possible to produce correct work and have a “Happy Athlete” performing the tasks required.

My lessons are also athlete focused, which means that I encourage my pupils to find solutions regarding certain situations by questioning them and making them find the answers. This ensures that the learning process and outcome is owned by them and easier for them to recall when needed.

It is also important that the rider understands that any “problems” are actually “possibilities and training opportunities”. (Steffen Peters).

My coaching practices are for New Zealand riders of all levels and ages, of whom some are likely to have lessons only once a month or less.

The Road to Collection

Scale of Training

Rhythm, Suppleness, Contact, Impulsion, Straightness, Collection

The horse’s natural balance lies to about 55% on the forehand. When riding dressage it is necessary to transfer the weight back onto the hindquarters to ensure that the forehand is not “overloaded”. The hind legs are made to carry weight due to their ability to act like a spring. To be able to make the horse do this we need to follow The Road to Collection - the “Scale of Training”.

Only if the following first five points are achievable at the same time can “collection” be developed, the horse can then carry more weight on its hindquarters and create “self-carriage”.

1. Rhythm

Regularity of the steps and strides in every pace, the sequence and timing of the natural footfall and the tempo is the speed of the rhythm.

2. Suppleness

Relaxation combined with looseness and complete absence of tension, while the muscles of the back are swinging with the movements of the horse’s legs and the ability to bend laterally.

3. Contact

Soft, steady and even connection between the rider’s hand and the horse’s mouth, poll the highest point and nose-line in front of vertical.

4. Impulsion

The result of using the natural paces and adding energy to the horse’s suppleness, elasticity and responsiveness to the aids.

5. Straightness

The horse can bend evenly on both reins; hind legs follow front legs at all times. The centre of gravity is as close as possible to the vertebrae. Only if the horse is straight can impulsion come through and become collection.

6. Collection

Pushing power is transferred into carrying power, the horse transfers the centre of gravity further back, lowers the hindquarters and moves forward-upwards - impulsion is collected.

How are they linked?

- Rhythm and suppleness - to create balance
- Contact - to create a connection between forehand and hindquarters to allow impulsion to come through for horse to become straight
- Impulsion and Straightness - to strengthen inside hind leg on both reins, allow the energy created to go through to the hindquarters and become:
- Collection

1. Rhythm and 2. Suppleness - Balance of rider and horse

To improve their own and the horse's balance the rider has to make sure that he controls:

1. Rhythm = even footfall / "tempo"= speed

How fast the horse goes in each gait - Tempo (*refer to Scale of Training – Rhythm*)

The horse has accepted the Go and Stop buttons. It needs to go forward to a light leg aid, stay in front of the rider's leg and also respect a rein aid.

2. Submission

Where the horse goes - for example on the shape of a circle (*refer Scale of Training – Suppleness and Correct Lateral bend page 11*). The rider has to imagine that he has to guide the horse at all times between the reins and his legs, like a railway keeping the train on the track, or better he should imagine to be like a tunnel or corridor where the horse conforms to the track required. Each side of the rider's body should act like a wall, solid and upright. The created "enclosure" by the rider should be as wide as the horse. It should not act like a vice, especially on an energetic horse and the rider should never drive with his seat to create energy as it will flatten the horse's movement.

When coaching a lesson I give the rider a priority list, which includes

- speed control = rhythm/tempo
- controls "where the horse goes" (the horse's body to be able to conform to the shape required = suppleness),
- then rides the horse on the bit and over the back = contact, and
- creates an even contact.

Horse's Balance - Checklist

1. The horse's forehand should be placed where the rider wants to go, hind legs to follow, straight vertebra in all exercises, the horse's body conforms to the shape of the exercise, i.e. straight vertebra within itself conforming to the bend of a circle or half pass. Head and neck of the horse to stay in the middle of its chest so there is not too much neck bend, but still flexed.
2. The horse's hindquarters are wider than its forehand, therefore the rider needs to place forehand slightly to the outside track when riding along the long side so horse can be straight.
3. The horse needs to be "upright and level" – not leaning in or tilting; its back should be flat like a table-top

Rider's Balance - Checklist

1. Rider should have shoulder, hip and heel in a vertical line. If the horse was to disappear from under the rider, the rider should be able to stand up. Shoulders and hips are parallel with the horses. Horse and rider should have their shoulders and hips parallel to one and the other. The rider's position should be upright, no leaning in or tilting.
2. Elbow and hand of the rider and the mouth of the horse to be in a straight line, the length of the rider's arm determines the length of rein. The rider's "strength available to use his lower leg" also determines how long the rein is. The shorter the rein the more leg aid is required to work in relation to the contact taken. A rider who hasn't much strength in his legs cannot take the rein too short, as the horse will fight with the restriction. Arms and hands to be elastic in themselves and within the frame given to the horse.

3. Rider should sit on the inside seat bone on all curved lines, during lateral work and in canter. Rider should keep riding the horse to the outside with his inside leg to be able to stay on the inside seat bone. The shoulders of the horse need to appear to be on the outside for the rider when looking down to check. If the rider sits on the outside seat bone the inside wall for the required tunnel will have collapsed.
4. Rider has to be “upright and level” before the horse can be influenced correctly.
5. There should be a certain amount of positive energy flowing through the rider’s body. The rider’s body language will indicate to the horse if the rider is “proactive” (being one step ahead of the horse and telling it what is expected through correct aids) or reactive (not indicating what is expected – being passive and trying to fix what is wrong). Every step the horse takes is the rider’s decision!

