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Trot Transitions

All good trot transitions (that is, all good transitions in general) can be divided into 3 main components. They are, 1) the preparation, 2) the actual change of gait, and 3) the follow-through. Unfortunately, it is common to see downward transitions, for example, occurring as a result of the rider just removing the driving aids. A horse going from a trot to a walk because he has lost impulsion as a result of a lack of the rider's influence is evidence that both the horse and the rider are poorly trained. Because support for the transition comes directly from the riders aids, it is imperative that the rider develop an independent seat, steady effective driving aids, and soft feeling hands. All integral to performing good transitions. In this article, I will give you information to help you develop the skill and "feel" necessary to perform fundamentally good transitions.

Preparation

Before attempting any transition, your horse must be prepared to do it properly. For example, if the horse is trotting with his weight is on his forehead, his back down, and leaning on the bit he does not have the potential to perform a good transition, regardless of how you may ask for it. It is very similar to you running top speed down a hill and my anticipating that you will stop with grace and balance the instant I ask. The quality of the transition is directly related to the horse's balance the

at the moment you ask for the transition; therefore, it is imperative that you balance the horse in preparation for the change of gait. Here is what you can do to help prepare your horse for the transition. 1) Center yourself (see last month's article). This makes your aids more effective to the horse. 2) Feel as though your legs are gently surrounding and hugging your horse. 3) Open the front of your body and sit "taller" in the saddle. Imagine the horse's back lifting your seat and ride the horse as if you are going uphill. For upward walk-trot transitions, try to create enough energy in the walk so that the horse feels as if he wants to go into the trot before you ask for it. This will allow you to use more subtle aids when you actually ask for the transition. For downward trot-walk transitions, feel that you are asking the horse to wait for your aids while still staying active behind. The key to a good preparation is to feel as though the horse is "in front of the seat and leg" and "into the hand" and any change in gait will not alter his balance (or yours).

The Transition - Change of Gait

During a recent training session, a talented rider/trainer said to me, "I think I need to pay more attention to what happens *during* the transition'. Yes, yes, and yes! The wisdom of her statement unfortunately eludes many riders at all levels and in all disciplines. Schooling transitions correctly mandates that the rider focuses on continuing active communication with the horse during those few seconds it takes for the horse to actually change gait. Here is what you can do to maintain active communication during the transition. 1) Again, make sure you are centered. 2) Keep your shoulders down and elbows quiet at your side and try to keep your upper body and your hands as still as possible. 3) Ride the horse forward, up, into the bridle and feel as if you are lifting the horse up through your body. For downward transitions: slow the motion of your seat, and concentrate on keeping the horse active behind while staying "on your seat" * (*You should practice allowing your right and left*

seat bones to alternately drop with the saddle as you RELAX the muscles around your hips, as was discussed in last month's article, "The Perfect Sitting Trot"). For upward transitions, create more energy and impulsion and quietly release some of this energy through your fingers. Here you will be concerned about having the horse prepared to correctly execute the next movement in good self carriage, whether it is an active walk or a collected canter.

Follow Through

The main goal of the follow through is to have the horse remain in self carriage *after* he changes to the new gait, and adequately prepared for the next movement. The most common mistake riders make in the follow through is that they drop the contact, and forget to keep the horse moving forward and into the bridle. Another common mistake is to lean forward while pulling on the reins, which also shuts down the horse's forward motion and allows the horse's energy to move rearward behind the seat. Poor follow through allows the horse to lose impulsion, drop his back, and become heavy on the forehand; everything you tried to prevent by doing a good preparation. Think of the follow through as the preparation for the next movement so the horse can *stay* in self carriage and get the most out of his athletic training.

Additional Notes on Transitions

*Working transitions on circles helps the horse stay active behind and make better use of his back.

*The horse must maintain consistent energy before, during, and after the transition.

*Always be conscious of using the lightest aids necessary to perform the transition, as this lessens the likelihood that the horse will develop resistances and tension.

*Slightly soften your aids as your horse yields to them to encourage relaxation, but do not lose connection or impulsion.

*Keep the hindquarters active and keep a regular rhythm throughout the transition.

Any worthwhile training program must include attention to diligent work on transitions. A fluid moving horse, into and out of transitions, in self carriage and good balance is the cornerstone of a well trained horse and rider.

Until next time,

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