

Chapter 3

RIDER'S AIDS

Note: For a complete discussion of rider's equitation, basic position, and anatomy, see USDF Teaching Manual.

Definition

The rider influences his horse by giving aids with his weight, legs, hands and seat bones.

In order to be ridden properly on the bit, the horse must accept the use of the aids. All of the aids must be effective and any resistance in the body will be reflected by either disobedience or a lack of throughness. Above all, the horse must be ridden forward and straight.

A horse is on the aids when the horse is "well-connected, on the bit, in front of the leg, and responsive." [*USDF Glossary of Judging Terms*]

When the forward driving aids are applied, the horse has to move forward into the contact. The horse should accept the forward driving aids without rushing.

"Bringing the horse onto the aids entails pushing it forwards from behind onto the contact, i.e. into the hand, so that both at the halt and in movement, a steady but soft, elastic connection is established between the rider's hand and the horse's mouth." [*Principles of Riding*, p 89]

The natural aids of the rider are the seat, legs, hands and voice – all aids that are natural parts of the rider's body.

The artificial aids are whips and spurs, which are used to reinforce the natural driving aids. "Spurs and whips are used to reinforce the forward driving aids. The artificial aids are only brought into action if the legs are not effective." [*British Horse Society Manual of Equitation*]

Rider's Coordination of the Aids

The coordination of the natural and artificial aids controls the horse's posture, the quality of the paces and his overall obedience.

The rider's feel and tact are shown by his ability to time and coordinate the various aids correctly and to apply them with the appropriate intensity. Only by correct coordination of the various leg, rein and weight aids can safe control of the horse be achieved. It is not the strength of a rider, but the tactful use of the aids which produces the desired response in the horse.

A rider has *feel* when he demonstrates the ability to coordinate the aids, at the right time, in the correct place, and with suitable intensity. Only a rider who sits relaxed, supple and balanced, constantly in harmony with the horse's movement, can have such feel. When relaxed, the rider is in full control of his own body and can apply the aids with correct intensity independent of the horse's movement. It cannot be overemphasized *that only a relaxed rider sitting correctly can apply the aids efficiently.*

Rider's Application of the Aids

"The intensity of the aids depends on the horse's sensitivity, its stage of training, and on what the rider is trying to achieve. The aids should always be applied gently to start with, and the intensity increased or decreased as required. If strong aids are necessary, the rider should always return to the lighter aids afterwards so as to preserve the horse's sensitivity and not make it increasingly 'dead' to the aids.

Insensitive aids spoil the horse, whereas frequent praise makes for a better working relationship between rider and horse.

As the training progresses, the aids will become progressively more subtle and unobtrusive, until finally the horse re-

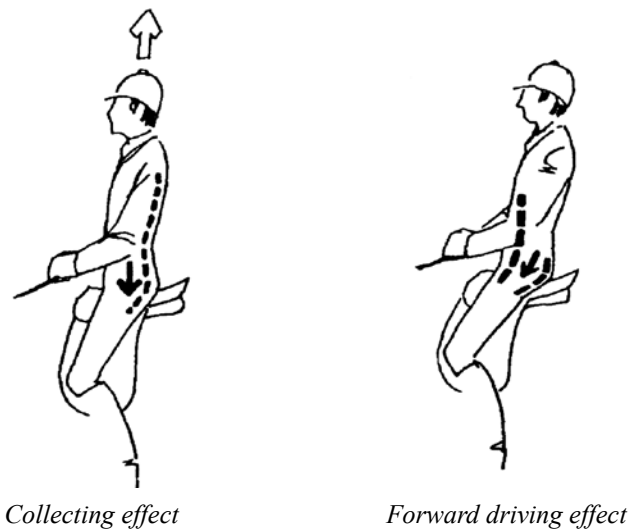
sponds to aids which are almost imperceptible to the onlooker.” [Principles of Riding, p 66]

Voice Aid

“Use of the voice is indispensable in the early training of the young horse. It should be used sparingly with older horses or they tend either to become dependent on it or to cease to respond to it. In dressage competitions, audible use of the voice is not permitted.” [Principles of Riding, p 79]

“A smooth and quiet tone will tend to calm him and will be accepted as a reward, whereas rough words will convey a threat or even a punishment. The click of the tongue or the sound of the riding whip may be used as a stimulation, as may also the crack or the sound of the lash of the lunge whip being dropped on the ground.” [The Complete Training of Horse and Rider pp 54-55]

Source: Principles of Riding 1987



Weight Aids

“The weight aids are essentially forward-driving aids, although they also back up the (ever more finely coordinated) leg and rein aids.

The rider can use his weight in the following ways:

- By increasing the weight on both seat bones
- By increasing the weight on one seat bone
- By easing the weight on the seat bones

The stiller and more supple the rider’s seat, the better the horse will respond to these aids.

The rider must be able to ensure that his own centre of gravity coincides (as close as possible) with that of the horse in any situation. He is then light and comfortable for the horse to carry. The difficulty lies in adjusting to the horse’s constantly changing balance, i.e. its dynamic centre of gravity.