Submission also refers to the mental relaxation of the horse, it should be free from tension.

Contact is the next point to address so we improve the horse’s balance. Of course we cannot neglect checking on the previous points of the training scale - rhythm and suppleness.

Only if we can create an even contact by using impulsion will it be possible to achieve straightness and work towards collection.

3. Contact - Accepting an even contact

In 1886 the old German Master Gustav Steinbrecht said “ride your horse forward and set it straight”. This is still the golden rule for dressage! Only when riding forward can contact be achieved or corrected. The horse should work long and low and go forward at the beginning of every ride. This is necessary to develop the horse’s back muscles, which is essential to produce collection later.

To make the horse go long and low the horse has to accept the contact. This is a crucial point!

Generally to make the horse accept the contact and ride it “on the bit” we need to create contact on the outside rein. Therefore the horse has to have lateral bend – the outside of the horse stretches (is longer than the inside) and the inside contracts (is shorter than the outside). The bend should run evenly through the horse’s body so it is actually straight – head and neck of the horse should be in the middle of its chest. It is important to create inside flexion with the inside rein before lateral bend can be developed. On a circle the bend of the horse’s neck to the inside gives the rider weight into the outside rein and together with the inside rein he can ride the horse “on the bit” by moving the snaffle gently within the mouth! The outside rein is steady and the inside rein keeps asking for flexion which together with the use of the riders legs to ride the horse forward makes the horse accept the contact, drop its neck and go “longer and lower”. The contact has to be even!

Accepting the contact means:

- The horse drops the base of its neck to ensure that the back is up and goes forward into an even, soft contact and therefore connects the forehand and hindquarters. Only when the connection is made can the horse develop and strengthen its muscles in preparation for collection. Every time the horse comes up too high or after it has a break on a long rein the rider has to “reconnect”. When a horse comes up higher it will also make its neck shorter in the process and the rider has to ask it to go longer as well as lower to compensate for the horse’s action.
- This has to be done on a slightly long rein at the beginning of each ride. Every time we pick up the reins we have to “convince” the horse that it is a nice experience to accept the contact and go into a slightly shorter outline than nature gave them. If the rein is too short when picking them up, the horse will resist! We need to use the longest rein necessary and the shortest rein possible!

- There has to be a working relationship between the rider's hands and legs, there always has to be more leg application than rein. The horse has to go forward into the steady, even contact applied and "take the rein forward" and give us a "positive pull". Too much weight in a rider's hand should be on the corresponding hind leg. If the horse is too heavy in the rider's hands use transitions to activate the horse's hind legs by using more lowerleg.
- There is no pulling, just the application of a steady connection between the rider's hand and the horse's mouth. Once the horse submits to the contact applied, the rider becomes soft within the newly created outline, like squeezing a sponge and keeping the hand still over the sink.
- A different explanation for a horse that tries to go above the bit or moves its head a lot - it is searching for a steady contact! It takes a horse three to five seconds before it can relate and submit to any given contact on the inside or outside rein. It is never a pull, just "taking the horse gently by the mouth, encouraging it to take up the offer by using the right amount of leg aid and producing a positive pull from the horse into the rider's hand in return". If the rider changes the contact in either hand before the horse has a chance to submit, it was a useless approach to make the horse to accept the contact and drop the neck.
- If there is a strong resistance to any contact by the horse just apply the inside rein only and give with the outside rein until the horse submits to the inside to gain control and inside flexion – after that apply both reins again gently and try to gain some weight in the outside rein maintaining inside flexion. After any resistance the rider has to "reconnect" the horse by riding it longer and lower in the neck until it works over its back again.
- Moving hands, giving and taking of the rein within the pace makes the horse's mouth dead and creates head movement. The only time the rider follows the horse's head movement is in the free, medium and extended walk. To give the rider with unsteady hands the feel of a "steady connection" it is best to make him hold the strap of his saddle blanket, which is not attached to the saddle or take his hands slightly further apart temporarily so that his "habit" can be broken and he can feel how the horse immediately conforms to the steady contact given. This has to be done on a slightly longer rein so the horse is not restricted and the rider has to let the strap go once the horse has submitted.
- Half Halt - the magic word! It means that the rider uses a forward driving leg aid and a tightening of the spine to a non-allowing or regulating rein aid to prepare transitions, movements, adjust the horse's shape and/ or create collection. This is immediately followed by an allowing rein aid. I personally do not use the word often as nearly every rider has a different definition of it. To get the horse on the bit we need to use half halts. Every rider has a certain way of "getting the horse on the bit". If it is done without pulling and head movement, it is their personal way of communicating with the horse, their "half halt". The rider should apply this the same way in all paces, all transitions, at any time necessary to keep the horse on the bit. Do not change "your way of giving a half halt" between walk, trot and canter.
- Often we see the snaffle in the horse's mouth sticking out one side more than the other, a loop in one rein and/or head tilting. This indicates that the horse is hanging on one rein, the contact is not even and the neck is set. The cause can be an unbalanced rider who has collapsed one of his "tunnel walls", and/or the "natural crookedness" of the horse (*refer to "Straightness" page 11*).
- It is not the horse that is not taking the contact; it is the rider who is not applying one while riding forward.

