

A DRESSAGE METHOD

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INTRODUCTION

If you stepped into your horse's stable and set out to train him to move away from the pressure of your hand on his flank, it would not take long before he was educated enough to make it easier for you to look after him.

If you were prepared to spend more time, you could eventually refine this training so that you could keep him moving steadily away from the pressure of your hand indefinitely, assuming this were of benefit to you. To co-operate fully your horse would have to learn to move out of the way but still maintain contact with your hand pressure. He would need to mobilize his whole body to concentrate on your touch on his flank.

You could then take this training even further by teaching him to follow your withdrawing hand to give you full mobility in the stable. He might be sensitive enough to immediately understand the switch from push to draw. If not, you would have to bounce him away in such a manner that he bounced back towards your hand when you would let him know you were pleased with the renewed contact between you, etc.

This book is about how to train your horse to interpret the drawing action your hand necessarily puts on his mouth via the rein and bit as a pushing action. While these two polarized training objectives cause the switch of action from a 'push to pull' in one to a 'pull to push' in the other, the switch in both is the start of an exchange between the two of you which takes on almost magnetic qualities.

Perhaps the mystique of 'good hands' is rooted in this apparent magnetism, in which case the following pages aim to dispel the mystery by taking you through the steps that result in being able to push your horse's mouth via the rein. However, to achieve this I need you to be willing to look at the role of your hand in a different way; some would say to think about this role laterally. As a result, some of the points of view described are unusual and if taken on their own could well seem preposterous, while some others are likely to harmonize with your own experiences. However, if you are prepared to reposition your understanding of how to handle your horse so that each chapter provides you with a different point of view of the whole method, then you will be in a position to (learn to) use your hand in harmony with your leg and seat.

For the sake of avoiding repetition as much as possible, a chapter in this manual cannot be fully understood without knowing what is contained in all the others. I hope you will be able to conclude that the small number of pages makes your effort worthwhile.

The best way to start is at the beginning and in a very practical way with a simple exercise that becomes an important part of your daily training routine.

THE FIRST EXERCISE: OUTSIDE BEND

Ride your horse around the outside track of the arena and with your outside hand impose on him a permanent bend to the outside, even through the corners. Aim to make the bend as slight as becomes effective. You will need to use your outside leg (inside to the bend) at the girth to help deflect him out of and through the corners. You will also need to concentrate the weight of your body into your outside seat bone (inside to the bend) to push his withers over when he fails to flow through the turns.

Your outside hand (inside to the bend) will need to move where required to cause your horse to step away from its action on his body. Instead of pulling him into a direction your hand will start the process of learning how to push him towards it. In the early stages of new exercises you are likely to resort to what is known as the 'neck rein' but progress depends on using your hand differently. We will examine this in more detail later.

From now on, when I use the expression 'inside leg', 'inside seat' or 'inside hand', this will refer to the aid on the inside of his bend whether he is bent to the inside or outside of the school or circle.

When your horse is familiar with following the outer track with a permanent slight bend to the outside, teach him to follow a twenty-metre circle in the middle of the school still with a permanent slight outside bend. You may need to use either leg (inside or outside to the bend) to help keep him on the circle.

Stay on the circle until he is familiar with your wishes and becomes increasingly easier to manoeuvre around it.

Before too long, you should be able to notice that his posture changes as a result of trying to carry out the exercise more comfortably for himself. Sooner or later, he will try to 'come over in his back' which must be encouraged. When agile enough, he will adopt for longer periods at a time a posture commonly referred to as 'on the bit'. You next need to learn why this happens and how to make the most of it for both of you.

This first exercise is introduced in walk. When familiar with it you then introduce it in trot and finally in canter (yes, with an outside bend!).

When you are at ease with the benefits obtained (however far into his training) from working your horse with an outside bend, change the rein without changing the bend so that he now goes round the school with a slight bend to the inside. Be careful now to ride him as if you were still on a very large circle in the other direction with an outside bend. Without paying attention to this point you will revert to pulling him round the arena rather than pushing him with your hand via the rein and bit.

OVER IN HIS BACK

In the chapter *The first exercise: outside bend* I used the expression ‘come over in his back’. This is fairly common in dressage jargon but I need to expand on it a little as it has far-reaching significance.

When you sit on a horse his spine sags under your weight between pelvis and poll. This applies whether he is stationary or in motion. By asking him to perform the first exercise you cause his forehead to feel awkward in motion because his chest is sagging low between his shoulder blades. As well as other adjustments through the rest of his structure, the outside bend you are imposing on him requires his whole foreleg muscles to work harder by having to pick his feet up higher in order not to knock himself during the slight cross-over required especially in the turns.

After a while, the length of which depends on the horse you are riding and the skills you have acquired so far, he will want to relieve the concentration of effort out of his forehead and redistribute the work more evenly by lifting his chest so his shoulder muscles work at less of a stretch. To help achieve this he will need to tuck his pelvis in, lift his chest, arch his neck, lower his head and straighten his whole spine. Your horse will have ‘come over in his back’ and the sensation as a rider is clearly recognizable. His back comes up and becomes more comfortable to ride. He is then carrying you at least until he drops on his forehead again for whatever reason.

What is important to recognize here is that you caused him to switch from sagging under your weight to carrying you by giving him only two simple instructions: step over there (1) in this bent body position (2). How he then organized his body to respond more comfortably was only a side effect of the instructions. But because it turned out to be a desirable side effect, this now needs to be pursued by you with increasing focus.

You do two things with your body to communicate your wishes and, in responding, he does two things with his. You ask him to deflect away from the pressure of your three aids on him and your whole body becomes springy in order to maintain a slight and consistent bend permanently through the whole of his.

He steps away (deflects) from the pressure of your aids applied on three different parts of his body and by attuning himself to the one track you wish him to step onto, he must co-ordinate his whole body and become a single but complex spring himself by coming over in his back. It is only when he is over in his back that your hand can begin to be interpreted as a push by him.

Therefore, deflecting and springing fuse together inextricably, in the one combined aid from you and in the one response from him.

For the sake of clarity I now have to describe your role and his work separately. Both of these however, link in the two words: deflection and spring. Let us examine how your horse responds first.

HIS HINDQUARTERS

Generally, the process of schooling a horse for dressage involves developing his hindquarters so that each one of his strides carries the rider better. This is usually referred to as 'engagement'. To achieve this, you will hear it said that the horse's hindquarters must learn to 'take the weight more'. However you have to interpret this carefully. If it is taken to mean 'sitting', then this action is a motion backwards which is undesirable because dressage is about free motion forwards.

Boiled down to its absolute essence, the hindquarters do not 'engage' unless each hind leg performs two tasks in the one thrust. Each in turn has to help propel the horse both forward and upward in the push away from the ground. If it were a matter of propelling forward only, there would not be any need for the word 'engagement'. To propel the horse up as well, the thrust away must involve a momentary bracing in his loins and pelvis to help lift his forehead. This bracing to help lift is the reason behind the need for the word 'engagement'.

There is an optimum range within which the hind limbs must operate to play their part in the lift the whole horse needs to achieve. The long jump will not reach far unless the leap to achieve it has got some height to it rather than just speed. By the same token, the high jump will not reach any height unless there is sufficient momentum going into it.

A racehorse at a full gallop, engages his hind legs in order to propel his body in a particular way, forwards more than up, to achieve the required speed, with his whole body, through length and quickness of stride.

At the other end of the scale, the dressage horse must learn to place each of his hind feet on the ground under his moving mass precisely where the muscles above that foot can then help develop thrust upwards away from the ground with his whole body, rather than speed.

While one of his hind legs is engaging, the other is flexing to deflect towards your destination in response to your aids. Again, we see the inextricable relationship between deflection (in your horse reaching towards your destination with one leg) and spring (in your horse engaging with the other leg).

However, your horse can be sectioned in this way only for the purpose of explaining. In reality the engagement of one hind leg calls for the rest of his body to be involved in a complex relationship of flexing and extending joints to reach your destination all in one piece.

HIS FOREHAND

There are no bones connecting the forelimbs to the spine, only muscles, tendons and ligaments. The freedom of movement of the spine is at its greatest in front of the forelimbs, that is the neck. The freedom of movement of the spine at the withers, underneath and behind the rider's compromising weight, can be re-established through gymnastic exercises. The potential for a rider to influence the performance of his horse, positively or not, is therefore at its greatest in the forehand.

Basically, the front legs of the horse can be trained to act as a source of thrust or allowed to play the role of a wheel in which case your horse could be compared to a wheelbarrow. The choice is effectively yours since you are the one in charge. Your horse in motion, however purposely bred for dressage, will naturally react to your weight by 'wheeling' you along unless you school him otherwise. This wheelbarrow concept is generally described by the words 'the horse is on the forehand'.

We have already considered the role of the hindquarters of your horse and engagement. The bracing by his hind limbs to help lift his forehand is wasted if a corresponding thrust from his forelimbs does not then also play its part in carrying you. If you do not have this aspect of your horse's locomotion in mind then it is inevitable that his front legs will be playing no more than the role of the wheel on a barrow.

So, you have no choice but to teach him how to co-ordinate the potential power of each front leg to also lift and send you towards your destination. Therefore, as much care needs to be taken in 'engaging' the front as in engaging the hind legs.

While one front leg engages, the other flexes to reach towards your destination. Again, we see the same pattern of springing and deflecting alternately in the work of each front leg.

With both front and back engines working equally your horse should then find the burden of your weight easier to lift with his whole back. For the dressage horse it is important he learns the tendency to thrust upwards more with the fore limbs and forwards more with the hind limbs to give amplitude to his strides. This means he must learn to push away from the ground as each forelimb has just gone past the vertical rather than a split second later when it is markedly behind the vertical. The difference between suspension and ground cover depends on this.

If your horse were to thrust when his fore and hind legs worked exactly on the vertical in trot, he would be in piaffe. Alternatively, if he were not to thrust at all out of his front legs but merely lifted each fore foot as his centre of gravity passed over it, he would be most emphatically on his forehand.

HIS BACK

The long line of a horse's vertebrae between the tip of the dock and the poll moves in three basic ways. A mixture of any two or three of these ways gives the spine the potential for tremendous flexibility in all directions, where the structure permits.

These three basic motions are as follows. Each vertebra can rise or drop in the vertical plane (vertical flexion). Each can be displaced to the right or left in the horizontal plane (lateral flexion). Finally, each can oscillate around its longitudinal axis (swing).

As a rider you will want to directly influence the first two motions and indirectly enable the last to be as free as possible.

Just as his hindquarters must brace each time a hind leg works and just as each foreleg must impel his chest away from the ground, his back i.e. each vertebra must also actively participate in the effort of carrying you towards your destination. This means that, as each stride develops, each vertebra must lift you in turn. It must not just cope under your weight by absorbing the motions of the pace through the over-flexing of joints everywhere else in his body or by becoming stiff.

Again, the inextricable relationship between deflection and spring can be seen in the motion of his back. Deflection applies to the lateral displacement of each vertebra and spring applies to the vertical displacement. The free oscillation of each vertebra either way around its axis visibly forms the connection between these two as the swing in his paces.

FROM BEHIND FORWARD

Absolutely everything conspires to enable your horse to drop in the cradle of his shoulder muscles when you sit on him and to facilitate the functioning of his front legs as a virtual wheel.

His conformation and your weight are easy enough to identify as good reasons why your horse would naturally drop on his forehand. But his moods when free in the paddock also affect whether he will be on his forehand or not and they continue to do so when ridden. The whole process of schooling him must gradually equip him with the musculature and education to enable him to move underneath you as if he were showing off in the paddock. Influenced by this improved posture his mood is then likely to harmonize. You are aiming to nurture this psychological development because it signifies that his happiness increases with training. However, unless you are careful, the very means by which you control him, especially the bridle, can stifle this progression.

The moment you use the bit in his mouth to pull him into a direction (or straighten him for that matter) you cause him to instantly drop on his forehand if he was not there already. The same thing happens to you if you follow your nose. Your legs will move forward only to prevent you from falling over. By contrast, if you stay in balance over your feet then your feet and legs can take you to your destination.

