

Accepting the Rein

Q My horse won't keep the left bend and doesn't accept the right rein. When I ask for bend with my left rein and release, she moves her neck back to its previous position. How should I handle this? Would a counter-bend exercise on a circle be an appropriate exercise?

Tory Larson, Ontario

LISA PIERSON

A First, I'd like to re-phrase your question to come from what I feel is a more helpful perspective: "My horse is hard to bend left. How can I improve his general straightness, suppleness and balance?"

Begin by having your veterinarian make sure that your horse's problems are not caused by body soreness or unsoundness or tooth or mouth pain. If your horse is healthy, the root of your riding problem is probably her natural crookedness. Most horses are stiff—or strong—on the left side and hollow—or weak—on the right side. When watching a horse on the longe line or at liberty, you'll usually see that he carries the shoulders to one side of the hindquarters. The rider feels this in her hand as an uneven contact—the horse feels heavy on one rein and won't accept the other. In her legs, it feels like the horse is difficult to bend.

In general, the horse must come off the forehand so that she does not need to lean on one shoulder more than the other. In your case, it sounds like your horse's shoulders are to the right and the hindquarters are to the left, which makes her lean on your left rein and her left shoulder. To feel that your horse is more even in the contact, you have to have the long-term goal of straightening her. This is done by suppling and strengthening her. This is what dressage is all about. Even at the highest riding levels, every horse's crookedness is being managed every stride, every movement by the rider. This is something that is never finished.

To go deeper into the issue, the underlying weakness is the uneven carrying power of the hind legs. When your horse is strong enough to hold herself in balance—or self-carriage—you will be able to release the left rein and have her maintain the left flexion and bend. So, as a basic principle, every exercise you use must have as your goal the even loading and pushing power of the two hind legs.

A counter-bend exercise is difficult. The difficulty lies in keeping the horse on the circle line while also keeping her on three tracks. Instead, I recommend you start by riding shoulder-in on the quarterline or inside track. The shoulder-in engages the hindquarters by requiring the horse to step under her body with both hind legs. Whichever flexion you pick brings the shoulders in front of the haunches, collecting and elevating the shoulder. In a correct shoulder-in, you ideally should be able to give either rein as a test of self-carriage. Doing the exercise away from the wall prevents your horse from using the wall as support. Shoulder-in first appears at Second Level and trains the horse in collection and self-carriage.

I'll describe shoulder-in as I would ride or teach it: Starting on the quarterline, ride a 10-meter circle at the beginning of the long side, establishing flexion and bend. As you finish the circle, maintain the bend through the circle through the horse's body by keeping your inside leg at the girth and your outside leg behind the girth to keep her hindquarters from drifting out. Your seat keeps your horse's

haunches straight on the track. Turn her shoulders by turning your shoulders, keeping her withers between your hands, which remain level on either side. Her inside hind foot should step onto the same line as her outside front foot.

Work on being able to ride this exercise in both directions away from the arena wall. Make it a regular part of your training program. Riding shoulder-in in both directions helps the overall balance of your horse. Concentrating too much on one side doesn't address the whole picture, because the problem with balance is a deficiency in both sides, for example, strong/weak, supple/stiff, longitudinal balance/lateral balance. Just doing it more in one direction will not cure a horse's crookedness.

A ground person or a mirror is useful in helping you determine if you're riding this exercise correctly on three tracks. Frequent short repetitions are more helpful than doing one exercise for an extended time.

Other helpful exercises that will improve your horse's overall engagement include transitions between or within gaits (while maintaining the shoulder-in position), counter-canter and haunches-in on the quarterline. Don't expect immediate results from any exercise. Dressage is a long-term commitment to improve the strength and evenness of your partner.

Are Hanoverians a True Breed?

Q Someone told me that Hanoverians and warmbloods in general are not considered a true breed. If this is true, can you explain why? Also, are Hanoverians still the most popular warmblood in the world?

Nancy Goodman, Florida

HUGH BELLIS-JONES

A The Hanoverian is considered a true breed because it has evolved for almost 300 years and was the foundation stock for the state stud in Celle, Hannover, which was founded in 1735. Throughout the decades, the Hanoverian breed has developed its own type and genetics. Because of the bloodlines with other breeds—in former times principally the Mecklenburger and more recently with Holstein and Trakehner—there are strong similarities between the different warmblood breeds but the Hanoverian has always been able to stand on its own identity.