- It is like a “security blanket” for the horse if the rider rides it down and round with inside flexion if the horse is trying to shy or worry about something! The rider has to give the horse a “Job” to do and it will switch its attention back to him.

To gain an “even” contact:

The rider can only create an even contact when the horse is connected and going over its back. The horse might have to be ridden lower for a moment to achieve this.

There can be many reasons why the contact is not even; mostly it is a combination of an unbalanced rider applying an uneven contact and the horse’s crookedness that contribute to the examples below.

The rider will probably have to build up his “collapsed” wall of the tunnel, take the “empty” rein and become softer with the “heavy” rein to level and straighten the horse. If the heavy rein is on the outside the rider can use “counter flexion” to make the contact even. If the heavy rein is on the inside “leg yielding” can be used.

The following depends if we see the rider’s collapsed side on the bent side of the horse (the inside of the horse is shorter than the outside) or the stiff side (the inside of the horse is longer than the outside). We presume that the left side of the horse is the bent one and the right side the stiff (*refer to “Straightness” page 11*). There are many variations and here are some examples.

1. On the “rein” where the empty rein is on the inside and the horse is “bent” (left rein)

The horse’s “bend” could cause these faults and it may be the “weak left side” of the rider as well.

Correcting the rider’s balance for this example

The rider is not using his inside leg and probably sitting on the outside seat bone, which is the cause of these common problems. To change this we have to make the rider build up the inside wall and ride the horse towards the outside track with the inside leg.

The following corrections apply whenever necessary to **correct** the rider’s balance by building up a collapsed side of the body and rotate the body to be in line with the horse’s body.

- This includes ensuring that he sits on his inside seat bone by pushing his inside hip forward, his inside knee down and push his outside seat bone towards the centre of the saddle.
- Make him imagine that he has got a crutch under his arm and lengthen the distance between shoulder and hip.
- Make him carry the dropped hand higher and lower the high hand.
- Turn his body to the inside by bringing the inside upper arm back by his side, the outside shoulder forward and push his body out towards his inside arm.

Now he can apply the inside leg aid and use the inside wall of his tunnel to stop the horse from bending too much and/or falling in and not pull it out with the outside rein.

Correcting the horse for this example

- We use “counter flexion” to even the contact and unlock the set neck of the horse if there is too much weight in the outside rein, even when in movements.
- The rider flexes the horse to the outside. (It is easier to use right and left now rather than inside/outside).
- Say the horse is going on the left rein (most horses are more bent to the left, (*refer to “Straightness”*)) and the rider is flexing the horse to the right. Counter flexion stretches the left side of the horse and will give a little weight into the left rein as long as the rider keeps his left hand a little higher than the right one and clearly on the left side of the horse’s neck.

The right side of the horse's neck will contract and the pressure on the heavy rein will become less. The rider will then give the right rein away and the newly created weight in the left rein will flex the horse back until the head is in the middle of the horse's chest and flexed to the left. The rider then gently takes up the right rein and the pressure between both reins should be more even than before counter flexing. All this happens over the period of a few strides, never in a hurry as the horse needs between 3 to 5 seconds to respond to the change of contact.

- The transfer of the weight in the rider's hand to an even contact will be gradual. Imagine the rider has 10 points of pressure in the right hand and 2 in the left. After using counter flexion once, this might change to 8 in the right and 4 in the left, still not even, but better. Other exercises, which I will explain when talking about the horse's "straightness", will make the process complete.

2. On the "rein" where the empty rein is on the inside and horse is "stiff" (right rein)

On this rein the rider might have his shoulders turned to the outside, the outside hand is higher and pulled back and the inside one forward and might be neck reining. The horse might be tilting its head to the outside. Chances are that once the rider turns his body to the inside, the horse will fall in. The right side might be the "stiff side" of the horse.

Again counter flexion is used to even the contact.

3. On the "rein" where the empty rein is on the outside and the horse is "bent" (left rein)

The left hand could be up and pulling, right side of the rider's body collapsed. Same corrections to balance apply.

- It also could be seen that the rider has his left shoulder down and his hand is neck reining. Here we need to stretch the rider's left side, get him on the inside seat bone and use the inside leg.
- To change the contact in these cases we apply "leg yielding", the rider gently takes the outside rein to straighten the neck, so it is in the middle of the chest but keeping inside flexion, and takes the left rein a little away from the horse's neck and uses a lot of inside leg to activate the horse inside hind leg. The horse now can transfer the weight from the left rein onto the left hind leg. This should level the contact and give the rider some weight in the outside rein.

4. On the "rein" where the empty rein is on the outside and the horse is "stiff" (right rein)

This time chances are that the horse's stiffness is causing the problems. The symptoms show a rider who has his right hand and shoulder up, trying to turn the horse. We might find that the rider is also applying the outside rein (because one has to do so says the book!); rider's shoulders might be turning out.

To change this we again need to follow the corrections for the rider's balance, make the rider take the inside rein a little away from the neck, **the outside rein forward a little**, therefore allowing the horse to contract its right side. The rider then needs to push the horse out into a more stretched left side of the neck by using a lot of inside leg, may be even using "leg yielding". The rider will not be able to use a lot of outside rein until the horse has become more supple to the right and flexes to the inside on the right rein, give the rider lateral bend and the chance to create contact on the outside rein. It could take some time for a horse that is very stiff on one side to achieve this!