I trust it will become clear to you, if it is not already, that if the direction you wish your horse to follow is not initiated in your horse's hind feet, then he will invariably be fulfilling no more than the role of a wheelbarrow where your saddle is the bucket your weight is concentrated in, where his hind legs play the role of the gardener and where your action on the reins merely incline the barrow one way or the other for manoeuvrability.

Having understood that it is in his hind feet that direction must originate, it becomes necessary to be even more precise. Within each stride, his inside hind foot is the one that must reach towards your destination first while his other hind leg engages to facilitate that reach. The reason for this will become clear later when considering your horse's way of going and turning.

Progressing forward from his hind legs and mindful that it is his feet that must take you towards your destination first, otherwise your horse will only ever move out of balance, let us consider what his front feet must do to harmonize.

Because you are aiming to push him towards your destination not pull him into it, within each stride his inside (to the bend) front leg must be the first to engage (spring) in order to facilitate the reach of his outside front foot towards your destination (deflection). Again, his way of going and turning depend on this.

One leg having sprung and the other deflected in each pair of either front and back or lateral legs, the stride is completed when each leg has alternated its work.

Because of the necessity for the reach towards your destination to initiate in his inside hind foot, it follows that the outside front foot completes that diagonal reach

a split second later. This applies in all three paces even where the diagonal pair of limbs is disassociated.

The vertebrae in the loin area of his back also deflect and spring towards your destination slightly after his hind feet. The process continues forward up his spine to coincide with the thrust upwards of his front legs to cause your horse to lift his chest in the process of coming over in his back.

Then, unless his neck follows the same development of motion from behind forward, his nose, being the foremost end of his anatomy, will not be the 'last' to reach your destination. In which case, he will have lost his balance and dropped on his forehead to follow his nose or his chest.

So we now need to examine what you can practise to cause your horse to start going where you wish with his hind feet first.

THE SECOND EXERCISE: THE LEG-YIELD

The purpose of the leg-yield is far-reaching. It is the first exercise to teach your horse how to mobilize his hindquarters then his forehand and finally his back in response to your aids.

Assuming your horse is ignorant of this exercise I will take you through its various stages from the beginning.

From going large in the school with an inside bend on (say) the left rein turn down the centre line by using your right leg at the girth. Once you are on the centre line and still maintaining a bend to the left, leg-yield (towards the right) back to the track. Your left lower leg (now active) needs to fold up on your horse's flank by hinging at the knee to influence him to step sideways so that his two pairs of limbs (hind and fore) each work diagonally forward and across towards the right at the same time. As a result, his spine should stay more or less parallel to the long side you are aiming to merge with. His inside limbs will necessarily cross in front of the outside limbs. Hind and forelimbs will be travelling on two separate tracks. This explains the use of the expression 'two track work'.

At first you may need to help him understand the general direction and flow of the exercise by pressing the left rein against his neck and crossing your active hand over his withers (neck rein). This is your active hand of course because it is on the inside of his bend. Your right (passive) hand does only what is needed to support the work of your active hand but drops all contact should your horse show signs of being restricted.

Your seat facilitates the execution by influencing the left side of the saddle to spring his withers over from left to right.

Once your horse is familiar with the general idea of stepping sideways, you then need to progress to the desired hand action (deflection and spring combined) as soon as possible. This will be examined in more detail later.

The influence your hand will have on your horse must cause his hindquarters to spring ahead of his shoulders towards the outer track and remain slightly ahead throughout. As we will see later, this point is fundamental.

Repeat this many times and look out for a desire on his part to lift his chest, straighten his neck, lower his poll and place his right front foot further out to the right so that he can come over in his back. Learn to promote his ability to do so. However if his outside shoulder steps ahead of the outside hip and his neck bends too much into the existing bend, he will have 'run' through his outside shoulder, fallen onto his forehand and dropped his chest.

When you can keep his quarters consistently slightly ahead, otherwise known as 'leading', and he remains over in his back throughout, you will both have mastered the technicalities of this exercise.

The most educating leg-yield is achieved when it takes the whole length of the arena to go from centre line to diagonal marker because your active hand will be springing the outside diagonal pair of limbs more precisely forwards than sideways. Meanwhile, your inside leg, on the side your hand and seat are active, remains folded up to signal sideways motion to your horse only, because it is your hand which has the greater role to play here, but more on that later.

A WAY OF GOING

When you and your horse are skilful at the leg-yield i.e. when his whole spine becomes straighter and it remains consistently positioned on the parallels from the centre line to the long side of the school, it is time to use the schooling achieved this far to start paying attention to his 'way of going'. This expression, commonly used in dressage training, is incomplete. If you think 'a way of going there' instead, this then focuses you on the mechanics of locomotion rather than the cosmetics of your horse's motion, which are open to an infinite number of interpretations.

You are aiming to teach him to carry you (over in his back) to your destination for longer and longer periods until he is strong and skilful enough to do so permanently. To help you flow seamlessly into 'the way of going there', you can follow straight from the leg-yield into going large on rejoining the track and with your active hand deflect and spring his inside hind foot and outside front foot even more precisely forward than sideways to follow the track as if in the shallowest of leg-yields. Your inside leg drops down to the girth on rejoining the track so that either leg at the girth can then be active to clarify more precisely where your horse needs to step.

In terms of sensations for you to experience, this will be the realisation that he can work equally with both pairs of front and hind limbs. This is an important stage to reach in the training of your horse.

When your horse falls out of the influence of this shallowest of leg yields you will have effectively 'lost' him because he will have dropped onto his forehand. Incidentally, if you then go on to combine this shallowest of leg-yields with the first exercise which is the large circle with a slight outside bend, you will develop your horse's agility and paces further.

We now need to examine in more detail what your horse is required to do with his body while performing this shallowest of leg-yields. So shallow that it becomes the equivalent of what is known as 'relative straightness'.

Your aids need to influence his locomotion into three sequential and cumulative responses by his hindquarters, forehand and back in turn to form the way of going. Eventually all three responses will follow each other almost simultaneously, therefore within one stride.

The first response required from him is to deflect and spring his inside (relative to the bend) hind leg first onto your chosen track. As a result of your aid he should then proceed on two tracks. This starts the process of working your horse from behind forwards. The track you place his hindquarters on is the one his fore feet and spine must align themselves with. If you are working him with an outside bend, his hindquarters will spring into an inner track. If you are training him with an inside bend you will need to start on an inner track so you can spring his quarters onto the outer track.

In any event, his hindquarters must be trained to mobilise, as required by you, every time your hand acts and to do so with increasing lightness viewed overall and within each single session.

His second response, as you continue to apply your aids, is for him to place his front feet in line with the track already stepped into by his hindquarters. The desire to relieve his musculature from the effort of moving along on two tracks will prompt him to try to straighten himself out because it is more comfortable. We are developing further the observation already made in the chapter *Over in his back*.

Provided you keep his hind feet as the centre around which his front feet describe a portion of a circle to resume single-track locomotion, your horse will reach across in a combination of two ways. He will point his outside front foot towards the track his hind feet are already following and he will step out of his inside front footprint to conclude the sweep.

Be observant here because unless your aids are able to impart spring, his forehand will merely deflect back into a single track in front of his hindquarters. In which case, his forelimbs will retain the wheel-like quality of a horse on his forehand. Nevertheless the improved scope of the reach across of his front legs will help develop his paces.

However, if he can also spring in front of his hindquarters, you will constructively influence his way of going. For the sake of visualisation, you are contrasting doing the splits in the previous paragraph with going on tiptoes in this one and he has to combine both actions to progress.

His third response is to spring his chest up and towards the track his hind feet are already following to resume single-track locomotion. Although the second and third response could seem to amount to the same thing because they happen at the same time, they are not. His back must learn to become involved all the way along its length from behind forward, as required by each pace, to ensure his whole body participates in the process of springing towards your destination. Logically, his head will spring last into line with the track you are intending to follow, even if this tendency becomes indiscernible.

Looking at the second and third responses together, the mixing of being able to do the splits, going on tip toes and using his whole back and hind legs to also lift you, will necessarily develop the amplitude and quality of his stride.

Incidentally, you must expect that within the training of the same horse and within the same training session even, it is likely that the aids for these three responses will need to be emphasised differently at various stages.

This way of going there directly forms his deportment. If you are successful, your horse will learn to bounce over the ground rather than roll along it on his forehand.

THE THIRD EXERCISE: THE TURN ON THE HAUNCHES

In this exercise your horse turns so that his front feet follow a large circle around his hind feet which follow a smaller circle. He needs to do this with a bend to the outside in order to conclude the potential development of his way of going. Apparently, there is no brief explanation or word to define this exercise so I will simply and pragmatically refer to it exclusively as a turn on the haunches. Where this turn is executed with the horse bent to the inside, I will refer to it exclusively as a pirouette. This also serves me to differentiate between an exercise and a manoeuvre as explained in the chapter *The manoeuvres*.

This exercise focuses on teaching your horse how to co-ordinate his whole body to lift his chest in continuous motion and take a larger step with his front legs than with his hind legs, in order to execute the turn. As a result of becoming skilful in this exercise your horse will improve his way of going.

The aids for this exercise are all on the inside of his bend. The defining aid is your inside leg pressing his flank firmly at the girth. It helps him understand that it is his forehand which must yield away more. Do not apply your leg behind the girth as this would be the same as for the leg-yield and would confuse your horse. Your seat springs his withers away into the same direction as your active leg is conveying. Your hand aid is likely to be a neck rein to begin with.

As soon as your horse is familiar with the turn on the haunches, however technically insufficient its execution, your hand must then cause his inside hind foot to step forward and more under himself. This ensures you cause him to initiate each complete turning stride to start with his inside hind leg.

As he learns to carry you better, the circle described by his hind feet will reduce eventually to a desirable size. What is important is not how small that circle can eventually become but how well he learns to organize his body in the turn. As your awareness and management of the way of going improves during the turn, you will be able to focus on more technical requirements of this exercise as the training progresses. As a side effect he will become straighter and straighter while turning, which is desirable, as well as more agile with his forelimbs, while his hind legs will visibly 'take the weight' more.

Once your horse is familiar with the turn on the haunches in walk, it can be introduced in trot and canter (therefore with an outside bend).

TWO INSTINCTS TO OVERCOME

As you will have found out, it is relatively easy to cause your horse to move occasionally in ways that you instinctively know are desirable. What is not so easy is to engineer those moments again and again for longer and longer periods until they become a way of going.

The reason for this is that your horse always obeys two natural instincts (or reflexes) in priority to his schooling. It is tactically better to convert the energy he puts into these instincts and transform it into carrying you where you wish rather than suppress them. These two instincts are so strong that you must expect to remind him every day where your manipulating of his body leads. As his training and muscle development progress, he should then rehearse through all the co-ordination adjustments required from him in shorter and shorter sequences within each training session. This is sometimes referred to as 'putting your horse on the aids'. Indeed, every time you apply your aids, he has to go through the whole of his training to date, and beyond, eventually almost instantly. I inserted the word 'beyond' in the last sentence to include those moments when he does something more agile with his body, coincidentally or as a result of your influence, which gives you a new standard for him to work to.

Let us now identify the two circumstances when your horse will naturally fall on his forehand.

The first such circumstance is the way he will negotiate the next corner or turn in the school.

If you watch a horse showing off in the paddock, he will bend round the turns only when he wants to maintain the height of his strides to impress. This is when his movement is at its most beautiful. Quite naturally the discipline of dressage aims to promote this posture by the horse when ridden.

At all other times, the horse naturally turns by leaning in at an angle like a bicycle. The greater his speed, the more he inclines. He does this by dropping his inside shoulder into the turn and using his head and neck to balance, mostly on the outside of the turn.

It should come as no surprise that with your weight bearing down on him he naturally will always incline through turns. This is not so perceptible if he is permanently on his forehand and his pace is slow.

However, if you have managed to cause him to come over in his back and guided him along a straight line for a while, the next turn compels him to negotiate it instinctively. He goes to drop on his forehand again. You can either welcome this predictable impetus as a means of swinging him back up or vainly fight against it.

The second circumstance when your horse will naturally drop back down on his forehead comes as soon as the next time you need to act with your hand. His instinctive reaction to that action is the source of the expressions 'it takes two to pull' and 'behind the bit'.