A rider who is not sitting in balance, and cannot move with the horse, will disturb the horse’s rhythm and carriage and restrict its freedom of movement”. [Principles of Riding, p.66]

“Increasing the weight on both seat bones is used to increase the activity of the hind legs, e.g. in all halts and half-halts, and in all transitions. In conjunction with the forward-driving leg aids, this weight aid stimulates both hind feet to step further forward in the direction of the center of gravity and to push off more energetically.

Increasing the weight on both seat bones, or on one seat bone, is done with the upper body in a natural erect position

(though it helps for the rider's back to be moderately 'braced' so that he can accompany the horse's movements).

Increasing the weight on the seat bones entails bracing the back more strongly: this means that the rider, while contracting and relaxing the muscles to allow his seat to accompany the movement, momentarily exaggerates the phase where the abdominal and lower back muscles are tightened. This action is repeated if necessary for several steps or strides. The effect is to encourage the horse to step further under its body in the direction of the centre of gravity and to take more weight on its hind legs". [*Principles of Riding*, p.66]

"When using these weight aids it is absolutely essential for the rider to ensure that he is always in balance with the horse. Leaning back, stiffly tensing the seat muscles and drawing up the knee and thigh (with the lower leg sliding forwards) prevent this aid from being used effectively and are incorrect". [*Principles of Riding*, p.66]

"Increasing the weight on one seat bone is an important back-up to the rein and leg aids in all movements where the horse is flexed or bent, and in well-schooled horses is the most important aid. When using this weight aid the rider shifts his weight on to one seat bone. This will lower his hip and knee on that side.

To a well-schooled horse this weight aid is a signal to turn and thus bring its balance back in line with that of the rider. The increased pressure on the inside seat bone is caused by drawing the leg back slightly from the hip into the 'guarding' position. Pushing down too hard on the inside stirrup is to be avoided since it can cause the inside leg to straighten and the weight to slide to the wrong side". [*Principles of Riding*, p.68]

"The rider eases the weight on the seat bones when he needs to ease the weight on the horse's hindquarters or back when schooling on the flat, e.g. when riding young horses, when loosening the horse up and in the early stages of teaching the horse the rein-back.

The rider places a little more of his weight onto his thighs and stirrups. His seat remains in the saddle, while his upper body comes forward slightly in front of the vertical depending on how much weight is to be taken off the seat bones". [*Principles of Riding*, p.68]

Leg Aids

"The leg aids are used as a signal to the horse to start moving and as a means of keeping the movement going. Hence leg aids always have a driving or pushing action. They can be used in the following ways:

- Forward-driving leg aid
- Forwards-sideways pushing leg aid
- Regulating leg aid or 'guarding' leg

The forward-driving leg aid is applied just behind the girth so that the heel is vertically below the hip". [*Principles of Riding*, p.69]

"Briefly tightening the calf muscles emphasizes the signal to the horse to push off with its foot from the ground. This aid is used especially to coincide with the lifting of the hind foot on the same side.

With horses which do not respond to an aid of such short duration, the rider needs to make the horse more responsive by using stronger aids at first. On no account should his legs remain clamped to the horse's sides". [*Principles of Riding*, p.69]

"The forwards-sideways pushing leg aid causes the horse to step forwards and sideways with the hind leg on the side the aid is applied, or the hind leg and diagonally opposite foreleg, depending on the exercise. The rider's leg should be about 10cm further back than its normal position. It must never be drawn upwards. Like the forward driving leg, this aid is most effective when used just as the hind foot is being picked up.

The position of the regulating or 'guarding' leg is approximately the same as that of the forwards-sideways driving leg but it is used less actively than the latter. While one leg is giving forward or forwards-sideways pushing aids, the other must act in a regulating or 'guarding' capacity on the opposite side. Only if the aids work together in this way will the

action of sideways pushing leg achieve the desired effect.

The purpose of the regulating or 'guarding' leg is to limit the sideways movement of the hindquarters or to stop them evading sideways. Hence it keeps the hind feet following in the same track as the forefeet, so that the horse works equally onto the contact on both sides. The regulating leg is also partly responsible for the forward movement.

As a basic rule all the aids are applied with the leg quietly against the horse. Stronger aids should be used only on a short-term basis and in individual cases. They should then be used sharply, as a 'warning'. [*Principles of Riding*, p.70]

“The forward/sideways leg aid brings the horse’s inner hind leg better underneath the rider and closer to the center of gravity. In the moment the inner hind leg of the horse tracks properly, the inner side of the horse’s body will become hollow and the inside rein will become soft. At nearly the same time, the horse will step into the outside rein, which the rider feels as a good, steady contact in his hand. It is indeed a wonderful experience to be able to control the entire horse with just a single rein and the seat” [and inner leg]. “Every dressage horse must eventually reach this stage and the best way to achieve it is to work on the circle.” [Source: Karl Mikolka]