Contact – Check List

1. As soon as there is an uneven contact or a contact problem it needs to be addressed immediately by riding the horse lower with inside flexion!
2. Inside flexion before lateral bend, especially when horse is resisting – security blanket!

3. The horse's head and neck in the middle of the chest with inside flexion
4. If horse is heavy in both reins use transitions to activate both hindlegs
5. If horse is heavy on inside rein use leg yielding even during other movements
6. If horse is heavy in outside rein use counter flexion even during movements

Now that we have an even contact and the rider has "connected" the horse over its back he can ride it "up", ensuring that the poll is the highest point and the nose is in front of the vertical by using transitions and exercises. The rein will become shorter with the use of exercises. The rein is not shortened before the horse is ready to come up from behind. The rider needs to check all the time that the horse is still connected and allow it to go "long and low" in between exercises.

4. "Impulsion" and 5. "Straightness" - how to deal with the natural crookedness of the horse

As mentioned earlier Gustav Steinbrecht said in 1886, to ride your horse forward and straight you need to use "Impulsion" to help us create "straightness" but only if the horse is straight can impulsion come through!

- Impulsion is the 4th and "Straightness" is the 5th point of the "Scale of Training", but they need to be introduced even while "Rhythm", "Suppleness" and "Contact" are being established.
- "Impulsion and "Straightness" go hand in hand and their positions on the "Training Scale" can be changed around or be side by side.

4. "Impulsion" = Activity of the hind legs = Pushing Power = Controlled Energy"

It is important to realise that the rider is responsible for the amount of energy a horse produces! For example a 20 km per hour trot or canter can have 50% energy or 100% controlled energy. We need to have a high amount of energy though to create good performance and collection (*refer to "How to Introduce Collection" Page 17*)

If a horse's energy level is too high and uncontrolled for the rider's requirements, some energy needs to be taken out by trying to calm the horse down if it is too excited or worried, to improve submission and control the amount of energy. Riding it longer and lower and using turns and circles can help.

Most of the time though the energy level will be too low which means that the horse is not active enough from behind. The rider has to be proactive, ride more forward and use transitions between the paces or within the pace to improve this. These transitions should always be seamless. To achieve this the rider needs to learn how to create more energy with his "forward aids" and how to decrease the tempo, but not the amount of energy, with his "collecting aids" by using a number of half halts in a row (*refer to "Half Halts" Page 7*).

Please note that if the rider is in rising trot, sitting trot needs to be established before starting to ask for any transition or to stay in rising trot. Do not sit half way during the transition.

An active trot/walk transition is a good example. It is important to teach the horse straight away that when the rider asks for a downward transition it is not allowed to "help" and come back too quickly. The rider has to tackle this by keeping the horse in front of the leg while asking the horse "how slow can you trot before you walk". If the horse tries to come back quicker than asked for by the rider energy needs to be added by riding forward again and repeating the exercise trying to keep the activity. With a more experienced horse the rider should stay in that speed where the problem (training opportunity) started and activate the hind leg more by using some half halts.

A seamless transition between trot and walk with an active hind leg will be the result which becomes the foundation for further transitions such as between piaffe and passage later on.

Seamless transitions within the pace have to be like smooth gear changes in a truck. Say the extended trot/canter is in tenth gear and piaffe/canter pirouette canter is first gear – while the energy in them stays the same the length and height of the stride changes. The strides get a little higher and more cadenced with every gear change down from extended trot/canter. The rider has to be able to stay in whatever gear for as long as he wants to guarantee a balanced transition upwards or downwards.

The rider has to use forward and collecting aids together on a sliding scale between tenth and first gear. When one increases the other decreases but does not stop working!

For example in a piaffe or a very collected canter on the spot (canter/canter = maximum collection in canter) the rider needs to use say 9 points collecting aid and 1 point forward aid (which still produces 100% controlled energy), while in an extended trot/canter it will be the other way round.

For example :

- a) Piaffe = 9 collecting aids and 1 forward aid,
- b) Passage = 7 collecting and 3 forward aids
- c) Collected trot = 5 collecting and 5 forward aids
- d) Medium trot = 3 collecting and 7 forward aids
- e) Extended trot = 1 collecting aid and 9 forward aids

Regardless of the actual tempo the horse is travelling at, it should work with 100% impulsion (controlled energy) at any stage to perform well.

5. “Straightness”

Horses are more bent to one side. This is mainly due to their position in their mother’s womb; most horses are more bent to the left. The fact that they are more bent to one side can be counter productive. How is this so and how can we fix it?

We need to produce a horse that has its centre of gravity as close as possible to the vertebrae, not more to the right or left of it. The hindlegs need to follow the tracks of the frontlegs. Unfortunately the horse will always tend to go “crooked” again; it might only be perfectly straight for one ride. We need to keep addressing the problem.

A reminder, most books are written with a perfectly straight horse in mind when talking about the aids for exercises. Here are some hints how to approach the problem. I prefer the term “bent” and “stiff” when relating to this subject.

We need to make sure that the rider is in balance and both ends of the horse are connected. When one end falls in, the other will probably be running out!