The common interpretation of the expression 'behind the bit' describes the period of time when your horse organises his body so that he avoids putting any weight onto the bit, and thus onto your hand. To give his neck the necessary freedom, he must rest his chest on the wheel of his front legs. He drops on his forehead to react passively to your hand.

In contrast, when your horse concentrates his energy into the bit and refuses to alter that concentration he is commonly described as pulling or heavy. Because of his actual physical position in relation to the bit, he is also behind it but actively so. To pull against you, he also drops his chest in the cradle of his front legs and finds purchase in the ground under his front feet.

Therefore, when you next need to act with your hand, he cannot help but be positioned 'behind the bit' anyway and then instinctively drop on his forehead to react actively or passively to its influence.

Therefore, you need to know where and how to apply your aids to help him come over in his back and remain in this posture despite these two instincts. Eventually, you will learn to use the energy that drives these two instincts to swing your horse into constant motion.

However, before we can deal with your aids, I need you to see a picture in your mind's eye.

SWING

Imagine your horse is a flexible pole suspended in mid air. With your weight on it, the pole sags. For your horse to come over in his back, the pole needs to swing 180 degrees left or right to arch instead. The lateral bend you put on his spine determines the direction it must swing in order to arch. If you work your horse with a bend to the left, his spine must swing out to the right and vice-versa.

As your horse's spine is a series of articulated sections and each stride develops from behind forwards, the swing outwards from sag to arch can be very subtle. Your role as a rider is to set your horse's spine in motion to swing it over into an arch and maintain it there with the help of constant motion.

So the picture of your horse coming over in his back on stepping forward can be expressed fully in the two words 'swinging forward'.

Bearing in mind the two instincts you need your horse to overcome, as explained in the previous chapter, I trust it will be clear that you can best educate them to yield to the action of your hand and seat during turns when, logically, you initially guide him through them with an outside bend. He will more readily allow you to bend him outwards with your active hand because nature predisposes him to doing this anyway. And he will more readily learn to allow you to push his withers sideways into the turn with your active seat bone because instinct predisposes him to incline them into it. When he is familiar with how your hand and seat work together, you can then teach him to continue yielding to their action when you take him through turns with an inside bend despite the influence of both instincts.

Now we can examine the role of your body in deflection, spring and swing.

YOUR AIDS

Your whole body can be divided into the three aids known as the hand, the leg and the seat.

Your 'hand' also includes your arm from the shoulder joint down to your wrist. Your 'leg' only includes your leg from the knee joint down to your toes. Your 'seat' comprises the rest of your body between shoulder and knee joints.

The common interpretation of the word 'aid' usually encapsulates a range of actions from crude, which is usually visible, to subtle when it becomes a signal imperceptible to all but your horse.

However, the word 'aid' means 'help' or 'to help'. Therefore, I would like to use it more precisely to describe the range of action on your part that actually helps him work out where and how you wish him to carry you. The range of your action that compels your horse to become safe and rideable in the first place can then be more appropriately described as your 'controls or restraints'. When your horse eventually understands your slightest actions (so you do not need to develop them more fully into aids), they then become your 'signals'. The progression of your influence from necessarily guarded to begin with, to restraining, then helping and finally trusting cannot be adequately contained in the single word 'aid'.

In obedience to the urge we all share to refine our actions so they develop into an art, it follows that the instruments we use to train our horses with must also be seen to change from 'controlling' ones such as spurs, lever action bits and so-called gadgets to 'signalling' ones where only a mild bit is used.

There are only three simple rules that govern the use of your three single sided aids, without exception:

1-Your hand should act on the same side as the desired bend, only.

2-Your seat should act on the same side as the active hand, only.

3-Your leg should act on one side only to clarify to the horse where to step towards by yielding away from its pressure. This can be on either side whatever the bend. The use of one leg or both at the same time to request a transition up or down becomes more of a signal.

Your three aids must not act to affect how he appears in motion, as this must emerge as a side effect. Vibrating or tugging at the rein to place your horse in a rounded outline is motivated by cosmetics. This detracts from the clarity of information you wish to communicate to your horse, which is just 'carry me over there'.

To straighten your horse by pulling on either rein is again motivated by his appearance and, therefore, cosmetic. This invariably also places him behind the bit and will delay your ability to eventually push him with your hand. Again, this must be avoided.

When your body is no longer required for keeping you in the saddle and controlling your horse, you can switch to helping him work out where and how you wish to be carried. He needs to learn to step freely through the open gap defined by the pressure your inside hand puts on the bit on one side and by the pressure your outside leg puts on the other side of his body. If your three aids act on the same side, the whole of either his right side or left side is open for him to step into. His natural desire to move along a single track eventually narrows the gap between inside hand and outside leg (if active). Because of forward motion, your horse will learn to also step in front of the action of your hand, not just that of your leg and seat, when you will be able to conclude he is 'in front of your aids'.

By learning to step through that open but narrowing gap your horse necessarily transforms his posture, as you would wish.

YOUR LEG

Compared with your hand and seat, which must acquire great athleticism to influence, your leg has an easier time of it only because its action is so easy to understand by your horse. His obedience to it means he will necessarily yield by stepping forward and away from its pressure. Because your hand and seat also serve the same function, there will be very little opportunity for your horse to be confused and resort to what one could diagnose as disobedience to the leg. Indeed, I believe most if not all disobedience to the leg is caused by the contradiction of the bit acting across your horse's path at the same time.

There is no button for you to find on your horse's side that will open up 'advanced dressage' for you. There is no need for you to go to the gym to build up muscle in order to have a leg that can be heard. Your horse can twitch a fly off his flank as soon as he feels it land, so you can be sure he can feel you at your weakest. All your horse needs to learn is to respond to a simple code communicated by your leg.

Apart from some necessary exceptions, only one leg will be active at any one time and will be positioned at or behind the girth. It will either touch the horse to signify the need for a brief response or apply a prolonged pressure to indicate the need for a more concentrated yield.

The following table should be self-explanatory:

	Touch/ Pressure	Single/ Both	At Girth/ Behind	Right/ Left
General guiding along a single track – Straight or curved	t/p	s	g	r/l
Halt to walk	t	s/b	g	-
Halt to trot	t	b	g	-
Halt to canter left	t	s	b	r
Halt to canter right	t	s	b	l
Walk to trot	t	b	g	-
Trot to canter left	t	s	b	r
Trot to canter right	t	s	b	l
Transition down	p	b	g	-
Leg-yield to left	p/t	s	b	r
Leg-yield to right	p/t	s	b	l
Shoulder-in to left	p/t	s	b	r
Shoulder-in to right	p/t	s	b	l
Half-pass to left	p	s	b	r
Half-pass to right	p	s	b	l

Turn on the haunches to					
	Left	p	s	g	r
	Right	p	s	g	l
Pirouette to					
	Left	p	s	g	r
	Right	p	s	g	l
Rein-back		t	b	b	-

The above is for you to refer to as required until the pattern of the code or signals makes sense (if it does not already because most of it is standard). The chapters dealing with the exercises and manoeuvres in detail provide more specific information about the position of your leg where necessary. In order to apply your leg aid behind the girth without disturbing your seat, you should bend your knee to do so. Your horse will soon learn to discern the difference.

Essentially, the single sided leg pressure at the girth indicates to your horse that his forehead must deflect away onto a separate track. The single sided leg pressure behind the girth indicates to your horse that his hindquarters and forehead must step onto two separate tracks.

Also essentially, the single leg action on the same side as the active hand and seat emphasises the deflective influence of your aids. The single leg action on the opposite side to your active hand and seat will emphasize spring.

The signal for your horse to canter by applying the leg behind the girth on the opposite side to the desired lead is widespread. At first you may have to be obvious about it but eventually a well-timed mere suggestion of bending your knee will cause him to start the initial desired canter stride. Once obtained, he must learn to stay in that pace until asked to perform another transition. Therefore, your lower leg can then drop back down into a passive hanging down at the girth, ready for the next aid without him dropping out of canter.

For transitions up, the touch of your heel(s) should quickly become sufficient as a signal. For transitions down, the squeeze of both your calves at the girth will distinguish this signal from that for a transition up.

YOUR SEAT

As soon as you are safe in the saddle you can start to use your seat to help your horse work out where and how to carry you. Just trust that your body will learn to become as agile as you need it. It is better for you to be motivated in the use of your seat by the results that need to be achieved rather than the cosmetics of it as the latter emerge as a side effect.

It is necessary to make a distinction right from the start between your active and passive seat. The active seat is when you use it to influence your horse. The passive seat is when you blend in with your horse's motion and merely follow him because he is going where and how you want him to.

Inevitably, during the greater part of the training it will be difficult for you to distinguish when your seat is active and when it is passive. You need not waste time reflecting on this, as your instincts will take care of the blending and switching between both.

Your passive seat is you, the passenger. Because of the dynamics involved, of course, it will be anything but inert. However, the distinction between you applying an aid to guide and you athletically moving to follow your horse when he steps where you wish, is important. Let us look at how you need to move athletically to be passive.

There will be a point in every stride of whatever pace your horse is moving in, when he bounces you up and away from the saddle, however subtle this may be. To be a good passenger you have the responsibility of making yourself as light and unobtrusive as possible for your horse; in other words, become a live weight. To achieve this you must synchronise with the moment he pushes away from the ground to also spring yourself away from the ground so that he barely notices your weight. This happens to be when his front legs engage.

You will both be in harmony when he springs exactly up and forward into the space you form for him with the base of your seat (knees, thighs and seat bones) through your own synchronised spring away from the ground. It should not be a case of you acquiring a good seat because you have learned to stick to the saddle like a limpet, but rather a case of the saddle staying in contact with your seat because he has learned to spring precisely into the space you form for him under you. Again it is a question of releasing him, rather than restricting him, onto your chosen track.

Your responsibility as a good passenger is to eliminate the jarring that can occur between you and your horse when his pace sends you out of the saddle and when gravity pulls you back into it, by synchronising your take off and landing well and bending joints throughout your body to absorb the motion. And, obviously, bouncing away from the ground only as much as you can reasonably expect your horse to match!

The moment your horse steps straight onto your chosen track and swings his back over in the process, your seat will become instantly passive and both your seat

bones will feel his back evenly. This moment lasts as long as you do not need to guide him again, this could be for several strides when fully trained.

Your seat becomes active only to deflect, spring and swing his back. You use it, as required, to deflect your horse's withers to incline into turns and two track work if you are working him with an outside bend or keep them upright if you are working him with an inside bend. You also use your seat to spring his whole back so that in reaction he swings forward.

As you will see in practice, this influence on his withers and back happens to coincide with when you need to act with your hand. This harmony is logical as it is impossible to act with the hand without it finding stability, dexterity and finesse in the seat simultaneously. Your seat is a bit like the hand of a player on a basketball. It imparts direction (deflection) and bounce (spring) in the same action. It adds, maintains or reduces both as required. Your seat is also a bit like the archer's hand holding the bow. It pushes on the bow while his other hand pulls on the string to bend it and develop its potential. This latter analogy will be examined more fully when looking at your hand.

Obviously it is into your inside seat bone that your whole seat concentrates the precision of its action. The following principles will help you learn to move your body economically so that your inside seat bone becomes a very clear source of information for your horse:

If you try to use your inside seat bone but your head inclines to the other side of an imaginary vertical plane bisecting your horse along his spine, you will dissipate the potential clarity of your seat. This can happen intentionally when you need to unbalance your horse towards your destination much in the same way that you will use the neck-rein in the early days of a new exercise, in which case deflection and spring are compromised.

If you try to use your inside seat bone but your head inclines ahead of an imaginary vertical plane bisecting your horse into front and back, just in front of your seat bones, you will also dissipate the potential clarity of your seat. This happens when your horse fails to step in front of your seat and hand or you do not move to place yourself behind him.

If you try to use your inside seat bone but your head inclines far backwards, you will break his back in two dynamically because you will need to use his mouth to balance yourself on, in which case it is impossible for your horse to be anything else but on his forehead and behind the bit.

If you sit on one seat bone and use your hand on the other side of his spine you will twist him, in which case he cannot become straight.

Your seat bones should move back and forth in walk and canter as if at the end of a pendulum, the centre of which is your head. This also happens imperceptibly in trot but the marked up and down motion of this pace masks it. You should minimize the lateral motion of your seat to concentrate his motion forward.