After World War II, the Hanoverian breed was the quickest to develop into the modern sport-horse type. As such, it became a foundation breed for many of the studbooks in Europe. Today, it is one of five breeds worldwide considered foundation breeds for the modern sport horse. The others are Holsteiner, Trakehner, Selle Français and English Thoroughbred. The Hanoverian became foundation stock for many of the European studbooks. For example, in 1922, the Westphalian breeding region decided to use only Hanoverian breeding stock to build its studbook. The Oldenburg used to be a pure heavy carriage horse until the introduction of Hanoverian blood. The change came about in a predictable pattern: Oldenburgs were crossed with Thoroughbreds and the resulting F1 Oldenburgs (an F1 foal is a horse that has a warmblood sire and a Thoroughbred dam) were then crossed principally with Hanoverians and to a lesser extent Trakehners and Selle Français, to build an Oldenburg sport-horse type. Hannover also had a huge influence on the breeding programs of the Danish and Belgium Warmblood studbooks.

Hugh Bellis-Jones

has been the executive director of the American Hanoverian Society since 1995. A naturalized U.S. citizen, he is a graduate of the University of Newcastle (England) and obtained his postgraduate degree from the University of Kentucky. Apart from a three-year period as a professional biologist, he has spent his entire career in the horse industry. He and his wife run a small warmblood and hunter pony breeding operation in Paris, Kentucky (hanoverian.org).



Kenneth L. Marcella, DVM,

graduated from Cornell University's veterinary college and served as an FEI veterinary judge for the endurance competition at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. He is board certified in veterinary thermography by the American Academy of Thermography and the author of two books on horse rehabilitation and performance issues. He practices in Canton, Georgia, at Chattahoochee Equine.



Lisa Pierson

is a U.S. Dressage Federation (USDF) Certified Trainer through Fourth Level. A USDF bronze and silver medalist, she has won several regional championships as well as the Michigan Combined Training Association's Professional of the Year award. She gives clinics throughout New York and Connecticut and is based at C.B. Walker Stables in Brewster, New York (lisapiersondressage.com).



*Have a question about dressage? E-mail it to DressageToday@AimMedia.com or send to Dressage Today, 656 Quince Orchard Rd., Suite 600, Gaithersburg, MD 20878—Ask the Experts is compiled by **Reina Abelshausen**.*

The Hanoverian is a breed that is recognized by the German government and by the World Breeding Federation for Sport Horses (WBFSH). Other than Germany, there are four countries in the world that administer their own Hanoverian studbooks: the United States, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. At present, there are 14 other countries (including Canada) where Hanoverians are registered. However, their registration papers are issued in Germany. It is the philosophy of the German Hanoverian Verband and its various daughter societies that the Hanoverian should be considered one breed with a global population and operate as such. All Hanoverian registries follow the same breeding rules and goals and share a common studbook. It follows that with this full reciprocity, Hanoverians foaled outside of Germany are recognized as being of the exact same breed as their German counterparts.

Like most other warmblood breed organizations, the Hanoverian registries, including the American Hanoverian Society (AHS), keep an open studbook. This means that although the Hanoverian Verband and the American Hanoverian Society enter primarily Hanoverian stallions and mares into their studbooks, they will accept horses from certain outside populations, principally quality Thoroughbreds and warmbloods with verifiable pedigrees. Because of the full reciprocity that the AHS has with the German Verband, it follows that we may inspect only mares and stallions in the United States that would also qualify for inspection by the Hanoverian Verband in Germany. Non-Hanoverian stallions that are accepted are considered to be "improvement sires." Two recent examples in America would be the Thoroughbred stallion Coconut Grove

xx (Thoroughbred) and the Trakehner stallion Windfall. Through this "pure breeding" philosophy, the Hanoverian breed is constantly able to improve upon the desired type.

To stay true to its origins, Hanoverian studbooks worldwide also implement the "Fifty Percent Blood Rule." Generally, Hanoverian foals have at least one Hanoverian registered parent. However, in rare cases two approved non-Hanoverian horses, for example, an approved Oldenburg stallion and an approved Trakehner mare, may produce a registered Hanoverian foal, provided at least one of the parents has at least 50 percent Hanoverian blood. With so many studbooks having based their development on Hanoverian bloodlines, this is not at all unusual.