It is also important that, while riding lateral work or cantering, the rider should have the horse’s forehand slightly on his outside when he looks down, even though the forehand is in front of the hindquarters. This ensures that he is sitting on the inside seat bone and is able to use his inside leg. This is essential when riding on the horse’s “stiff” side to keep the forehand out and create bend.

“Bent side”

The horse is bent more to the inside than necessary for any line required, including straight lines. The inside of its body is “contracted/shorter”, the outside “stretched/ longer”, the hind quarters are

falling in, the shoulders might be running out. The horse might be falling onto the riders inside leg also.

“Stiff side”

The horse is too straight for any bent line required. The inside of its body is “stretched/longer”, the outside “contracted/shorter”. The hindquarters might be drifting out and the forehand turning in, even on straight lines. The horse’s centre of gravity might still be on the outside.

Correct Lateral Bend

It is important to realise that a horse is more bent to one side does not mean that it is correctly bent laterally. The horse might not be bending properly through its ribcage and but is leaning on the rider’s inside leg rather than bending around it. Once the rider is able to influence the horse’s body and make straighter, this has to be addressed to be able to get better bend for the lateral work especially. The rider has to assure the horse’s ribcage bends evenly around his inside leg – that the horse’s “ribs are curved out” but not falling out. The key to correct bend is that the rider actively uses his inside leg.

Riding slightly smaller circles and then pushing the horse out onto a slightly bigger circle whilst controlling the outside of the horse’s body is a starting exercise to get the ribcage out. Another exercise that helps to achieve correct ribcage bend is to try and bend the horse on a 20m circle like it would be going on a smaller circle. Thinking of riding a 10m circle whilst staying on a 20m circle line. The rider brings the forehand and the hindquarters in gradually without losing tempo, quality of the contact or decreasing the size of the circle OR coming down the $\frac{3}{4}$ line and drifting the horse back to the outside track with the forehand leading. Once the forehand reaches the track the rider goes along the long side keeping the hindquarters in and off the track which becomes “travers”. It will take some time for the horse to get suppler – a little like going to the gym and adding more weight for you to lift. You cannot rush these things - gradual increase in the degree of bend does the trick.

There are various degrees of “crookedness”. This is why the “symptoms” can differ. There are two revealing exercises to determine which side of the horse is “bent” or “stiff”.

Leg Yielding

The horse will do this better on the “stiff” side.

Shoulder-in

The horse will not give enough angle on the “bent” side and be too straight on the “stiff” side.

How to make your horse “straight”?

It is important that we use impulsion to make the horse straight. Lots of transitions within the pace will ensure that the horse is ridden forward from behind into an even contact and the created energy will help the straightening process. It is also important to realise that to “make a horse straight” the rider needs to know how to “place the forehand” of the horse. This is another key focus of my lessons! There should always be a slight flexing and shoulder fore when riding along the long side.

“Straightening” a horse means to “stretch/lengthen” the “bent” side and “contract/shorten” the “stiff” side of the horse. The rider should be aware of the horse’s limitations and give it time to develop the necessary muscles. Just think about how long it takes us to build up muscle at the gym. A resisting horse is telling you it is “over faced” with the task in question. Scale back a little and advance quicker. This is an important rule during training in general!

Exercises for the young, green horse

- On the “bent” side ride a “square” with “direct” turns to make the rider realise how much he has to apply the “outside wall” of his tunnel. Once the “tunnel” has been “built” it will be easier for the rider to apply the same “structure” on other lines like a 20m circle.
- On the “stiff” side do lots of bent lines, i.e. circles. If the horse is very stiff the rider has to give the outside rein as much as necessary to gain inside flexion to start the bending process. The rider has the outside leg slightly back and on to stop the hindquarters from falling out and inside leg forward and on to keep the forehand out and create bend.
- Leg yielding is the other exercise to make a horse straight, once the horse is up to this level. This will be a challenge for the “bent” side, but easy on the “stiff” side.

Exercises for the older, established horse

Where the horse is able to do shoulder-in and travers.

- On the “bent” side use “renvers”, being “travers” on the other rein. This is the most effective way of “placing the forehand” to make the horse straight.
- Using “travers” on the “bent” side would suit the horse’s crookedness (inside of body contracts, which it is already!), hence we use “renvers” (outside of body contracts), which is “travers” on the other rein. At the same time it will supple the “stiff” side of the horse.
- It is not always necessary to ride the 100% version of “renvers”; once the rider has placed the forehand in front of the hindquarters he can flex the horse back to the true side.
- On the “stiff” side use “travers” to contract inside and stretch outside of body. The rider will need to start with a small amount of “travers” to build up suppleness.

How does “crookedness” affect exercises?

The “bent” side being the left, the “stiff” side being the right.

The horse will bend too much on any curved line on the left rein and be too straight on the right. The “crookedness” can help achieve necessary bend, for example, in half pass. Only in walk and canter pirouettes will the “bent” side be counter productive as the horse will not want to turn its forehand due to the contraction of its inside.

Here are some exercises and the affect “crookedness” has on them

Shoulder-in and travers are the ingredients for half pass. The recipe changes depending on the “bent” or “stiff” side.

