

RIDER'S REIN AIDS

The Four Rein Aids

“The **rein aids** must be used in accordance with the principles of correct training. The following points are therefore particularly important:

- Rein aids should only be given in conjunction with leg and weight aids
- Only if the horse is letting the aids through and working through its back can the action of the rein aids pass through the mouth, poll, neck and back and reach the hindquarters.

The rein aids can have the following actions:

- Yielding
- Asking
- Non-yielding
- Regulating or ‘guarding’
- Sideway-acting or ‘opening’ rein.

Yielding and asking rein aids must always be considered as a pair. Which comes first, the yielding or the asking, depends on the situation and the position and carriage of the horse. What is important is that the aids are finely tuned and sensitively given from the wrist. This is only possible if the hand is held correctly, with the knuckles vertical, and if the wrist is supple.

Yielding and asking rein aids are always used in conjunction with the appropriate weight and leg aids. They are used, for example:

- In all half-halts, and so in transitions from one gait to another or within a gait (increasing and decreasing the strides)
- In halts
- To improve the self-carriage and the horse’s contact with the bit
- When about to begin an exercise
- When flexing or bending the horse
- As necessary in the rein-back.

Depending on the intensity, the **asking rein aid** consists in either closing the fingers momentarily, or for a stronger effect, turning the hand inwards slightly from the wrist. The hand must never remain fixed in position. If the horse does not respond immediately, this aid must never be allowed to degenerate into ‘pulling on the reins’. Instead the hand should yield, and further asking/yielding aids should be given as required”. [*Principles of Riding*, pp. 73-74]

The **non-yielding rein aid** is used when the horse goes against or above the contact. Applied with the appropriate lightness and finesse, and used on a horse which ‘lets the aids through’ correctly, it can also be used instead of the asking rein.

To give this aid, the hands close tightly, without altering their position, until the horse yields to the bit and becomes light in the hand. However, the hands should not act in a backward direction or continue their action for too long. This aid must be used in conjunction with bracing the back and with forward-driving leg aids.

It is important that the hand becomes light again in its action as soon as the horse becomes light in the hand and yields through the poll. On turns and circular tracks this applies especially to the inside hand.

Whenever the horse is required to be bent or flexed, the regulating rein aids or guarding rein complements the action of the inside asking rein aid, the purpose of which is to obtain flexion.

To use a regulating rein aid, the rider yields with his outside rein just enough to allow the amount of flexion at the poll, or bend in the neck, which has been asked for by the inside rein. However, this rein aid also serves to prevent excessive bend in the neck and ‘falling out’ into the outside shoulder. If the horse does not respect this aid sufficiently, it may be necessary to increase its responsiveness by a brief ‘asking and giving’ action on this rein.

The sideways-acting rein aid or opening rein is used especially in turns, to indicate the direction to the horse. This aid is

especially useful on young horses and when teaching lateral movements”. [*Principles of Riding*, pp 74-75]

Only a horse which is absolutely obedient to the leg aids and therefore going into the bit will willingly obey the rein aids. The rein contact may not be achieved by working backwards with the hands, but must be created by the drive from the quarters which moves the horse’s body via a supple back forward into the bit. One has to be constantly reminded of the negative tendency of most riders to do too much with the reins and too little with legs and weight.

How to Hold the Snaffle Rein

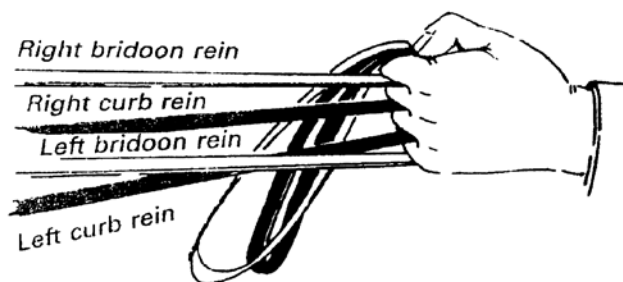
“When riding with a snaffle bridle, the reins should be of equal length and untwisted and should pass between the third finger and the little finger with the smooth side of the leather facing outwards. The ends of the reins should pass out of the hand over the second joint of the index finger and hang down, buckled together, inside the off (right) rein and on the off-side of the horse.