At the moment you need to spring away from the ground it is helpful to think of your seat bones, each one of your vertebrae and your head, all bouncing together away from the saddle or ground at the same time.

Once in suspension your spine can flex freely to reach back with your seat bones so that as you start the process of landing and absorbing by closing your knees, you re-enter the whole cycle of your seat's movement, from behind him and into one or the other seat bone, if need be.

During the early days of his training, the process of teaching him to yield to your seat will mean that you will be active mostly through many strides and barely passive, it will seem. When he is fully trained, the activity of your seat will be so subtle as to be nearly unnoticeable within a stride. The passivity of your seat will then have the most influence, as it will determine how much time your horse is encouraged to spend away from the ground given the limits set by his stamina and the pull of gravity.

The refinement of your horse's schooling will necessarily mould your position until the two of you are pleasing to watch in motion. If you already know where and how your body needs to eventually move in the space above him, you can be more forming with your seat earlier and, therefore, shorten his training.

YOUR HAND

Your hand is more agile and sensitive than your seat and leg and, of course, his mouth is more mobile and sensitive than his back and flanks. What you actually do with your hand is the key to a good relationship between you and your horse. As getting on his back was your idea you have the responsibility of handling the bit very knowledgeably. The greatest potential for a subtle exchange between you and your horse depends on how specific you become with this aid.

You are aiming to act with your hand from a place low above the withers and, the further along your horse's training progresses, to have to move it away from the withers less and less as this aid becomes more of a signal.

Again, the principle of active and passive roles applies.

Your outside hand is always passive although not inert as it can hold an infinitely varied amount of weight or none depending on the support it is lending to your active hand at any one time. Its key function, however, is to reassure your horse that the gap between the inside ring of the bit and your active outside leg will always be kept open for him to step through.

Only your inside hand can be active and only when your horse needs to be helped to work out where to carry you. It becomes passive in the instant your horse swings forward. It remains passive all the time you do not need to convey where and how he should step next, although it must maintain a bend, however slightly, otherwise you risk losing contact.

Basically your active hand bends and releases your horse. His reaction to this bending forms his way of going there. There are two principles that determine the direction your hand should take when it bends your horse to act as an aid or signal.

The first is that it should always act behind 'the tangent'. Sitting on him, draw an imaginary straight line from the inside ring of the bit to touch past the outside wall of your horse's inside hind foot whenever it lands on the ground. This line changes angle with the track constantly as much as you need to bend him laterally or he straightens. This line intersects the track you wish to follow behind your horse because of the way of going. Therefore, your horse is positioned in front of this line but your hand must act somewhere behind it.

I need to use the concept of right and left now for quicker clarity but obviously the following explanation applies to its mirror image. Your horse is working in bend left, let us say, and in a very shallow leg-yield going large.

If you put tension on the left rein in a direction to the right of the tangent (i.e. in front of it), you will (eventually) put your horse passively behind the bit. If you put tension on the rein in the same direction as the tangent, you will (eventually) put your horse actively behind the bit. If you put pressure on the rein in a direction to the left of the tangent (i.e. behind it), you will (eventually) cause your horse to step in front of your hand aid or the bit.

The second principle is that it should also always act above a horizontal line drawn through your horse's mouth wherever he may place it.

Now we need to infuse into this basic picture the role your hand plays in deflection and spring. When your hand acts in a horizontal direction away from your seat bone, it influences your horse to deflect in the opposite direction. When it acts in a vertical direction away from your seat bone, it influences your horse to spring away from the ground and forward. The blending of these two motions into one hand action informs your horse where and how he should step forward. Because the 'where' comes before the 'how', your hand must always move horizontally away before it then also rises.

As soon as your horse swings forward in yielding to your aid, your hand can return towards his withers to allow him to straighten. It can then begin its active journey from this point again and again.

You need to treat your horse's spine as if it were a flexible bow. He will react as such if you visualize that your hand and seat bone act as the archer's hands on the bow. The more emphatic these two aids need to be, the further away from each other they will have to work and the more likely your inside leg will be active (at the girth). In contrast, if you barely need to distance your hand from your seat bone, the more likely it is that your outside leg will be active at the girth. It should not take too long for your horse to understand how you handle him and contribute increasing sensitivity to your aids and increasing power to the complex spring you effectively wish him to become.

For example, when you bend him laterally to the left by moving your active hand horizontally away from your left seat bone, by pushing his withers towards the right with your left seat bone and by then guiding him forward with your right leg at the girth, you want him to relieve the flexion you put on his body i.e. yield by lifting his inside hind foot and deflecting it towards the right onto your chosen track to start the way of going.

This aid may or may not be sufficient to then cause him to swing forward. If it is sufficient, your hand moves back towards the withers to allow him to resile. (To 'resile' means to resume shape after bending. Because it encapsulates the concepts of straightness and springy resilience, it now serves my purpose better than straighten.)

If not, your hand needs to then move steadily upwards to bend his neck up as well as to the left. This added flexion on his back might be sufficient to cause him to seek to relieve the tension by springing up and forward off the ground. This should help set his back in motion to swing outwards to the right and over to complete the 180 degrees rotation. I use the word 'complete' because the sag in your horse's back will have already been disturbed to the right from the vertical by originally bending him laterally to the left.

If not, your hand and seat need to work in rhythm away from each other in time with the footfalls of his front legs to disturb the resistance in his back and cause deflection, spring and swing in succession. (You are likely to need to switch to your left leg at the girth to help deflect him.)

Your hand can then return to the withers to allow him to resile. The manner of this return becomes increasingly educational. To start off with, it is a clear dropping of the contact to signify your satisfaction and to give him the time and freedom to return unintentionally to a straighter body position or even lower his head into a long and low outline. Towards the end of his training, when contact, straightness and lightness become more consistent, your hand will return gradually towards the withers in order to nurture an intentional and smoothly continuing resilience from him. The transition between bending him and allowing him to resile can then become subtle enough to give rise to the paradox of putting tension on the rein to push his mouth.

In terms of the way of going, there is a progression in the use of your hand and seat aids. Deflection of your horse's hind feet is initiated by your hand acting horizontally away from your seat bone. Your hand acting upwards away from your seat bone imposes the spring of his forehead away from the ground and forward and across into your chosen track. The swing forward by his back is set in motion by your seat acting on his back like the hand of the basketball player. At any one point in the development of the way of going, you have to assess what influence your aids need to emphasize more: deflection, spring or swing. However, all three influences are ultimately inextricably linked.

Perhaps the most important aspect of using your hand in this manner is that it is impossible for you to pull backwards on your horse's mouth and contradict your leg and seat.

THE SWEET SPOT, CONTACT AND PUSH

A lot of sports share this notion of hitting the sweet spot. It comes from synchronising a stroke with precision and timing in seemingly effortless, efficient and graceful motion.

When your hand, seat and leg cause your horse to swing forward that moment is unmistakably a 'sweet spot' as well. What you cannot rely on is where precisely your hand will find it at any one time because many factors affect this outcome. So you have to move wherever needed to find it again and again. However, you will notice that within a training session, your horse allows your hand to hit upon it somewhere closer and closer to your seat bone as the session develops because he becomes clearer about what it is you want and how to give it to you with less and less effort on his part. This pattern also emerges within his overall training.

It will become obvious to you that when you are then able to move your hand so that you keep your horse in a constant state of being over in his back because it stays on this moving sweet spot, this is unmistakably a reciprocal 'contact'. It is very difficult to say whether his contact towards you arises because he has understood the purpose of your aids and wants to help or because he wants to train your hand to prevent it from bending him further because this involves two-track motion for him again. I believe your sensing of either possibility is likely to change constantly depending on the temperament and intelligence of each individual horse and the stage reached in his training.

The next development in your relationship is for you to realize that the pressure of your hand on the bow-like nature of your horse is a bit like your foot on a car accelerator. It causes him to surge up and forward into an improved carrying posture as he swings forward. You should then be able to conclude that you are effectively 'pushing' your horse's mouth with your hand when you can maintain the surging and his posture, even and constant.

Apart from wanting your horse to resile by always seeking to stretch his poll away from you as a result of the way you handle him, you also want him to learn to reach into collection. For these reasons, it is important that when your horse surges forward you automatically allow forward with your hand to facilitate his desire to stretch. The ease with which he co-ordinates his body to ready himself to surge up and forward again at the slightest pressure you put on the rein determines how thorough his training has become. Eventually, when you can push him consistently and lightly, the distinction between putting tension on the rein and allowing your hand forward becomes blurred and the contact between you becomes magnetic.

Incidentally, when your hand finds the sweet spot, this is the closest equivalent to what is known as a 'half-halt'. The trouble with this expression is two-fold. Firstly it suggests a halt, which psychologically interrupts the free flow of motion through the gap between your aids. Secondly, because it is associated with the hand it may cause the rider to place his horse behind the bit, actively or passively in an effort to perform one.

LONG AND LOW OR LONG AND HIGH

Every time you take up the slack in the rein to re-establish contact, your aids must then go to bend your horse to cause him to swing forward and stretch his head away from you to resile. This may happen immediately or it may require prolonged manipulation of his body. If it does not happen, however, you will cause him to drop behind your hand.

To then hold the rein, allow it to lengthen or shorten it, determines whether your horse's head (eventually) lowers or rises.

You allow the rein through your fingers as soon as he shows signs of swinging forward to encourage him to do so and stretch his spine straighter (lateral straightness). Because he arches his back in the process, his head naturally tends to lower as the rein slips through. You can act with your aids again and again and cause him to stretch further and further down while working him through his entire curriculum until he can perform it all with a long neck and low head.

You do not have to do this so thoroughly with every horse but you certainly want your horse to readily work long and low if needed. This is very useful with sensitive horses to keep them calm while learning because it requires only the minimum of stimulus from you. You would also do this with stiff lazy horses to give them the time to learn how to loosen into the way of going hopefully without them noticing how much work even this minimum of activity actually entails.

From a long and low outline you can then start the process of causing him to raise his head without him dropping any of his vertebrae in the development of each stride from behind forwards (this dropping is also referred to as hollowing). From having learned to arch and stretch his spine he must gradually add the skill to raise his forehead and lift his neck.

Just after the next time he swings forward is the best moment to shorten both reins and re-apply your aids keeping your fingers closed on the rein. He may immediately yield to the push of your hand by swinging forward, in which case he will have reciprocated your contact somewhere higher towards the horizon, which is your ultimate destination. Or he may not, in which case your hand needs to work away from your seat bone until he does. When he yields by swinging forward, your hand immediately also yields forward. Then you can shorten the rein again. This cycle progressively adds straightness to his top line.

There will come a point when he reciprocates your contact towards the horizon whatever the work you wish him to perform for you. Invariably, he will then be working in a 'poll high' position, when your hand will be positioned close to his withers and barely above the horizontal line drawn through his mouth because most of his neck is above the rein.

So the difference between working your horse towards a lower and a higher outline depends on whether you want to yield first to reward his effort so far or you want him to yield first to cause him to become lighter. The shorter the rein you

impose on him, the higher his back and neck need to lift for him to still swing forward.

It is possible for you never to resort to working your horse in a long and low outline because every time you shorten the rein you know how to cause him to respond to the push of your hand and when to allow your hand forward to enable him to resile towards the horizon.

However, it is also possible for you never to resort to shortening the rein to raise your horse's outline because you know how to influence him to do this indirectly. If you ask your horse to perform all his work in a long and low outline, he will gradually organize his body into a more efficient carrying position as he learns that your aids always disturb him when he fails to arch and stretch his back while working. This more efficient carrying position is, naturally enough, when his poll is the highest joint in his body and he reciprocates your contact towards the horizon. Because of his rising mouth you would need to shorten the rein after he raised his outline but only to maintain contact. You eventually reach the push of the hand in a different way but the result will be the same. You have to decide which way suits your horse more during each training session and overall.

Whether you choose to work your horse towards a poll high outline from a short rein or from a long rein, your skill at keeping a constant tension on the bow will determine how quickly you train your horse. The straighter he makes himself, to be helpful or to train your hand to remain close to his withers, the more subtle the tension becomes and magnetic the quality of the action of your hand.