Shoulder-in on the left - the horse does not give much angle

Ride “renvers” first, then slowly switch over to “shoulder-in” by changing flexion and bend but keep control of the shoulders, this should give a better angle. The rider will have to ensure that he is sitting to the inside for both exercises.

Shoulder-in on the right - the horse wants to be too straight

Ride “travers” first, then slowly switch over to “shoulder-in” and keep bend.

Travers on the left

Very easy for the horse, better to be avoided while working on straightening.

Travers on the right

Very beneficial for the horse. Start doing it on a 20m circle, only ask for 10% more bend than the horse offers and increase it as the horse gets more supple.

Half Pass

It is only beneficial to work on half pass when the horse is able to do shoulder-in and travers. It is helpful to train the horse to go on a straight line and bend it like it would be in half pass. Once the rider has the desired shape, with the forehand slightly in the lead, but still appearing to be on the outside of the rider, he takes the horse sideways into the movement. If the correct angle is lost the rider should go back to riding shoulder-in (if the hindquarters are leading) or travers (if the shoulders are leading too much), depending on which ingredient got lost. If the horse's body falls onto the rider's inside leg the rider could leg yield the horse back out and off the inside leg to get it upright again. Once this is achieved the horse can be bent around the inside leg again and once balanced can carry on with performing half pass. (See "Correct Lateral Bend" page 11).

- On the left - the quarters will want to lead
Rider will need to have more shoulder-in than travers in his bending beforehand and will have to imagine riding the forehand on a diagonal and adding some travers once going sideways.
- On the right - the horse will want to trail its quarters
The rider will need to have more travers in its bending beforehand and ensure that the horse's forehand stays to his left side by using a lot of right leg once going sideways, so the inside of the horse stays contracted and the forehand stays to his left. The forehand needs to be just ahead of the hindquarters. A common rider mistake on the trailing side is that the rider's body turns in the direction of the half pass. This will make the rider sit to the outside and block his inside leg from doing its job. The rider has to sit on the inside seat bone and the rider's shoulders should stay parallel to the short side.

When riding counter changes in half pass, the "turnover" will be different if the horse is going from his bent to his stiff side, or vice versa. The rider's body does not turn with the horse when changing over but the rider has to bring their new inside hip forward to be on the new inside seat bone.

Before changing over the rider has to finish the "old" half pass by riding the hindquarters over one more stride than the forehand, straighten the horse and then establish shoulder fore into the new direction before starting the new half pass. The changeover should be smooth. A more experienced combination can do this relatively quickly, but when teaching the horse it is important to take time and make sure the horse establishes balance first however long that might take for the changeover!

- From left half pass to the right (bend to stiff)
Chances are that the horse will want to be slightly leading with its hindquarters. So in the changeover the hindquarters will be already trailing to the new side, which also suits the horse. The rider will have to ensure that his left leg stops the hindquarters from further going to the left and his right leg "catches" the forehand. The rider's left leg then has to ask for the bend around the right leg required for the new half pass. As an exercise the rider should go straight ahead after the left half pass and ride travers.
- From right half pass to the left (stiff to bend)
Chances are that the hindquarters are trailing, so they are leading after the changeover, which again suits the horse. The rider will have to ensure that he finishes the old half pass and make the hindquarters catch up with the forehand by pushing them over one more stride than the forehand, almost riding travers in the old direction. This allows the forehand to come around first and

establishes shoulder-in before asking the hindquarters to follow. As an exercise the rider should go straight ahead after the right half pass and ride shoulder-in.

Walk and Canter Pirouettes are Half Passes on the spot!

In these exercises the right pirouette will probably be better than the left. The horse will try to bend too much to the left and therefore contract its body too much for the radius required. The right pirouette will be better if this side can be bent enough to conform to the desired shape of a pirouette. This shape is equal to the shape of a half pass ridden on the spot.

Left Walk Pirouette

Rider should bend the horse like he would in half pass, with more shoulder-in to make the turn possible. Rider might have to put outside leg forward to help shoulder turn.

Right Walk Pirouette

Rider should create bend for half pass and turn, keeping the outside leg back and on for correct bending.

Canter Pirouettes require three ingredients

- the horse can canter “on the spot” (*refer to “Collection” page 16*)
- the horse can maintain a canter on the spot in shoulder-fore on a straight line
- the horse can do travers on a small circle

Once these points are established the rider should be able to turn into a big training pirouette or quarter pirouette with balance. If one of the ingredients is lost a balanced turn is not possible. The difference between left and right canter pirouettes being the same as for walk pirouettes.

Flying Changes

The horse has to be straight to be able to change smoothly. Most horses will change easier from the “stiff” to the “bent” side. Imagine the vertebrae as a line in the middle of the horse’s body. The centre of gravity will be more to the left. It is difficult for the horse to have it to the right being the “stiff” side. When asking for the change from right to left the horse will be happy to get back to its comfort zone.

Before every change the rider needs to ensure that:

- the horse canters well
- the horse is responsive to the leg
- the horse is as straight as possible and
- the horse stays straight and on the bit within itself during and after the change. The rider again should think of riding in a tunnel especially when riding sequence changes.

When introducing flying changes the rider should flex the horse to the new inside to create a contact on the new outside rein, and in the case of changing from left to right it is important that the rider is able to push the hindquarters to the right if necessary, before asking.