The fingers should be closed. The thumbs should be slightly bent and lightly pressed down on top of the rein where it passes over the index finger, to prevent it slipping. The hands should be held with the knuckles vertical and at such a height that the forearm, the hand and the horse’s mouth are approximately in a straight line. The distance between the hands depends on the thickness of the horse’s neck - the line from the elbow to the horse’s mouth also needs to be straight when seen from above.” [*Principles of Riding*, pp 70-71]

Incorrect hand positions include:

- Stiff wrists, which prevent the rider having an elastic contact with the horse’s mouth.
- Fingers not closed on the reins, with the third finger pulled forward, which allows the reins to become longer and longer and encourages the rider to bring his hands back towards his stomach.
- Hands facing downwards, so that the rider cannot give sensitive rein aids from his wrist. Instead, he will tend to use his whole arm or his body so that the action of the rein is wrong, especially when using an ‘asking’ rein aid.
- Crossing the rein over the horse’s neck is a serious fault because it makes the action of the bit in the horse’s mouth incorrect. As a result, the horse’s neck is constricted so that it tilts its head from the poll.” [*Principles of Riding*, pp 72-73]

Source: *Principles of Riding* 1987



Holding the reins with one hand

The Double Bridle

“During advanced dressage training, when the horse becomes gradually more ‘durchlassig’ (through), the double bridle will be used more frequently because it allows the rider to give even finer and more precise aids. Much of the work, however will be done in an ordinary snaffle bridle to make sure that no one-sided stiffness develops in the poll.” [*Advanced Techniques of Riding*, p 23]

“The most important prerequisite for riding with a double bridle is a correct balanced, supple seat which allows the rider to use his hands independently.

Before using a double bridle, the rider needs to learn to use the reins with more finesse. The rein aids are given in the

same way as when using a snaffle bridle, but the elasticity of the hands is even more important since the lever action of the bit increases the intensity of its action on the mouth. The rider needs to be constantly on his guard against unintentionally putting too much pressure on the curb reins". [*Principles of Riding*, p.76]

How to Hold the Four Reins of the Double Bridle

There are different ways of holding the reins when riding with a double bridle. Usually, the reins are held in both hands (i.e. two reins in each hand, 2:2), or and with the bridoon rein underneath the third finger, like the snaffle rein, and the curb rein between the middle and third fingers. Both reins then pass over the top of the index finger, where they are secured by the thumb, and the ends of the reins hang down on the off (right) side. In the salute, the rider takes the two right reins in his left hand. The ends of both sets of reins hang down underneath the right reins by the side of the horse's neck.

In another method of holding the reins in both hands, the bridoon rein is held underneath the little finger, with the curb rein between the little finger and the third finger. The action is similar to that of the previous method

In yet another method, the bridoon rein is held underneath the third finger, with the curb rein under the little finger. This method in particular should only be used by experienced riders, because when the hand is turned inwards the action of the curb rein predominates.

Holding three reins in one hand and one in the other (3:1), holding all the reins in one hand and the Fillis method (snaffle reins over the forefingers and curb reins under the little fingers) are only recommended for advanced riders and then in special cases. [*Principles of Riding*, pp 76-77]

Whichever method of holding the reins is adopted, it is essential that the bridoon and curb rein should be held and used independently of each other. Because the curb is a solid bit it is important to give with the outside curb rein during turns, so as not to hurt the horse by putting too much pressure on the outside bars. However, because the bridoon is a jointed bit, the outside bridoon rein can maintain its elastic contact.

Source: *Principles of Riding 1987*