Your horse has an optimum length of rein that is arrived at by constantly shortening and lengthening it until the spring upwards generated from his front legs enables his hind feet to step further under to facilitate a higher lift of his chest for the following stride. His spine still stretches by raising the lower portion of his neck and taking his poll forward to improve his ease and comfort of motion. This causes a cycle that could be mistaken for causing your horse to sit if it were not for the height and freedom of his paces. The gradual lift of his whole back through training happens because it pivots around the centre formed by his hip joint so that his poll finally ends up in a high position but only by dynamic reaction.

COLLECTION

Collection is when your horse finally actively works with you. But two things need to happen first.

The first is for him to stretch his poll so far away as to cause him to suddenly lower his hindquarters and lift his chest and the lower part of the 'S' in his neck all at the same time. He finds himself compelled to do this in order to counter-balance his forward reaching head, which represents approximately ten percent of his whole body weight, to prevent it from causing him to lose balance and fall over. He collects his body together. This adjustment coincidentally harmonizes with both the final effect you wish to have on his posture through the way of going so he can interpret your hand aid as a push and the need for him to become straight from within. The self-explanatory concepts of self-carriage and balance harmonize completely with collection viewed in this way.

The second is for him to work out that although you bend and disturb him constantly until you can push him with your hand, you seem satisfied with him and become more passive whenever your handling actually causes him to adjust his posture to counter-balance the weight of his forward reaching head.

There will then come a time when he will notice that the energy he needs to spend to keep you passive reduces dramatically when his body is permanently counter-balancing his head. (All horses are intelligent and, therefore, lazy enough to work this out sooner or later.) In which case, he will then be in a position to harmonize with your handling of him by intentionally using his head to effectively counter-balance your weight on his back. This becomes schooled collection and he contributes it himself.

Incidentally, this more economical energy output happens to be considerable compared with the energy he would need to expend if he somehow managed to perform the entire dressage repertoire on his forehand. Understandably, therefore, your horse will spend a large portion of his training seemingly trying to convince you that he can perform all his work on his forehand!

Therefore, you should not think of collection in terms of restraining him because this risks putting him behind the bit. It is better to accept fluctuations in his paces all the time he does not yet know how to collect himself. Aim for him to work only as much as is needed to respond fully to your aids but if he puts too much effort into it, wait for him to become more economical. For this reason most of his training will be performed in various versions of working walk, trot and canter until a reliable optimized working pace emerges from which your horse can easily perform any of the work required of him. This reliable optimized working pace becomes a 'collected' pace. The sooner he works this out the longer he is likely to serve you.

Eventually, he will learn to maintain his collection even when increasing his energetic output to extend each pace, perform all the manoeuvres, the transitions, the passage and the piaffe.

STRAIGHTNESS

It is fundamental to remember that straightness develops as an automatic side effect of bending him to set him in motion and then releasing him. You must not use your passive hand to pull or hold him straight, or use your leg and seat to restrict lateral bend. Under these circumstances he can become straight from within, not superficially so, and this ensures freedom and ease of his movement.

Straightness seen strictly through the alignment of his vertebrae along his whole spine requires three points of view to define it in absolute terms.

In the horizontal plane where each vertebra can displace to right and left, straightness is when they align perfectly one behind the other in a straight line viewed from above or below. I shall refer to this as lateral straightness.

In the vertical plane where each vertebra can rise and fall, straightness is when the spine is stretched straight from front to back viewed from either side (making due allowance for its natural curves). I shall refer to this as top line straightness.

In the longitudinal axis where each vertebra can oscillate, straightness is when there is no degree of oscillation either way through the length of the spine viewed from behind or in front.

While these three aspects combine into a vision of perfect stiffness, this demonstrates that in motion your horse can only become straighter whenever he moves to lengthen his spine evenly as much as you allow him, in the horizontal and vertical planes.

Bearing in mind that you are aiming to push his mouth through the tension you necessarily put on the rein to communicate your hand aid, he will become straightest when his mouth is the furthest away from your hand it can reach without him losing contact or changing the bend.

Because you can only push him with your inside hand, the posture he will need to adopt to listen to this your active hand means he will be stretching away into what is referred to as 'position right' or 'left'. But we must also take into account the posture he needs to adopt in the vertical plane to carry you. This requires him to arch his back uniformly along its whole length but as little as necessary to ensure the straightening of it. So it is the combination of these two subtle but even flexions into the one shallow-arched posture, to the right or left, which enables him to move ahead of your push and the need for the concept of 'relative straightness' becomes understandable.

The way of going which involves pushing your horse from behind forward into the shallowest leg-yield possible harmonizes with your horse's conformation and also with the concept of relative straightness examined above. Because his shoulders tend to be narrower than his hips, this means that an imaginary line touching his inside shoulder and inside hip becomes parallel with the track you wish to follow i.e. straight, only when you are able to push him with your hand.

THE TANGENT

In the chapter *Your hand* I introduced the concept of an imaginary line drawn from the inside ring of the bit in your horse's mouth to touch past the outside wall of your horse's inside hind foot whenever it lands on the ground. I now need to expand on some of the implications of this.

Even when your trained horse moves along on a single track in a relatively straight posture, the tangent will be crossing the track behind your horse. Admittedly, this will be so far behind that the tangent becomes all but parallel with the track. So, if your horse is working in a bend to the left, your hand will then still be acting as an aid or signal 'behind' the tangent if it does so to the left of it and your horse will still be moving in 'front' of the tangent if he does so on the right of it.

When your horse performs a leg-yield, he is positioned in front of the tangent. The same applies to the shoulder-in and turn on the haunches. However, when your horse performs a quarters-in, he is positioned behind the tangent because it will be crossing the track in front of him. One can conclude from this that any straight line or manoeuvre performed in a shallow quarters-in position must mean your horse is behind the tangent and thus behind the hand/bit. This can easily be confirmed by the position of your hand, which invariably will also be behind the tangent but wrongly so.

A principle emerges from this that when performing a circle with an inside bend, half-pass and pirouette, your horse must remain in front of the tangent otherwise you will not be able to push him with your hand.

Therefore, when your horse resists your attempts to place him in front of your hand aid, you must resort to exaggerating the deflecting of his hindquarters in order to set the tangent at a greater angle to the track you wish to follow and emphasize his position in front of it until he tires of trying to slip behind it.

SYMMETRY

I believe most horses are born right handed, just like humans. It seems that they naturally tend to be permanently slightly bent to the right and move along straight lines in a manner that one could define as fractionally 'quarters in' to the right.

As a consequence, your contact towards him must feel different to him on the left compared to the right just as his contact towards you does. Every day, you have to start afresh the process of making yourself and him more ambidextrous. Thankfully, this takes less time and becomes more thorough as the training progresses.

In practical terms, however, this means that when you are working your horse on the right bend he will tend to naturally place himself passively behind the bit whereas when you work him on the left bend he will tend to place himself actively behind it. Whether it is his right-handedness that predisposes to this or the natural posture he adopts is difficult to ascertain, but it seems he will more readily over-bend on the right side to avoid your contact whereas he will tend to stiffen against your contact on the left to challenge it.

To put your horse in front of the action of your right hand you will need to cause him to step all the way from passive behind the bit to active behind it and finally to active in front of it. When you work him with a left bend you are likely to need to cause him to step only from actively behind the bit to in front of it. For this reason you will tend to find certain exercises and manoeuvres difficult in one bend and easy in the other and vice versa. Also you should find that his progress through training switches these polarities fairly regularly, which is a good sign.

The most significant consequence of this natural lack of symmetry is that you will find changing the bend surprisingly difficult during training until your horse is relatively straight and collected. In addition, because of having to move through one more position to step in front of your right hand, the change from left to right bend is the more difficult of the two, even when your horse is trained and it is easy by then for you to push his mouth. Of course it is comparatively simple to cosmetically change the bend in your horse's neck if his chest is resting on his rolling fore legs.

SUPPLENESS

It is when your horse moves out of a tightening spot that you can observe the degree of his suppleness. This applies to his mental and physical abilities.

For you to flex him so he becomes a contortionist is a pointless exercise because this does not teach him to use his whole body in the pursuit of the single purpose of carrying you to your destination. In fact, it teaches him how to stay longer on the ground to lift his suspended feet higher and over-bend his joints. This may look active but it is inefficient motion.

Each one of his joints will last much longer if it works only as much as it is required to achieve the single purpose.

Some horses are so flexible by nature that they find it easy to over-bend usually to avoid reciprocating a contact. At the other end of the scale, some horses are so inflexible by nature that they prefer to stubbornly challenge your contact rather than yield forward away from it. Of the two tendencies the second is preferable as your hand is closer to the desired pushing ability and it may need to move only a millimetre more to hit upon the sweet spot.

In order to step in front of the action of your hand, the over flexible horse must first learn to become resilient enough to actively limit how much you need to bend him before he will alight off the ground.

Your horse will be supple when he surges forward readily at the slightest motion of your hand in order to limit any further tightening of his spring-like body.

LIGHTNESS AND RESISTANCE

Your horse gradually achieves lightness as he deflects, springs and swings forward ahead of your aids or signals. This improving lightness is perceivable by your body because suddenly your hand, seat and leg become unnecessary and passive. If the renewed action of your body on his can be limited to signals and he reciprocates your hand contact towards the horizon, he will be light.

This lightness is also perceivable by anyone watching your horse move because he will not only appear weightless but his hooves will cause less noise when they make contact with the ground.

This means your horse uses the ground for one purpose only. That is to push away from it rather than use it to cope with any contradictions from your aids or, indeed, to disobey them. These wrong uses feel like resistance and can arise from ignorance, lack of fitness or disobedience. Whichever it is, you must patiently wait for him to learn and become stronger because you have only one course of action open to you: you have to repeatedly disturb the resistance. Take comfort from the realisation that if you sense that your horse is disobedient, this means he actually knows what you want and is, therefore, closer towards accepting your training.

Your horse has two ways of resisting you. He can either over-bend to avoid your hand contact or he can stiffen against it. The same horse can go through phases of doing either at different times in addition to his predisposition for asymmetry.

In any event, to resist your aids your horse needs to either passively roll over his front feet to leave his neck free to over-bend or he needs to actively plant his front feet into the ground to brace against you. Of course, he can also combine the two resistances and the main location for these is in his forehead. By handling him into the way of going there, you will disturb his feet and body so your horse eventually acquires the only posture compatible with being pushed by your active hand.

Ultimately all his resistances are an expression of his ignorance of the final goal you have in mind for him: collection. Educating him is merely the process of altering his belief structures until his stamina and musculature are so developed that he has no good reason left for resisting your signals. In the meantime you may find a well-timed flick with your schooling whip held in your passive hand disturbs his resistance constructively and saves some of your energy. However, if you are strong enough and have the stamina, you can undertake the whole of a lazy and unhelpful horse's training without a whip if you so wished.

IMPULSION

The definition of the word impulsion is an 'impelling push'. Therefore it is inadequate when used to define a mental state denoting your horse's desire to move forward as is commonly done. Perhaps this explains why the word impulsion is steeped in semantics within the dressage teachings. However, 'impulsion' actually requires no adaptation to lend it more meaning.

Looking at your horse's relationship with the ground, impulsion refers to the push away from it that propels him up and forward. If your horse's chest is resting on the wheel of his front legs, only his hind legs are propelling him. Logically this must reduce the quality of his impulsion by two thirds at the very least because his front limbs and back are not involved.

Looking at your relationship with your horse, impulsion also makes sense as all three of your aids seek to place him ahead of you to push him towards your destination.

Therefore, in order to produce constant motion, there must be a repeated or constant impelling push by you on him and by him away from the ground. You are responsible for its quality because how you eventually continuously and steadily push your horse out of the way of your aids determines how he pushes away from the ground to flow consistently over it.

Logically your horse's impulsion away from the ground must reduce when he moves into halt and increase when he moves out of it. Also, your horse's impulsion must increase and decrease as the effort he puts into his work increases and decreases.

Your impulsion on your horse must increase and decrease as needed to produce an evenly flowing performance from him. You need to be able to fade in and fade out with your aids and signals without startling him, yet be able to disturb any resistance as it arises.