Changing flexion needs to be possible at all times during counter canter and schooling of changes without the horse anticipation of the change. Riding on a 20m circle in counter canter and changing to the inside, when the horse has accepted the change-over of flexion, is a good way to start flying changes. Sometimes it pays to let the horse find the moment to change once the “conditions” are set up. The horse has got less chance to run away, the rider has more time to set it up and this is not a movement required in competition, so the horse does not get “worried” about a possible change after a half pass or going across the diagonal.

It takes time for the horse to become established, every horse will go through an “anticipation” phase and counter canter might be a little difficult for a while. It will be helpful if the rider makes a specific noise when he wants the horse to change and a different one for counter canter. Especially “hot” horses

will relate to this if the rider does it from the beginning and never asks for a change without the noise. Once the horse knows how to change, transfer the change to a straight line.

It is important not to worry about the crookedness too much in the beginning. Once the horse changes on the aid the rider has to address this problem. The horse will try to swing its hindquarters in too far when changing to the left, the rider should ask for shoulder-in immediately after the change. The horse will want to swing its hindquarters out when changing to the right, the rider should ask for a little bend to the right before changing and/or ask for travers shortly after change.

Piaffe and Passage

Energy plays a major role in developing “half steps” and later piaffe and passage (*refer to “Collection” page 16*). We worked towards this already with our active trot to walk transitions. When training towards piaffe and passage the horse has to be “electric” enough to react to the slightest aid from the rider. The horse’s crookedness will make it swing its quarters to the bent side and its forehand to the other to avoid taking the weight more under the centre of gravity. It is important that the rider corrects this straight away by riding more forward again and may be using the outside track as a wall for the side the horse wants to swing too. Keeping the horse lower in the outline while starting on half steps is important.

Checklist Impulsion and Straightness

1. Ride forward and use transitions to create Impulsion and therefore Energy, which can be collected once the horse is straight (*refer to “Impulsion” page 10*)
2. Stretch the bent side using squares, leg yielding and renvers
3. Contract the stiff side using bent lines and travers
4. Correct both ends of the horse simultaneously - forehand in and hindquarters out or visa versa
5. Keep forehand slightly off the outside track in a slight shoulder-fore position when going large

At any stage when addressing “straightness” issues, the rider has to be in balance and the horse has to be accepting an even contact, as well as going forward with “impulsion”. When starting any new exercise it is advisable to have the horse a little lower in its outline to assure that it is connected.

6. Collection - the light at the end of the road

The rider is in balance, the basics are sound. The centre of gravity is as close as possible to the horse’s vertebrae and can now be transferred back closer to the hindquarters to become collection. We are collecting developed energy. Pushing Power becomes carrying power that results in self-carriage.

If the first five points of the “Scale of Training” have been addressed and the horse is capable of producing the work required in the “desired outline”, collection can be introduced.

By using exercises the horse will learn to carry more weight on its hindquarters. These should relate to the collection required but the rider has to understand that every time a new exercise is introduced it will be a “beginner’s version” of the final movement required! The horse should be a little lower in the contact when training new movements to ensure connection.

Level 3 (Elementary levels) requires showing the “beginning of collection”. Every level after this demands a higher degree of collection. This is only possible if the rider keeps following the “Scale of Training” and develops all points simultaneously. It is not enough to be able to do the movements of the higher levels. The horse has to have “matching” collection to demonstrate smaller pirouettes and piaffe/passage for example.

The movements in our dressage tests follow the “Scale of Training”. Every rider is safe if these are used as exercises to prepare for the next level. The combination is asked to show in:

- Preliminary - walk, trot, canter, basic transitions and 20m circles show a horse in rhythm, suppleness, submission and accepting the contact.
- Novice - rhythm and acceptance of the contact, 15m and 10m circles ask for more suppleness, lengthening requires impulsion, leg yielding shows straightness.
- Elementary - rhythm, acceptance of the contact and submission. Rein-back is introduced. Medium paces and transitions within the pace show more impulsion. Shoulder-in, travers, turn on the haunches, counter canter and walk/canter/walk transitions ask for more suppleness, straightness and the beginning of collection .
- Medium - rhythm, acceptance of the contact, submission and a higher degree of collection in all movements are expected. Extended paces and transitions in and out for higher degree of impulsion, and half pass for suppleness and straightness are added.
- Advanced Medium - rhythm, suppleness, acceptance of the contact, submission, impulsion, straightness and a higher degree of collection than at Medium level in all movements. Single flying changes are introduced.
- Advanced – a higher degree of all the above in all movements, sequence changes every fourth and third strides and a quarter and 3m canter pirouettes are introduced.
- Small tour/ PSG, Intermediate I – a higher degree of all the above in all movements, flying changes every two and every strides, full canter pirouettes and counter changes in half pass are introduced.
- Medium tour/ Intermediate A and B – a higher degree of all the above in all movements - flying changes every stride, steeper angles in half passes, and piaffe and passage are introduced.
- Big tour/ Grand Prix and GPS – a higher degree of all the above in all movements, a higher number of two and one time changes, steeper angles for half passes, plus walk/canter pirouettes and piaffe on the spot are demanded.

How to go about introducing Collection?

Shifting the centre of gravity to the hindquarters can be achieved by transitions between working and medium paces and later collected and extended paces whilst maintaining the created energy during the downward transitions and riding uphill when riding forward again. This will develop collection and self-carriage.

