

Riding a Better Trot!

Regardless of your discipline, riding a better trot means more than just receiving higher test scores. While improving your horse's trot certainly prepares the horse for better movement and therefore performance, the quality of your horse's trot also has a direct relationship to his overall training and athletic potential. Plus, riders can make the greatest change in the trot, as opposed to the walk and the canter. So, here are a few things you can do to improve your horse's trot.

What is a "better" trot?

Why is it that some horses look "pretty" and effortless when they trot, and others look like they are struggling along? This is because the horse with the "pretty" trot is expressing several things the other horse is not, some of which are **suppleness**, (increased flexions and extensions of the joints), **forwardness** (energy and power), and **self-carriage** (balance and lightness). To help your horse improve his trot, start with these exercises, and do them in the order I list them.

Suppleness

First let's focus on suppleness. I want you to think about riding the 'center' of the horse, and for right now, concentrate on the part of the horse just in front of your seat, the horse's shoulders, and the base of his neck.

The exercise: Walk a circle to the left. Your horse should be in a left bend and you should see his left eye and soft neck muscles at the base of his neck. Now slowly *counter bend* him so he is looking slightly to the *right*, but keep your horse walking on this left circle through the entire exercise. Repeat this bend-counter bend exercise until you feel you can easily move his shoulders toward the inside, and then back out on the circle. When you feel comfortable enough, do this same exercise in the trot, try serpentines and figures 8's with the counter bend, and try it on a straight line!

Tips & Specifics: Your horse will probably need support from you for the counter bend (going left but bent right), particularly your outside (right) seat and leg, and inside (left) rein. Don't turn his head to much to the outside. Allow him to come on to the bit, but it is very important not to allow him to 'fall' sideways. Your goal here is not only suppleness, but connection through your horse's back and down on

to the rein. Are you able to step his inside front leg toward the inside of the circle while your horse stays connected to the inside rein? This exercise is about suppleness, connection, and your ability to move the horse's shoulders. It also encourages him to use his back and step more through and on to the bit. And, it helps improve your horse's self-carriage, and therefore, his trot.

Forwardness

There are many, *many* exercises to encourage and train forwardness. In fact, there are very few things we do with our horses where forwardness is not a key element of the movement. For this next exercise, I want you to think of riding "more horse in front of your seat", and of course, make sure you ride from back to front.

This exercise for forwardness is added onto the first one. When you feel comfortable with your ability to move your horse's shoulders both in and out on the circle at the trot, leave the circle and go immediately across the diagonal and lengthen (or extend for more advanced horses) the stride. Do not begin the lengthened stride from a counter bend position. Ride your horse straight, change rein, then do the exercise in the opposite direction.

self-carriage

fluidity

And who doesn't want to ride a horse with a pretty
trot?