A restless horse that will not keep still is not demonstrating good impulsion he just wants to move. A lazy horse could well have a conformation that makes it easy for him to spring away from the ground naturally in which case his impulsion would be good but for the fact that he would rather not move. Therefore, a horse, lazy or not, that has learned to spring away alertly from the ground off all four feet in such a way that he optimises impulsion through technical prowess while conserving energy will make all his work look easy and effortless and therefore beautiful. If he should feel exuberant yet obedient and his physique gives him the scope, then his work will impress all the more. However, to you the rider, this is not significant because any horse that has reached such a high level of training is always beautiful to ride.

HIS POLL AND HIS MOUTH

Your horse's poll and mouth lend themselves perfectly to the overall spring-like quality his whole body can potentially assume.

His skull is effectively the last vertebra at the front end of his back. Because he must also open his poll joint in the process of arching his entire spine upwards to carry you, this will tend to place his nose at a certain angle compared to the top of his neck. The opening of this joint puts the finishing touch to his overall arching otherwise known as 'roundness' provided he does not open it proportionally more or less than he needs to compared with any of the others along his back.

If he can carry you with his skull as much as he does with the rest of his spine, he will end up with his poll as the highest joint of his whole back and his nose will hang vertically or just in front of the vertical. This posture coincides with the posture he needs to adopt if he is to reciprocate your contact towards the horizon. It will take him time to acquire the strength and co-ordination to do this. In the meantime it would be destructive to the way of going to cosmetically place your horse in this posture.

His lower mandible is ideally jointed as a sprung lever to feel the influence of your hand. Indeed, as soon as he understands that he must become a spring, his eventual reaction will be to tend to close his mouth to participate. This is where the analogy with a car accelerator pedal is clearest. Thus a noseband is theoretically unnecessary and a tight one may well confuse or restrict your horse. However, you do need a noseband to limit the opening of his mouth to prevent injury to his jaw musculature should a serious loss of harmony between you happen, such as a spook.

You should expect your horse to open his mouth frequently all the way through training, as it is inevitable that he will step too far or not enough out of the way of your hand aid. Only vanity will tempt you to tighten the noseband to hide this. The knowledgeable onlooker can observe this constriction easily anyway and can only come to the same conclusion.

Therefore, if he arches the whole of his spine and opens and closes his mouth and poll in springy response to your hand, his parotid glands are likely to be gently massaged to produce white foamy saliva spread as if it were lipstick. This 'wet mouth' is a desirable sign.

As his tongue is the perfect cushion to absorb your finer hand signals, he will tend to place it under the bit to listen to you more carefully. Therefore, if you are to undertake the training of a horse with a tendency to put his tongue over the bit, he will necessarily gradually abandon this habit when he responds to the push of your hand.

With such horses there are two possible reasons for this problem, which either manifest singly or combine. Either the horse is very sensitive in his mouth or he is reluctant to step forward with the energy his rider would prefer.

If his mouth is very sensitive, by putting his tongue over the bit he can avoid the worst of the sensations caused by his rider's hands. The advantage of such a horse is that the lightest of touches from the hand will be heard. Thus the scope for finesse

is to be welcomed. This sensitivity may well be aggravated by his inability to cope mentally with the usual contradiction of being asked to go forward with the leg placed behind him and the seat above him while being asked to turn or slow down with the bit placed restrictively across his path. As soon as he understands that you are not trying to box him in with but place him permanently in front of your three aids, such a horse will learn to cope better with the unavoidable use of your one active hand.

If your horse is reluctant to step forward, then the use of the three aids as explained in this manual, could well remove the greater part, if not all, of the problem. However, you must be prepared for a period of readjustment during which he can be allowed to discover that removing his tongue from under the bit does not prevent you from manipulating him with your aids. As the effort of wriggling his tongue from where it lies naturally in his mouth is ultimately pointless, he will abandon this avoidance.

By placing him in front of all three of your aids, his tongue may be likely to drop back under the bit but his reluctance to work might not change. If this is the case, you will have to decide whether it is best to settle with the limited service he is prepared to offer you or consider replacing him. Learning to ride such a horse so that your active hand avoids providing the excuse for him to minimise his output is invaluable experience, but the repeated need to work your hand and seat far from each other to convince him you have not forgotten how to use them may be very frustrating.

It is likely that your horse will at some point explore the benefits of putting his tongue over the bit during his training either briefly or repeatedly, having never done this before. Provided the bit is low enough in his mouth for him to slip his tongue back where it belongs, it is better to ignore this because he is bound to adopt the more comfortable place for it to lie.

The bit you use and how you hang it in his mouth will promote his ability to use his lower jaw as a spring. Fixing it high in his mouth, usually to prevent him from putting his tongue over it, will make spring almost if not actually impossible.

A thick single jointed snaffle is not only comfortable but helps communicate the single sided action of your hand. However some horses take advantage of your underlying gentleness in using such a mild bit. In which case, a bit able to make more of an impression on him must be resorted to for the sake of ease and safety. You have to find a bit that enables you to explain your hand aids safely and try a milder one as his understanding and readiness to respond improve.

The double bit (bridoon and curb) gives the rider more powerful instruments with which to control his horse. The need for the rider's hands to be sensitive enough not to disturb his horse with this bridle may be the reason for its obligatory use in high level tests but this contradicts everyone's desire for gentler treatment of our horses as well as common sense because the bit should logically become milder as training progresses.

However, this biting combination is seemingly well liked by most horses, possibly because of the mobility of the bulk. Of course, it is possible that horses seem

to go well in a double bridle because the weight of it causes them to reach into collection more easily.

There is another very good reason you should not tighten the noseband to conceal the effect of your hand aid. Horses communicate their goodwill, understanding, submission and/or friendliness by what is called 'licking and chewing'. They can often be seen to do this while being ridden. It would be wrong to suppress this instinctive and desirable expression.

HIERARCHY

Some horsemen who have spent a long time studying the behaviour of horses maintain that the dominant horse will cause the submissive horse to move his front feet at will. Usually it takes seconds for two horses to work out the pecking order. Where two horses are of similar hierarchical standing, a longer confrontation period is necessary to determine who is dominant.

As your aids aim to push your horse out of their way, the subject of hierarchy between you must arise, often repeatedly especially if you are familiar with each other.

This very rarely is the case where a horse is behind the bit because the focus then of his relationship with his rider is in discerning whether his hand wants more or less contact, no contact, to bend him, to straighten him, to restrain him or to pull him in a direction and how much his seat and leg add (possibly contradictory) information, in which case, he moves his feet off the ground as an after-effect. This obscures the issue of hierarchy.

Hope springs eternal. You must expect your horse to test every day whether you can remember how to make his feet move over there. A highly intelligent, agile and compliant horse will yield immediately he senses you remember and know what you mean with your aids. These are rare souls indeed. If the way you handle your horse does not convince him immediately that you belong higher in the pecking order, you face a confrontation. The only sure way to convince is to slowly but surely demonstrate to him that you eventually always reach your goal even if you have to get there the safe and long way round.

The aim is for you to dominate in a respectful manner until your horse perceives that the posture you wish him to adopt for carrying you harmonizes essentially with the posture he adopts naturally when showing off and this can only ennoble him. If you do not sense that as a result of his training your horse becomes happier, brighter, more intelligent, confident and trustworthy, something will be amiss with the way you necessarily impose your will upon him.

DEALING WITH DISOBEDIENCE

There are very few horses whose temperaments and physiques are so good that training them does not face the rider with disobediences. Most horses are more intelligent than we give them credit for. With this intelligence comes the ability to negotiate, avoid and evade. When your horse understands that your influence actually causes him to work more than he is comfortable with at the time, he is likely to resort to basic strategies to minimize your impact. You need to know how to deal with these. Obviously, you are the only person capable of deciding on the appropriate way to control and educate your horse and you should use the following suggestions as you see fit.

Basically, your horse will either try to go faster or slower in order to counter the effect of your aids. The use of strong bits, sharp spurs and the stick is seldom conclusively helpful.

If he chooses to go fast because he can better roll along on his forehand, then consistently deflect his hindquarters onto another track so he is forced to move markedly on two tracks. Not only does this slow him down but it is the initial response your aids require from him in order to work on his way of going. Repeat this indefinitely until he learns to spring off the ground rather than roll over it, in which case he will no longer be speeding his way out of working.

If he chooses to go slowly, raise your hand to bend him upwards until he responds by springing up and forward and repeat this indefinitely until he concludes it is less of an effort for him to swing forward and offer you a working pace.

If he chooses to stop and plants his feet into the ground and refuses to move, work your hand slowly away from your seat out and up until he is forced to move his feet to keep his balance. Repeat this cycle as many times as necessary until he concludes that it is less of an effort for him to offer a working pace than resist your aids. To optimize your own resources, shorten the rein sufficiently so that you do not have to raise and distance your hand too far before you disturb his resistance. Also, make sure you steadily keep moving your hand to prevent him from settling into a fixed bracing position. You will hit upon an embryonic sweet spot when you manage to cause him to move.

If he chooses to step backwards, appear to accept this as a satisfactory alternative to going forwards. Choose the bend that tactically serves your purposes and deflect his hind feet away from the fence and corners to avoid stopping. With a little practice, you should be able to become accurate enough to keep going backwards indefinitely until he decides to step forward of his own accord. In my experience, it takes rarely more than one whole training session of going backwards for a very stubborn horse to learn that this strategy costs him more effort than it is worth, especially as you seem unperturbed by it. This becomes evident by how much quicker he is at deciding to step forward the next time he tries it. Eventually he will abandon this tactic.

I am not convinced that it is always advisable to pat your horse or praise him when he chooses to co-operate after having been disobedient but it definitely is when he is helpful in the first place

Riding a horse is a potentially dangerous activity at the best of times. It becomes even more so when your horse decides to use strategies that render you passive.

It is very easy for him to notice if he does something a few times, possibly by coincidence, which causes you to instantly stop acting with your aids. After all, you educate him in this way. However, this process can work both ways and if you are not careful and prepared to act bravely and decisively, you run the risk of him educating you! If this happens your horse will soon become a nightmare to ride.

Spooking as a tactic to render you passive is very effective and you should learn to spot this because it invariably starts to happen whenever you ask him to work harder. You can choose to ignore it and remain active until he perceives that he offers more energy for you to transform into good work than he had intended.

However, if your horse persists you could adopt another tactic provided you are agile enough to see it through. This involves pretending to be triggered into a fit-like state each time he spooks and continue this fit until he tries to calm you down by becoming passive and sensible himself. Your 'fit' needs to involve untidy and erratic motions from your body, arms and legs that do not hurt him but are in sharp contrast to your usual behaviour. Nevertheless, the erratic behaviour should not prevent you from judiciously taking control of his hindquarters and forehand by acting with your hand outwards and upwards as necessary. While all this is happening, make a characteristic loud sound of panic. Your fit must stop the moment you sense him try to calm you down when you should resume riding him as if nothing had ever happened. No patting or attempt to reward or reassure him should spoil the experience for him of having a rider who behaves in a most peculiar way under certain circumstances. It will not take him long to work out what triggers your fits. Provided you begin to make the appropriate sound when he next shows signs of wanting to spook, you should be able to observe him actively manipulating your behaviour back towards sanity. Obviously, this tactic should not be used on an inexperienced and genuinely fearful horse.

Rearing as a tactic to render you passive usually is a reaction to the bit being placed across your horse's path or at least being perceived as such by him. The method explained in this book specifically avoids this and should quickly be found to reduce significantly the incidence of this dangerous disobedience until it becomes a thing of the past. Nevertheless, you should try to take the initiative when you sense he is about to rear by deflecting his hind feet repeatedly to prevent them finding the ground he needs to go up.

However, you should not over-react when and if he raises his front feet off the ground when turning around his haunches as this stops as soon as he works out how to swing his back over in the process of turning. Indeed you should be pleased to observe that he is learning to lift his forehand.

Bucking as a tactic to render you passive is an energetic version of not going forward and can be dealt with by forcefully raising the hand and pushing his back down with your seat in rhythm until he springs forward instead. Effectively, you will have prevented him from finding with his front feet the firm ground he needs to buck.

If a horse resorts to a rodeo in order to prevent you from schooling him, you will need to assume basic control first before you can attempt to refine your aids into signals again. That is if you managed to stay on. You need to be extremely agile and convinced such a horse is worth training because the risks to your health are obviously great.