The Hanoverian breed is certainly one of the most sought-after and successful warmblood breeds in the world.

Recovering from a Stifle Injury

Q My 6-year-old Clydesdale/Thoroughbred gelding suffered a minor stifle injury. The vet had me treat him with Equioxx for 14 days and give him several weeks of rest. He's sound now, and I'd like to bring him back into work. What is the best way to do this? Are there certain exercises I can do to help strengthen that area? What can I do to help prevent him from reinjuring his stifle?

Name withheld by request

KENNETH L. MARCELLA, DVM

A As always, the best way to design a rehabilitation program centers on an accurate diagnosis, and there is, perhaps, no area of the horse's body where this is as

important as the stifle. The equine stifle is a complex series of joints with an assortment of ligaments, menisci and capsular structures that can all be injured to varying degrees. Some injuries, like those in your horse, can be relatively minor and heal fairly rapidly. Other injuries involving cruciate ligaments and menisci (the shock-absorbing material in the stifle between the femur and the tibia) can be much more severe and potentially career threatening. These more severe injuries must be handled very carefully and rehab exercises done exactly with slow progression so that reinjury does not occur. Knowledge of the exact nature and severity of your horse's injury is critical to creating the best rehab program, and it is wise to seek the advice of the veterinarian that made the initial diagnosis and has been overseeing his treatment.

That being said, we can proceed with our discussion based on the fact that anti-inflammatory therapy and rest have returned your horse to soundness. This suggests that he had a possible strain or sprain of the joint capsule, a collateral ligament or other related soft-tissue injury without structural damage to any part of the stifle. Your horse has also been rested for a number of weeks so a rehabilitation program must address overall cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength, balance and flexibility. Because your horse is relatively young, he may not have reached his full growth yet (warmbloods and some draft breeds tend to take longer to fully mature). More stifle injuries are seen in young, growing horses since the architecture of this joint depends on the interaction of multiple long bones, large muscle groups and many soft-tissue structures. If your horse is still growing, simply reducing his work level and allowing him to progress more slowly might help prevent further stifle issues. (continued)

WHAT I WISH I'D KNOWN THEN

When Doing Our Best Means Doing Nothing

BY ELIZABETH McMULLEN



Cealy Tetley

We ride dressage because we love the sport and we want our horses to do well. Ambition and overriding, however, often get in our way, causing more trouble than good. Let me take the canter pirouette as an example. It's often when we try too hard to help our horse do a successful canter pirouette that we make our worst mistakes. In fact, we often make it impossible for the horse to be successful.

Visualize a canter pirouette: A roughly 1,200-pound horse has to carry his weight on one tiny hoof—the size of my hand when I open it wide—staying with his inside hind leg on a dinner-plate-size area for six to eight strides (for a 360-degree pirouette), turning, keeping his balance with the rider on top, and trying to maintain the rhythm of the canter as well as some inside bend. That's a pretty delicate balancing job for the horse.

Now visualize the rider trying to help the horse: leaning in or out, kicking with her legs, bending the horse, pulling on the reins—all with the best intentions, but most likely unbalancing the horse and effectively preventing him from doing the pirouette.

To be able to ride a properly balanced canter pirouette, “doing our best” means doing very little or nothing that might unbalance the horse. Our responsibility as riders is to put the horse in the correct position to be successful in the canter pirouette, then remain still, sit quietly during the pirouette, and leave the horse alone to do his job. It's not a coincidence that judges look at the quality of the canter before and after the pirouette as the canter pirouette only underlines the existence of proper balance and collection in the canter.

Most mistakes happening in canter pirouettes are rider errors. In some cases, the horse is not physically strong enough to do the movement. By that I mean he doesn't have sufficient muscles in his hindquarters to collect. He may have weak hocks or he's not educated sufficiently to be able to collect to the degree that is required to do canter pirouettes. If the horse is sound, however, is educated properly following the scale of training, is strong enough and has the ability to collect, if you don't try too hard to help him, the canter pirouette should work out well.

Elizabeth McMullen is a dressage judge—an FEI (Fédération Equestre Internationale) “O” and a U.S. Equestrian Federation and Equine Canada “S.” A successful FEI competitor, she has also held the following positions: director of equine studies at Canada's Humber College, chair of the National Dressage Committee, member of the Canadian Equestrian Team Advisory Committee, member of the FEI World Cup Committee, chair of Dressage Canada's Officials committee, North American representative to the FEI Dressage Committee and member of the board of Dressage Canada. She is based near Toronto, Canada.