“Less speed means more”! Any pushing power (impulsion = energy), created by riding forward into an even contact and being straight, is transformed into carrying power. The created energy cannot be lost during the transitions if collection is the aim. Especially when training piaffe and passage, it is crucial that the horse has enough energy to perform these movements with ease.

The amount of energy should stay the same – extended trot or piaffe/extended canter or canter pirouette! It is the length and height of the steps and strides that changes.

There is no “speed restriction” for collection! It can be quite forward for some horses. It is the amount of energy within the collection that scores higher marks.

Please assure that your horse is and stays over the back and round when training any new exercise or transition!

Two great exercises for the introduction of collection in canter are riding counter canter and walk/canter/walk transitions. These can be introduced at Novice. Regarding the walk/canter/walk transitions, by now the horse should easily canter on a small circle, about 12 – 10m.

The upward transition can be progressive with a few steps of trot at the beginning but soon the horse should be responsive enough to the leg to go from walk direct into canter. A noise aid before the rider gives the leg aid can help keeping the horse relaxed while walking as it can stay relaxed until it hears the noise and is not anticipating a sudden leg aid. This noise aid means “pay attention and give me energy now” and can be used for introducing flying changes, half steps, piaffe and passage also.

The horse should first learn to walk from a canter by riding the transition on a small circle. This will help “slow” the horse down without pulling it back, whilst keeping enough energy to keep cantering. Canter/walk transitions are at their best when the horse can canter as slow as walk speed, but it takes time to come to that stage. Once the horse has learned to come back to walk, thereby bringing the centre of gravity and balance further back, the rider does not necessarily come back to walk every time. He creates a few strides of “canter on the spot” or “canter pirouette canter” and then rides a little more forward again still using his collecting aids and the collected energy, to ride uphill and keeping the centre of gravity and balance on the hindquarters, creating collected canter.

To start working towards collected trot, the rider can use the same aids which are used to ride an active trot/walk transition (*refer “Impulsion” page 10*) whilst trotting. Also transitions between lengthened strides/medium trot and working paces are used. After a while the rider should be able to ride a good medium trot from collected trot without having to activate the horse especially for it. This indicates that the trot has the required energy to be collected. Some horses have a “medium trot button” and can switch into it easily, but most horses can be trained to have one. This “button” will also help to collect the trot more, create a bigger trot, half steps and passage. The rider pushes this button but does not go into a full medium trot. The energy of the created steps is maintained while gradually reducing the “speed”. with half halts to create a higher stride. Transitions have to be seamless! (*refer “Impulsion” pages 10/11*). The rider has now produced more “cadence” and therefore a more collected trot. This approach will also assist in training passage and for transitions between piaffe and passage as the horse learns straight away to do these with energy.

Half steps, which become piaffe, can be started by walking along the long side in a very collected walk. The rider makes a noise and the horse has to learn to go forward into a very short trot for a few strides with no leg aid applied. At the beginning the rider might have to give the horse a very strong leg aid or a tap with the whip after the noise is made to make the horse understand that the noise means GO. The importance lies in how alert and energised the horse is in the very collected walk before asking for the half steps. Once we have the desired reaction the rider gradually asks the horse for less forward motion to create piaffe. Again this will take time as the horse needs to gather strength before it can do piaffe on the spot. Half steps should be taught before passage. Half steps and piaffe are quicker in footfall than passage. Once the horse has learnt passage it will try and do a passage on the spot rather than piaffe. Work in hand can be very useful to assist this process.

The rider will find that he has to shorten up the reins during these exercises in trot or canter. This indicates that the horse is ready to transfer the weight back, but it is important that the horse’s neck is not shortened and the change in the horse’s frame comes from behind.

Riding long and low between collecting exercises is important to not stress one muscle group too much. As always collection as well has to be introduced slowly, the horse will tell you if it is not ready for a higher degree of collection by its actions – we need to listen to it. If the horse “plays up” we might have to take a slower approach with the introduction of any new exercise or higher degree of collection, but we will get there with a sound horse in body and mind.

Collection – Check List

1. There is no speed restriction on collection – we collect created energy
2. Use counter canter and walk/canter/walk transitions for collecting the canter for a start
3. Use transitions from working to medium paces and back as well as active trot/walk transitions for collecting the trot for a start
4. Have the horse lower in the outline when training new exercises or when starting to work on collection.

Conclusion

We got there, slowly but surely. The development of collection relies on a solid foundation called “The Basics”. This includes riding in rhythm and having a supple horse that accepts an even contact. It then is straightened, its centre of gravity shifted as close as possible to its vertebrae, with the help of impulsion. After which we can shift the centre of gravity back closer to the hindquarters to become collection and see the horse perform the required movements in self-carriage.

The rider has to be in balance. The basics for the horse have to be sound at any time; all “fancy movements” need to be added to them. If an exercise cannot be executed, check your own “Balance and the Basics”. That’s where the problem (training opportunity) will be!

There are no short cuts one can take to get there quicker. The horse needs time to develop its muscles to cope with the demands of training. If it is given the time required you will have a ‘Happy Athlete’ to work with.

Be patient, be consistent, be proactive!

Andrea Raves, Author and Coach
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