

American Dressage Legends: Chuck Grant

Meet the man dubbed the “dean of American dressage riders”

E. G. Charles “Chuck” Grant (1914-1990) was the second person inducted into the Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame. Grant received the honor posthumously in 1997, in recognition of his contributions to Ameri-

horses bareback. After high school, at the age of nineteen, he signed up to pursue a college degree in maritime engineering.

That summer, in 1934, Grant discovered the 122nd Field Artillery and soon changed his course to join the National Guard unit, where he could ride horses every day. A fellow serviceman gave him James Fillis’s nineteenth-century training classic, *Breaking and Riding*; and Grant became interested in training horses, reading every book on the subject he could find.

US Army Colonels Isaac Leonard Kitts and Hiram Tuttle were two of Grant’s equestrian role models. He would watch them ride and emulate them as best he could, as he wasn’t allowed to approach senior officers to ask them questions.

After World War II, Grant went to work for a riding academy in Chicago, eventually purchasing his own equestrian training facility, Plush Horse Stables, also in Chicago. He befriended two of his boarders: Paul Stjernholm, a Dane who’d been a major in the US Cavalry; and Arthur Konyot, head of the famed European circus family. Both men helped further Grant’s equestrian education. Grant’s first wife, Emmy Temple, a rider from Ohio, soon joined the three men in their discussions, forming an informal dressage group. In 1947, Emmy Temple taught the first civilian dressage lessons in the Midwest at Plush Horse Stables. Later that same year, Grant judged the first dressage show in the Midwest, in Morton Grove, IL.

From 1969 to 1979, Grant led a dressage and *haute école* exhibition troupe called the Horse Capades, which featured some of his advanced students and also included a comedy routine or two.

In 1978, with second wife Carole Grant (herself a top rider and competitor, including two gold medals at the 1983 Pan American Games), Grant established Shine a Bit Farm in Brighton, MI. There he trained 17 horses to Grand Prix, including Shining Gold, Bit o Shine, Shine a Bit, Miss Prince, Prussian Dudley, and Tarnished Gold. Grant trained Appaloosas, Arabians, Saddlebreds, and Thoroughbreds and taught hundreds of students, including such well-known dressage riders as Dominique Barbier, Violet Hopkins, Mary Anne McPhail, and Nancy Polozker. Grant’s daughters, Mary-Ann Grant and Tonya Grant Barber, are also successful FEI-level trainers and competitors.

The largely self-taught Grant believed that one cannot teach a horse something he does not already know; instead, the key is to learn how to communicate and to ask correctly. Many who have read Grant’s books or who were fortunate enough to have studied or conversed with this modern-day master recall the key point of his teachings: “Ask frequently; expect little or nothing; reward generously.”

In addition to his books, Grant penned numerous articles on dressage. Read on for his essay on how to introduce flying changes, first published in the July 1981 issue of *Dressage & CT* magazine and excerpted from the second edition of his book *American Dressage*.

Approaching the Flying Changes of Lead

By Chuck Grant

In introducing the flying changes of lead to the horse there are a number of prerequisites. The horse must be able to work at all paces in the canter, that is collected, ordinary, and extended. He must be able to make circles without getting off balance and leaning on the rider’s hand. He must be

From *Dressage & CT*, July 1981. Reprinted by permission of Tonya Grant Barber and the Grant family.



CLASSICALLY CORRECT: Grant in an undated photo

can dressage as a trainer, an instructor, an author (*American Dressage*, *American Dressage II*, and *Haute École*), and an inspiration to many.

Growing up on a farm in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Grant spent many hours riding the farm

Podcast Alert



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FINISHED PRODUCT: *Olivia LaGoy-Weltz rides a right-to-left flying change aboard Rassing's Lonoir at the 2014 Succeed/USDF FEI-Level Trainers' Conference*

able to do simple changes of lead—including canter departs on each lead on the circle. The counter-canter on the straight line and circle must be correct and the half-pass at the canter balanced. When all of this is accomplished with the horse remaining straight, forward, and calm, you are ready to begin training the flying changes of lead.

I start the flying changes from the left lead to the right. Once this is done I then work on the changes from right to left lead. However, the changes can be taught starting from right to left. In either case, do not go ahead with the other direction until the horse accepts the aids for the initial changes—it will only take less time and be less confusing to the horse if you confirm one direction at a time. Also do not attempt sequel changes of lead until the changes, in both directions, are confirmed. Again, to rush ahead will only confuse and perhaps excite the horse—and this must be avoided, for the horse learns nothing when confused or excited.

It is important for you to understand the mechanics of the canter gait

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before starting the flying changes. The first beat of the canter on the left leg is when the horse strikes off on the right hind leg. He then lands on the right fore and left hind—which is the second beat of the canter. Then he rolls forward over the left fore leg, which is the third beat. The second beat of the canter is when you ask for the flying change of lead. Precisely as the right fore and left hind are on the ground, you are going to slide your left leg well back along his side. At the same time

you are going to flex the horse ever so slightly toward the new leading leg, in this case the right. As you slide your left leg back, your weight automatically goes slightly to the right—or think of the right hip going a little forward as your left hip goes back. You must be prompt in asking for the change of lead, for the horse has to make the change during the period of suspension, when all four feet are off the ground. This is not easy to do. If it were, more people would be able to teach their horses to

do the flying changes. You, the trainer, must give this a lot of thought, for the timing and degree of movement on your part are very important.