Good balanced trimming and shoeing are also important when dealing with stifle injuries. It is important to have a critical eye to the possibility of a negative PIII (coffin bone) angle in the hind feet. If the hind foot has this type of negative angle, with more weight being carried on the heel rather than on the toe of the foot, then the horse may experience excessive strain on the back of the leg and flexor tendons when asked to place his foot forward under his body when working. This, in turn, may lead to stifle injuries as the horse tries to compensate. Consultation between your farrier and veterinarian should address any foot issues or imbalances prior to starting rehab.

A good walking program is the first step in stifle rehabilitation because it will let you evaluate consistent and even stride length, degree of "push," or drive, from each leg and overall balance. Gradually increasing workout time and distance is recorded and then can be decreased as each new movement or exercise is added. An increase in difficulty is associated with a decrease in duration and then a gradual build back up in exercise time as that phase of rehab is mastered. For example, if your horse has successfully been walking under saddle on the flat for periods of 45 minutes, it is time to add walking over ground poles, but the time for this exercise should be decreased to 25 to 30 minutes initially with gradual buildup back to 45 minutes or so. The pole spacing can then be altered to make the horse lengthen and compress stride as he progresses. Shallow serpentines can also be slowly added, which will make the horse utilize both the medial (inside) and lateral (outside) quadriceps muscles that help stabilize the stifle.

Spirals done at the trot (large circles at first and gradually tighter as you progress) will help strengthen the quadriceps muscles as well. Incline longing is also

an effective exercise to help keep stifles in good muscular condition. You will need a flat piece of ground that leads to a slight incline for this exercise. You stand at the break between the flat and the slope and longe your horse so that he is allowed to keep good balance on the flat area and then must drive himself up the slope and hold himself on the way down the other side. This exercise develops the hard-to-target inside and outside muscles of the thigh and upper leg. These muscles are important for strong stifle development and will help prevent injury when your horse is required to pivot, turn or push off using this area of his body. Once these muscles are developed and the associated ligaments and other soft-tissue structures are conditioned, you can progress to a number of dressage movements that will also help utilize the stifle. As you progress with your dressage training for this horse, it might be wise to remember to periodically add some cross-training exercises such as spirals and serpentines or long slow distance in deeper sand footing to keep the stifle muscles and ligaments in peak condition and to create some diversity in your training/conditioning routine.

Book Review

Cadence of Hooves: A Celebration of Horses

An anthology of literary poetry selected and edited by Suzan Jantz
487-page paperback; Yarroway Mountain Press; yarrowaymountainpress.com

Reviewed by Mary Daniels

Horses are themselves a kind of living four-legged poem. They carry us far, not only physically when we sit on their backs, but spiritually, mentally, emotionally and therapeutically. Their hoofbeats are the meter of their poetry.

This anthology contains the work of

more than 170 leading contemporary poets. Each of the poems is a flight into imagination atop or aside the horses that inspired these poets to express themselves with emotional, spiritual, cultural, sociological and anthropological import.

This approach makes this a unique source for horse lovers. It is the inaugural poetry anthology resulting from a 2006 publishing grant given to Suzan Jantz by California State University.

Jantz was in touch with her inner horse early in life and at age 12 she received from her parents a beautiful sorrel mare that consistently launched her from the saddle. "With a horse you know exactly where you stand," Jantz tells us in her introduction. "Show me your horse and I'll tell you who you are."

These prose poems tell powerful stories and several draw upon the discipline of dressage for imagery and symbolism, such as Laurie Clements Lambeth's "Dressage, or the Attempt at Training the Course of Illness" and Henry Taylor's "The Flying Change."

There were many I liked and will remember. Bios of the contributing poets in the back of the book tell of their connection with horses and are as intriguing as the poetry itself. Chad Woody says he has little to do with horses anymore. "That's why he's gone almost 30 years without getting bucked off."

Pulitzer Prize winner Maxine Kumin says, "Let them prosper, the dams and their sucklings. Let nothing inhibit their heedless growing. Let them raise up on sturdy pasterns and trot out in light summer rain onto the long lazy unfenced fields of heaven." Amen. 📖

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