REGULARITY, CADENCE AND BRIDLE LAMENESS

A good way to assess the progress you are making in the training of your horse is by reference to the regularity and cadence of his paces. The regularity refers to the correct sequence of footfalls for each pace. The cadence refers to the slowing of the paces through time spent rising away from the ground and coming down again i.e. through amplitude of stride.

Good cadence comes from two factors. Physical aptitude is one factor largely addressed by breeding. Confidence is the other. By that I mean the knowledge the horse has of what is required of him and that he can perform it successfully. Training can affect both factors to good or bad effect.

Your horse will be able to show dependable regularity of pace only at the beginning and end of his training because in between there are bound to be disturbances.

If you do not interfere with his way of wheeling you along (this is at the beginning) he will have regular paces, especially if purposely bred for dressage. This is a heavy responsibility to shoulder as a rider because the results will speak for themselves when he is trained. Will the regularity still be intact and will his cadence be unaffected or even improved? The purity of the walk especially demonstrates good training.

However, if his paces are regular but make you think of a sewing machine at the beginning of your time together, then only good training will be able to account for any improvement in his cadence. In this case the improvement necessarily means both you and your horse have learned to cope with gravity better.

Incidentally, focusing the training strongly on maintaining regularity of paces and natural cadence can be misleading as this could result in never disturbing your horse enough to teach him to lift his forehead to carry you.

Do not be surprised if during his training, your horse sometimes displays uneven strides in walk and trot otherwise referred to as bridle lameness. Of course bridle lameness happens in canter as well but it is not so obvious. This will be due to one of his front legs working in response to your aids but he is dropping back onto his forehead during what should have been the effort of his other front leg.

The solution is for you to ensure your hand also springs him forward because you are already successfully deflecting him (or vice versa). Achieve this consistently and he will find that swinging forward into a level pace is the most comfortable option for him.

The good thing about bridle lameness is that it shows you are, at least, partly effective and you need only complete the process. It is possible that your horse never displays any uneven strides during his training in which case either you are an exceptional rider or your horse has never learned to carry you.

TRANSITIONS

Transitions from one pace to another, within the same pace and into and out of halt can be divided into two clear categories: transitions up and transitions down.

It is easy to see progress in his training if you can first deflect then spring then push your horse's mouth during a transition up. This same progression must be evident during transitions down if you are to maintain and improve his way of going otherwise your horse will fall onto his forehead every time.

Your horse must come to learn a simple code that signals your request for each transition. This signal needs to come from your legs only because if he is in front of your three aids, your leg aid is the closest to his hind feet and thus the least likely to disturb his concentration on staying in front of your hand. We have looked at the signals in the chapter *Your leg*.

The best time to ask for a transition is when he is stretching his poll away from you after he has come over in his back. Nurturing that stretch away through each transition is your goal as without this you will not be able to develop consistent collection and straightness.

How to handle just the walk to halt transition is all you need me to explain, as in conjunction with the information in previous chapters you will have a comprehensive view of what needs to happen in all transitions.

Ride your horse in walk going large with a bend to the outside. When you wish to stop, continuously squeeze both legs, but not the heels, at the girth and use your voice to help explain your intention to halt. Your horse will instinctively seek a restraint in your hand. Avoid giving this as much as feasible within the circumstances. It is better to continue guiding him over there with your hand and seat and wait for the halt to happen from the steady squeeze of your legs. Repeat this a few times until he is familiar with this simple language.

For continued progress, you work his feet and body into the halt from behind forwards and below upwards by handling him into the way of going until he can surge forward into a halt. He must end up stepping uphill and square into a halt on a single track as a side effect of how you handle him. Under no circumstances should you teach him to square his feet up after he has halted as this is motivated by cosmetic considerations.

All transitions down (and up) must eventually follow the same progress pattern until you can push his mouth into each and every transition.

Once you have established a better way of going in any pace, the next difficulty to address is to maintain the improved way of going through the transitions up and finally through the transitions down from that pace. When his training allows you to become more subtle with the timing of your aids, you will notice that it is better to ask for a transition down with your legs first and immediately ask your horse to complete the transition by surging forward into it with your hand. For transitions up

it is better to ask for a surge forward with your hand first and then signal with your leg(s). When your hand is able to consistently push, this distinction all but disappears.

The flying change of leg from one canter to the other is a transition up. It is more natural to teach your horse to perform a flying change before you teach him to perform the counter canter. Most horses change quite happily while at play in the paddock and if you treat this transition as perfectly mundane it is likely that he will hardly notice it. The point is not to make a point of it. Some horses are so agile that they perform a clean change from the first mere suggestion whilst others need to learn to co-ordinate and acquire the strength before they can reliably perform one.

There are various tactical approaches to preparing the horse for the flying change. However, it is advisable to wait until you are able to obtain the way of going from your horse with either bend and he comes over in his back fairly easily. You will then need to work out which preparation works best for your horse.

Generally, avoid facing a horse with a request for a flying change until after he knows how to perform a reasonable turn on the haunches where you are able to deflect his landing foot into the movement. By following a strategically placed turn on the haunches with a strategically planned change of direction (but not bend) during which the aid (this is your leg only) for the new canter is applied, a change of leg usually happens more easily. His natural agility and intelligence will influence how clean this change is. The less he possesses of these qualities the more developed his way of going will need to be before a clean change becomes reliable. Your horse will then be bent to the same side as his leading leg.

The next degree of difficulty is to ask your horse to perform a change of leg from a canter with a bend to the leading leg onto the other canter, without changing the bend. Usually this flows easily if you ask your horse for a half-pass from the centre line to the outside track and then facing him with the need to change before the corner.

When these two different changes are familiar, it is time to ask for two changes, one at the beginning of a long side and one at the end. Once your horse is at ease with the need to change when you ask for one, you can progress to asking for changes after a regular number of strides, normally referred to as 'tempi' changes.

Whether these progress from keeping one bend throughout, to changing from an outside bend and finally to changing from an inside bend, is not important to describe here as you will be guided by your horse's individual strengths and weaknesses at the time. Ultimately, as you are aiming to push his mouth through each of these transitions, you will be doing so always from a bend to the leading leg, which will necessarily result in the straight changes you wish to see develop.

THE MANOEUVRES

For the sake of illustrating how simple your horse's syllabus is, consider that he will basically only ever have to work on three exercises and three manoeuvres. That I imply there is a difference between an exercise and a manoeuvre is only because it is a convenient way of categorising and explaining. The exercise helps you train your horse because your horse's bend is away from where he steps while performing it and this helps you establish the way of going. The manoeuvre tests your training because while performing it your horse is bent to look where he is going. This tends to pitch his two natural instincts (to lean in and pull) against your active hand until the way of going can be re-established. As manoeuvres are the most efficient way of altering your horse's course they supersede exercises as the means to do so.

The exercises are the circle with an outside bend, the leg-yield and the turn on the haunches. The manoeuvres are the circle with an inside bend, the half-pass and the pirouette. Turns on the shoulders tend to drop your horse onto his forehand. For this reason they are so rarely indicated, if ever, that I do not propose to examine them here.

In order not to compromise straightness and thus, your horse's freedom of movement during the manoeuvres, you will need to have considered the subject of what is the desirable amount of bend for each. Basically, your horse needs to be as straight as enables you to maintain your ability to push his mouth during the manoeuvre. If you over-bend him, you will weaken, if not break, the bow, lose the way of going and make it impossible for you to push his mouth. However, as he becomes more agile, he will bend himself more because it makes the manoeuvre easier for him. Therefore, you must only ensure that he is at least relatively straight in position right or left, focus on his readiness to still reciprocate your contact and leave him to work out how to become more comfortable by bending.

The circle

The circle with a bend to the inside is in many ways more difficult than the three exercises because it appears so simple. You are unlikely to ever realise how easily it drops your horse onto his forehand until after you can push him with your hand consistently some of the way round it. The technical implications of the tangent become evident at this stage. In terms of the way of going, your horse must learn to effectively step the long way round the circle if he is not to lean into the turn. Bearing in mind the principle examined in the chapter *From behind forward*, his inside hind foot must reach forward and under him first for direction to be initiated correctly and his outside front foot must reach outwards subsequently to complete the direction element of each stride.

The half-pass

Visualise your horse in a leg-yield parallel to the centre line and the direction he is stepping towards on two separate tracks. In a half-pass his body position remains the same but he steps in the opposite direction on two separate tracks. Therefore, as far as you are concerned, the only aid you change is your lower leg. From an active inside lower leg folded at the knee to act higher and further behind the girth, you only

need to switch this activity to your outside lower leg to go from a leg-yield to a half-pass.

As his shoulders are likely to be narrower than his hips, in the leg-yield to the left his left hip 'leads' because his right shoulder and right hip are on a parallel line with the centre line and his nose 'lags' behind. Conversely, in the half-pass to the right his nose 'leads', his right shoulder and right hip are on a line parallel with the centre line and his left hip 'lags' behind.

You might be perplexed at first to see how the logic of the way of going can be maintained by your aids once you ask for a half-pass. If you envisage a half-pass towards the left for example, your hand and seat aids, active on the left, must still deflect and spring your horse slightly towards the right and forward before your right leg aid (behind the girth) influences him to then reach across towards the left with each one of his feet. Put differently, he must learn to step the long way round this manoeuvre in order to swing forward into it. If this does not happen, your horse will merely fall onto his forehand on stepping sideways. This explains why many half-passes are performed in a seemingly different pace to the one displayed when going large before and after. Of course no difference is displayed if the horse was on his forehand anyway before the half-pass!

Therefore, the way of going will be maintained in the half-pass only when you are eventually able to push him with your hand.

Your yardsticks therefore to indicate that your horse had performed a good half-pass would not be by the cross-over but by how consistent the way of going remained, how parallel his inside shoulder and hip remained to the track and whether he had done so within the distance set. The crossover of his legs should not be a guide for improving the half-pass as this is a cosmetic consideration. In any event, if his chest remains close to the ground, he will crossover more than if he carries it high.

In the process of familiarizing your horse with the half-pass, it is inevitable that you will have recourse to the quarters-in positioning of his body. Provided that you do not lose sight of the fact that your horse must step in front of the tangent and your hand must move over to the other side of it to transform this into a half-pass, all is well.

The pirouette

This is also a turn around the haunches but the horse is bent towards the direction of the turn.

When he is familiar with the turn on the haunches you can switch your lower leg aid to suggest to him to turn the other way around his hindquarters instead, to perform a pirouette. Just as with the switch from leg-yield to half-pass, the simplicity and clarity of the single aid change (the leg at the girth) makes it easier for your horse to understand. If in canter, your horse will obviously need to perform a flying change first.

When you come to teach him the pirouette you will find that your hand cannot effectively act across his spine because this encourages him to step outwards with his outside hind foot. Being positioned at the girth not behind the girth, your leg is able to signal only, not provide a block against escape of his quarters, as this would cause you to restrict and lose spring. Therefore you are compelled to act with your hand nearly immediately in a springing manner when teaching him to pirouette.

During the pirouette turn, your hand and your seat must ensure each one of his feet steps forward and slightly away from his bend before reaching across in the direction he is looking towards to maintain the way of going, just as for the half-pass and circle with an inside bend. The main problem you are likely to experience is that your horse will dive into the pirouette once he realizes what you want. You will be able to school him successfully and progressively if you keep the pirouette as large as needed to establish and maintain your ability to push his mouth while he turns. Eventually, he will step under with his hind feet, reach across with his front feet, lift his chest, arch his neck, use his head as counter balance and bend as much as needed to perform the turn while focusing on the only thing that is important to you: reciprocating your contact.

The turn on the haunches and pirouette can eventually be performed in all three paces. When in trot, your horse will naturally have to alter the cadence and manner of thrusting away from the ground. If you emphasize the resulting slower cadence with your seat, this will provide you with a means of preparing him for the passage and, when the turn is small, piaffe.

THE SHOULDER-IN

The shoulder-in is also an exercise because he is bent away from the direction he steps into on two tracks but it does not help you establish the way of going. Instead, it becomes a means of gymnastically developing your horse's agility and the scope of his paces.

In order to provide continuity for your horse, you progress to shoulder-in from the leg-yield but only when he has become aware of the pushing quality you wish to convey and maintain with your hand.