Now, for your first flying change of lead. Assuming you are cantering your horse along the left lead, the change will be from left to right. The whip, which is about 39" long, will be in your left hand. The whip is used only to reinforce the leg aid and will be used, if needed, right behind your left leg just as the leg has started its swing to the rear. I recommend you do the first change on the straight line from counter lead—in this case the left—to the true lead. Also the change should not be made in the corner but while on the straight line. Making the change in the corner seems to set the horse up for the change to be late behind. When the horse is on the second beat of the canter, when the right fore and left hind touch the ground, you will give the signal for the change.

The responses which may follow are variable. First, after applying the aids, the horse could respond with a good clean change of lead. If this occurs you must immediately reward and come to the walk, letting him bask in his (and your) accomplishment! Another response is if the horse changes leads first in front, later behind. This is called a late change of lead. On some horses it is difficult to feel the late changes. I recommend every rider teaching the flying changes of lead to have an experienced person on the ground to tell you what the horse did. If this is impossible, then the early morning or late afternoon shadows are helpful. The flying changes of lead are difficult to do without a groundsman, but it has been done. Remember, after the correction, be sure to reward your horse—and analyze what has happened.

If the change was late, quietly pick up the left lead and again ask for the flying change. Do this until you get a change that is not late—meaning, not necessarily a “perfect change”—but a change which demonstrates the horse is trying to please. Perhaps the change will then be behind first and

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later in front—for which I would reward. The horse that is late in front, I have found, straightens out on its own in time. Perhaps the horse will be “unclean”—or reaching not as far behind in the change as he does in front. I would reward him for this as he clearly is showing an effort to please.

Remember, you should not punish the horse when teaching the changes of lead; this must be a pleasant experience for him. Also, usually the mistakes made are due to the rider,

not the horse—or if you have a friend watching changes, remember friends can make mistakes also! If you are in doubt about the correctness of the change, it would be better to reward the horse. Again, it is better to question yourself than the horse. You make many more mistakes than he does!

A good time to ask for the first change of lead is at the end of the training session. After the change is completed, the best reward for the horse is to put him back in his stable. Perhaps

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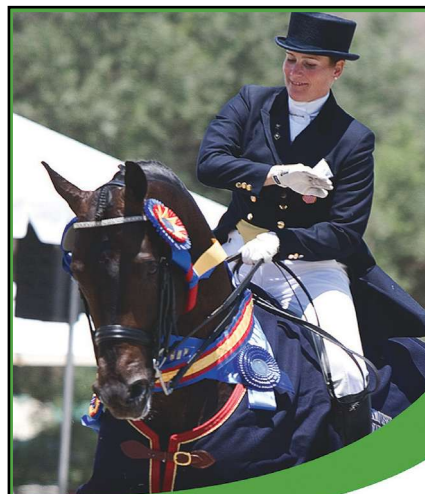
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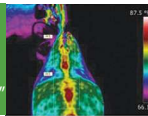


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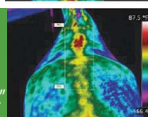


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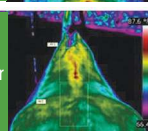
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the next day you may ask him for two changes. In any event, you will have to play this by ear, for the horse is your silent partner in this game of learning. He is the one that will tell you if he should be asked for another change of lead on any certain day, or if you should wait for a more opportune time when the horse is calm and relaxed. The horse cannot learn when he is not relaxed; you must wait for calmness to prevail.

Let's suppose you have asked for the change and get no response from the horse. In that case, just keep cantering along on the left lead and ask again. You may use the whip lightly behind your left leg to reinforce the leg aid. Ask often, expect little or *nothing*, and reward generously. Sooner or later you will get the change of lead. Bear in mind that you are asking the horse to do something he has not done before from a signal which perhaps you have never given before. You have, however, given this same cue or combination of aids for canter departs from the walk or trot—applying this while traveling about 8 mph is yet another situation—for the both of you!

There are many more responses the horse can give for the flying change of lead. Suppose the horse kicks out with the left hind leg when you asked for the change. You did not want this response, so you should not reward—but neither should you punish for this. At this time in training I would choose to ignore the kicking. Another response to the change is that he might go past the hand, he may go crooked, or he may

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buck up behind. Above all you must remain calm. All we can do is hope the horse remains calm. If he becomes apprehensive or excited we must remember that he learns nothing when in this state. We then must wait until the horse relaxes, and only then can we again ask for the flying change. Some horses continue to resist the flying change by using a number of defenses. You, the trainer, must remain persistent, yet never demanding, but continually asking for the flying changes. This may take days to do. One day the horse will make the change. When this occurs, be prompt with your reward.

You, the trainer, if you have never done flying changes before could practice applying the aids on any horse. Just canter along and ask for the change of lead using the same aids. This will develop your timing and agility in the use of the aids. Also, in the early stages of working on flying changes it is better not to ask for the change in the same place more than perhaps three times. Later you can try the change from true lead to counter—but not in the beginning on a circle or in the corners of the arena. The changes on a circle from the true to false are not done until the horse and rider are confirmed.

Do not set a limit on teaching the flying changes of lead, or any other training you are to do. Only the horse can tell you when it is time to go on to the next step in training. Once you have the single changes from left to right correct about 90 percent of the time, you are ready to begin teaching the right-to-left changes of lead. This must be done in the same organized manner in which you approached the left-to-right changes.

Remember, nothing is gained by hurrying through any portion of your training or neglecting small mistakes. In all training you must remember to ask often, expect nothing, and reward generously. ▲

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