

## **Dr. Beverly Gordon**

### **Sidelines Magazine- Q & A**

Periodically "The Horse in Motion" will dedicate an article to specific questions or concerns from our readers. Please send questions to [thehorseinmotion@aol.com](mailto:thehorseinmotion@aol.com) and write 'Sidelines' in the subject box.

## **Beginner/Intermediate**

### **Q. What is a half-halt, and how do you perform it?**

#### **Explaining the Half-halt**

Before you can perform a successful, skillfully ridden half-halt (something riders at all levels of training strive to accomplish) you need to get a clear picture of what it is. Simply put a half-halt is primarily just that - a half of a halt; you will ask for the halt, but not all the way. However, there is a big difference between a half-halt and actual halt. When performing a complete halt, the end goal will result in complete termination of the forward energy and engagement so the horse will ultimately stop moving. In a half-halt, you need to maintain the energy and engagement to help the horse *re-balance*. \*(Not to be *too* confusing, correct application of the aids for the complete halt actually involves using half-halts.)

There are many reasons and benefits why we include half-halts throughout the schooling session, and at all levels of training. Performing a correctly executed half-halt accomplishes the following:

- lightens the forehand
- shifts the horse's center of gravity backward
- helps the horse use his back and become "round"
- relaxes the horse's mind and body
- centers the rider
- half-halts aid in collection, engagement, self carriage, and balance

Obviously, you can see why there is so much emphasis on understanding and perfecting one's ability to execute an effective half-halt. It's easy to see how the quality of your performance is directly related to the quality of your half-halts.

#### **The Correct Aids for Performing a Half-halt**

Since the primary mechanism of creating self carriage for the horse comes from the rider's ability to influence the rearward displacement of the center of gravity, half-halting will always include engagement of the horse's hind quarters. This is because we want the horse to carry more weight on his hind quarters so that he may be able to lighten his forehand.

Application by the rider of a well-anchored seat and supporting legs, along with restricting rein aids allows the horse to re-establish back to front connection. The exact aids used will depend greatly upon the specific needs of the horse at

the moment the half-halt is performed. However, here are the basic aids used for executing a successful half-halt.

- 1- Sit tall, with your neck, shoulders and arms relaxed. Think - "everything from the waist up stretches UP, everything from the waist down extends DOWN"
- 2- Use your back, seat and legs to support the horse. Press the horse forward into the hands, remembering to keep the horse's energy active
- 3- Restrict the forward motion by closing your fingers. This will encourage the horse to re-balance by bringing his hind end under, rounding his back, and lightening his forehead.
- 4- When the horse responds, soften your aids. The goal of the half-halt is to re-balance the horse and prepare him for the next movement, whether it is change of direction, transition to a different gait, increasing collection, or even halting completely.

The better you learn and perfect your ability to execute a successful half-halt, the better your riding. It's that simple.

## **Intermediate/Advanced**

### **What is the most effective position of the seat bones when performing lateral movements?**

Lateral work will only be successful if the rider applies the appropriate aids while 1) in the proper balance, and 2) in the proper position.

1) **Proper balance** in lateral work requires the rider to move *with* the horse in the lateral direction of movement. This is necessary so the rider will not interfere with the ability of the horse to laterally displace his weight sideways. While the rider needs to stay straight, anchored, and not lean in either direction, he must allow his body to travel in the direction of movement (so as to not impede the horse). Your intent should be to laterally shift your *entire* body, without compromising your position. This will enable you to move *with* the horse, and not be left behind. It is a common fault for the rider to raise his inside seat bone and lean his shoulders toward the inside. This has the effect of both shortening the rider's muscles on the inside and decreases the effect of the inside seat bone. For example, when leg yielding the horse off the left leg toward the right, the rider should sit slightly heavier on the inside seat bone (left) so as not to oppose the movement created by the left driving leg. With half-pass to the right, it would again be the inside seat bone (but this time the right) which would be weighted slightly heavier as the rider sits into the motion of the horse.

2) **Proper position**, as in half-pass, where the horse is positioned with a slight bend in the direction of movement, the inside seat bone acts as an anchor to bend the horse, while the inside leg helps encourage forward motion; however, they must not interfere with or block the horse's desire to move *into* that *same*

direction. It is sometimes helpful to think of stepping the inside leg sideways down a curb *without* leaning. Because there is an even and continuous lateral bend along the entire length of the horse's spine, the outside musculature of the horse will elongate and the inside musculature will contract slightly. The associated longitudinal spinal flexion (bend) will result in a slight lowering of the horse's ribs on the inside, the cumulative effect of the action of the spinal segments and associated musculature. Therefore, the rider's inside seat bone will drop slightly with the lowering of the horse's ribs, and will be displaced forward because the rider's outside leg and seat bone remain back. This position is effective because the rider's inside leg and seat bone can influence the bend of the horse, while the rider's outside leg and seat bone can act as an aid to properly position the haunches and not interfere with the slight lateral displacement of the horse's ribs.

Until next time,

Dr. Bev Gordon