For the shoulder-in, your horse needs to bend his spine more laterally so that his outside shoulder can lead the movement rather than his outside hip. Obviously this must happen without him falling onto his outside shoulder which means that his inside hind foot must still be the 'first' of his four feet to step into each stride to initiate the way of going. Familiarity with exercising on two tracks will lead him to learn how to bend his spine laterally more to make it more comfortable for him to continue carrying you.

THE REIN-BACK

The rein-back is also a manoeuvre to mention and because of the simplicity of the language you have developed so far with your horse, you are wiser to leave this until it is actually necessary to teach it. The language you use is still simple. This is when you put the bit frankly across your horse's path and apply pressure backwards until he learns to step back on the lightest of indications. To help him recognise this manoeuvre, swing both lower legs up behind the girth to lie passively against his flanks. Eventually he will rein-back mostly from this signal and a mere suggestion from both your hands.

If it were not for the obvious advantage derived from being able to manoeuvre your horse fully, so few steps of the rein back are required on any one occasion that not too much time needs to be spent developing it. Needless to say it is the return to forward motion which will test your riding skills and his co-ordination as you have to quickly re-establish the way of going from whichever must become his inside hind foot all the way forwards through his body again. Your horse will find it all the more easy to carry you through this manoeuvre the better he carries you going forward.

ROUTINE

One of the most useful training tools is routine. If your horse is habitually taken through the same sequence of exercises, manoeuvres and transitions he will show his willingness to perform the next by diving into it through anticipation. While the diving is not the desired result, the willingness to perform represents a sizeable portion of the energy required for his work. By then gradually establishing the way of going through all the elements of the routine, you will eventually be able to transform the diving into carrying you consistently and maintain the push on your horse's mouth throughout. In which case, he will be prepared for any exercise, manoeuvre or transition when you need it because of his familiarity with how to organize his body.

For each training session you will be limited by his stamina and this may not extend much beyond fifty minutes. During this time you may have to focus on certain aspects of an exercise, manoeuvre, transition, pace or the way of going as you see fit but if all goes well you could find yourself eventually going through the whole of the routine in one session by doing each element no more than twice, if needed. Such a session then becomes a thorough warm-up routine for a test.

Basically, the aim for each session is to work in walk, trot and canter in that order. You start with an outside bend to work on going large and the exercises then change the rein but not the bend to work on the manoeuvres. Intersperse the work with transitions as you see fit. Allow for a period of rest with a free walk on a long rein then pick up the same pace but starting with the other outside bend and work to mirror what you achieved on the other bend. Because of his asymmetry the work on one bend will take less time than the other. To promote symmetry, you may choose to start each session on the other outside bend to the one you started with on the previous day.

For example, you start the session in walk on the right rein with a left bend then change the rein but not the bend. Rest. Pick up the right bend on the left rein then change the rein but not the bend. Rest. Pick up the left bend on the right rein in walk and then trot to work on both reins, rest and repeat on the other bend as you did in walk. Rest. Pick up the left bend on the right rein in walk and after a transition or two, work in canter right. Change the rein but not the bend and change the canter lead (flying or not) to work in canter left with the left bend. Rest. Pick up the right bend on the left rein from walk, etc. to mirror the work in both canters with a right bend.

The next day start the same routine but with walk on the left rein with a right bend etc.

Introduce each exercise and manoeuvre as soon as possible. Say the words 'circle', 'half-pass' and 'pirouette' before each exercise and manoeuvre to educate him to recognize a limited vocabulary. There is no need for him to know that there is a difference between a leg-yield and a half-pass or between a turn on the haunches and a pirouette. Your leg aid gives him the only relevant information. However, introduce the words 'shoulder-in' when you start to work on these. Similarly, voice the words 'walk', 'trot', 'canter' and 'halt' before each transition.

The exercises fade out of the routine when they are no longer required to help establish the way of going to be gradually replaced by the manoeuvres and shoulder-in.

It is advisable to always start on an outside bend because it is all too easy to revert unknowingly to a pulling relationship with your horse otherwise.

Because the canter can be performed on either leading leg and either bent to the leading leg or away from it, there is scope for a varied routine in this pace. Starting on a bend away, the first exercise to practise is the circle. Next is the leg-yield from the long side towards the centre line turning at the end into the direction of the leading leg to maintain the bend away and repeating indefinitely from the beginning of the next long side.

When he is familiar with the leg-yield and still on bend away, come on a twenty-metre circle in the middle and ask for a single three hundred and sixty degree turn on the haunches on the centre line. You do not need to ask for more than three in total on the same day as you want him to know that this part of the routine is not prolonged and stressful. It is not the size of the turn that is important as this reduces imperceptibly through familiarity and daily improvement of the way of going.

Come down the next centre line to change the rein and ask him to change his leading leg through walk, trot or canter. He will now be bent to his leading leg.

The circle with an inside bend can be worked on next.

As his way of going depends on your ability to shallow leg-yield him, you will need to teach him to leg-yield away from his leading leg. Practise from the next centre line or three-quarter line to the long side repeatedly. Because you could confuse him into a flying change by folding your inside leg up to indicate to him to step sideways, you will have to obtain this leg-yield entirely with your hand and seat. However, voicing the words 'half-pass' will help him understand the need for motion on two tracks. As your hand is the dominant aid in the leg-yield anyway, this is surprisingly simple. It should then be easier for you to go large and shallow leg-yield him into a better and better way of going.

You can then practise the half-pass from the long side to the centre line repeatedly. If he does it well there is no need to keep doing another one as improvement comes from refining daily the way of going and ultimately being able to push him with your hand.

When he is familiar with the half-pass, you can introduce the pirouette on a twenty-metre circle in the middle on crossing the centre line just as you did with the turn on the haunches.

There is also the added requirement of being able to work your horse in counter canter. Introduce this by going large in the school on an outside bend and ask for a canter on a lead to the outside and guide him onto a circle in the middle. If you progressively and on a daily basis ask him to reduce the circle you will be able to eventually perform as small a circle as needed.

This simple routine prepares your horse for most of the work he is likely to be required to perform. In theory, you could take him through it in all three paces while he is still on his forehand and by gradually improving his way of going transform his work to satisfy requirements at the highest level. In practice each horse's strengths and weaknesses lead you to focus on certain aspects of his work at different times to reach your goal.

Routine can also be built into test riding for competition. From one week or two before a competition, warm up each day by going large in all three paces from outside to inside bend without exercises, manoeuvres or transitions. Then when he is warmed up voice the word 'test' and come down the centre line to start each test in the competition order with a suitable rest in between. Before each movement or transition, voice the relevant word: circle, half-pass, pirouette, etc. You should aim to repeat movements only as much as to give him an idea of the pattern to follow. Over the week or fortnight, the daily performance will improve as a side effect of establishing the new routine. When you are at the show, he will take comfort from recognising his routine from the moment you voice the word 'test' on the way down the centre line. Eventually, you will not need to use your voice at all.

THE PACES

In order to remain as brief as possible I shall not describe the correct sequence of each pace as this information is readily available in more general reference material.

If the way you ride is consistent for all three paces, then the same qualities will emerge in all three and transitions from one to the other will flow. If not, you may find your horse develops one pace well and another deteriorates or all three paces can suffer and transitions will reveal the gap between the way you ride one pace and another

By training him to carry you with his hindquarters, forehand and back equally, your horse will become excitingly comfortable to ride in all three paces. I use the word 'exciting' because the development of his surge is just that and 'comfortable' because this inevitably happens as he comes over in his back and swings forward. The quality of his strides is the most, if not the only, reliable yardstick for training him when you have no one to help you from the ground. The measure on the yardstick is constantly upgraded when you experience a more powerful and more comfortable stride as a result of applying your aids, even if coincidentally. Until he finally lightly reciprocates your contact towards the horizon, you can safely assume he can feel even better still.

In working to develop his paces you should remember that your horse can feel you 'back off' with your aids. This must be avoided as a matter of training principle. If you are working him in walk, for example, and you can sense him about to jog, you might be tempted to lighten your aids in order to remain in walk. You could argue this was justifiable in a crucial test, only. At home however, your horse must not feel you shy away from ensuring he swings forward because he might jog. You must ignore the jogging and continue your search for the sweet spot until he walks again and learns all the co-ordination required from him to maintain the walk from down on his forehand to carrying you towards the horizon by swinging forward.

The walk

Usually, the walk is a source of concern. So much so that you will often read or hear that it is better to avoid working a horse in walk because it is so easy to ruin it. In any event, so little walk is usually required in a test that it ends up being relegated to working on it later. As a result, hardly anyone acquires the experience necessary to develop a good walk.

The reason for this is simple. Faced with a bit placed across his path that either contradicts forward motion or apologizes for being there, your horse will use the ground under his feet to negotiate with the bit first and leave walking to happen as an afterthought. With at least three feet on the ground at any one time and travelling at slow speed your horse can easily dispense with the need to maintain the correct sequence.

However, the moment you handle the bit so that you can eventually push his mouth, his walk immediately regains a natural sequence. The more practice you put in

the better. In fact, the walk is the best pace to work in to develop your horse's musculature without jarring his joints because there is no time of suspension. For this reason, be happy to spend as much as half an hour, if not more, working him in walk during the daily routine.

The time of suspension in trot and canter can help your horse work out how to lift his chest to carry you. In walk, however, he has to learn to use muscle power only to lift you consistently. This is highly beneficial to both those paces.

The trot

The trot demonstrates clearly the alternating work of each pair of legs, front and back, between engagement (thrust) and deflection (reaching into a direction).

It also demonstrates easily the diagonal relationship between fore and hind leg mentioned in the chapter *From behind forward*. While your horse is on his forehand, he will tend to land with his front foot fractionally before he does with his corresponding diagonal hind foot. Naturally, his tendency is to land with his diagonal pair of feet at the same moment. When he is schooled his tendency is to land with his hind foot fractionally before he does with the corresponding diagonal front foot

Because of these two clear relationships, it is the simplest pace for the rider to work on constructively, it would seem because it is difficult to affect its regularity.

The canter

Before we can examine the canter I need to define his limbs in this pace so that my explanations can be as succinct as possible. If your horse strikes up a canter right, his right foreleg reaches the furthest forward during each stride and for obvious reasons this is commonly referred to as the leading leg. His left hind leg lands first after each time of suspension and for ease of reference I shall refer to it as the landing leg. His left front leg and right hind leg work together as a diagonal pair during each stride. For this reason I shall refer to them as the diagonal fore leg and the diagonal hind leg or the diagonal legs.

In the canter, the work with a bend away from the leading leg teaches your horse how to deflect the landing leg first, engage the diagonal legs together then deflect the leading leg. The work with a bend to the leading leg completes the gymnastics to teach him how to engage the landing leg first, deflect the diagonal legs and optimise the thrust away from the ground (engagement) with the leading leg. Working your horse from behind forward on either bend on either leg develops his suppleness and agility in canter thoroughly.

Extensions

The length of over-track is not a reliable measure of extension because it varies according to each horse's conformation and because it depends on whether his hind and forelimbs work equally or not. A horse can easily learn to extend and over-track considerably without learning to also carry you. You must be prepared to temporarily sacrifice over-track for working on developing amplitude of stride. When

he then learns to exert even more energy into an amplified stride, he will regain his ability to cover the ground. Shy away from cosmetically affecting his extensions because you would need to place him behind the bit to do so.

CONCLUSION

If you think carefully what it is your horse has to do with his body if he is to interpret your hand aid as a continuous push, this eventually produces a clear picture of the posture he must adopt and of the training his mind requires. This is going to take him a while. Assuming you believed it were possible to push his mouth through the bridle, it would take you a while to work out how to achieve this. Hopefully, the preceding pages will save you a lot of time.

When your horse is finally trained, the mere pressure you put on one rein will effectively give him most of the information he needs about where to carry you. You might worry this training objective would turn him into a nervous athlete alert to the starting gun. In practice this is not the case because the work required of him mentally and physically is demanding and he will have learned on the way that it is better for him not to waste his energy. You should then find that he listens carefully to the quality of your hand signals possibly just in case you had forgotten how this works. The lazier option for him is to revert to a position behind the bit.

You should quickly be able to sense the manner in which he co-operates with you, or not. This tends to be characteristic of him throughout his training. I believe you will find that this method of educating him leads you to discover his very soul.