

Lateral thinking

Dressage trainer, Minette Rice Edwards explains how to maintain a balanced position when riding some basic lateral movements

Training tip...

Your body should accommodate the stillness of the hand, which must be light to the horse's mouth. Be loose in your arms and engage your back.



Our trainer

Minette Rice Edwards trains horses and riders

up to Grand Prix level for dressage and also teaches jumping, at Ham House Stables near Richmond. She uses her experience to help riders gain a clearer understanding of how to make optimum use of their bodies and the effect this has on the horse. "The more advanced this process becomes, the less effort is involved, and the greater the freedom of movement for both horse and rider," says Minette.

Our models

Donna rides Mafioso (below left) and Vicky rides Secretario (below right), both Lusitano geldings.



The **more balanced** the rider, the more **precise and effective** the aids will be; this allows the horse to **move freely**

The ease of movements such as leg-yield and shoulder-in will depend on the level of horse and rider. Often riders concentrate too much on the horse and as a result neglect their own position. The more balanced and supple the rider, the more balanced and supple the horse, and therefore the better his movement.

Here are three schooling exercises, as demonstrated by Vicki and Donna...

- Counter bend
- Leg-yield
- Shoulder-in

If you ride them correctly, your horse will be much improved.

Warming up the horse

- Ride around the outside track in rising trot and change the rein across the school. Ensure that you change your leg, seat and hand position when changing the bend and diagonal as you cross the centre line. Feel that your horse is soft and supple on both reins.
- Change the rein a few times in trot. Plan your turn and keep the horse forward, soft and supple. Feel if there's any difference between the two sides.
- Next, change the rein in sitting trot (see April 2010 *Horse&Rider*).
- Pick up canter. Note that the first canter of any schooling session is

usually the hardest, so take your time. With canter in particular, it's very important that you connect the outside hand and the outside seat bone, so keep a contact on the outside rein and engage your back. Free your hips and ankles, look up, think 'up' and breathe. Enjoy it!

- A couple of 20-metre circles on each rein in canter then go large around the school will suffice for warming up. To change the rein, ride across the diagonal in canter, trot for a few strides until he is balanced, then canter on the other rein.



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Warming up the rider

Before you start a schooling session your horse's back must be free. For this to happen you need to concentrate on yourself so that you are not stiff or crooked and don't hinder his movement. Here are a few exercises that will prepare you for riding more effectively.

- Take your feet out of the stirrups and allow your legs to hang down underneath you (pictured right).
- Swing your legs forward and back in a 'scissor' motion – ie, and right leg back from the hip, then vice versa.
- Engage your back and lift your knees, then release the leg down and back. This opens the hips.
- Swing one leg back and catch your foot with your hand – press your knee down for a few seconds to stretch through your thigh. Repeat with the other leg.
- Lift and drop your shoulders. Circle them forward, then back.
- Then you can put your feet back in your stirrups, and look up and forward. Take a note of how much better you feel at this point.



Training tip...

Offer your horse lots of breaks and allow him to stretch between exercises. Bending and lateral work can be hard work, so allow him time to recover.

You can limber up by doing a few simple exercises without stirrups

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Exercise 1 Counter bend

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Counter bend means riding your horse with the opposite bend to the direction you are going. So on the left rein you will counter bend him to the right, around your right leg, and vice versa. When ridden correctly it is useful for suppling your horse. Before you try it, make sure you are riding good and

accurate turns, circles and straight lines (see June 2010 *Horse&Rider*). Difficulties in counter bend are:

- Your horse may go crooked
- He may stiffen up through his body
- He may lose balance and speed up.

To ask your horse for counter bend on the left rein (pictured below left)...

- Close your right fingers and release those on your left hand. Do this simultaneously so you keep the connection with the new outside rein.
- Have enough bend that you can see your corner of your horse's eyeball. Be careful not to lean to the right.
- Ride counter bend on the long side, change the bend back before the corner and ride up the centre line to change the rein. Repeat to the right.
- In sitting trot ride in counter bend on the long sides, changing the bend back for the corners. Ride this on both reins and progress to holding counter bend through the corners.
- Keeping outside bend, change the rein across the diagonal, changing the bend as you cross X, so you change from counter bend to counter bend. Make the change of bend smooth, and avoid twisting your seat or having more pressure on one rein than the other. Ride this in walk before you trot.
- Ride counter bend on a 20-metre circle in walk, progressing to trot when you and your horse are ready.

Ride counter bend on the long sides...



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Build your skills

...then ride it on some 20-metre circles, too



In a nutshell

- When you change bend, keep an even contact in both reins
- Don't pull on the new inside rein or drop the new outside rein
- Keep change of leg, seat and hand aids smooth
- Don't let your horse's hindquarters swing out – keep him aligned on two tracks.
- In rising trot, change your diagonal when you change bend.

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Tougher stuff!

Exercise 2 Leg-yield

Contrary to popular opinion, leg-yield isn't just the stuff of the dressage arena! In fact, it can be very useful when you're out hacking – moving to the side of the road and opening and closing gates, for instance. Leg-yield teaches the horse to move off the rider's leg and it's the first lateral movement to teach a young horse.

Aids for leg-yield

- Your horse should move away from your inside leg and seat bone
- Your outside leg comes back a little from the knee to prevent the hindquarters swinging out
- Bring your inside shoulder and hip slightly back to help prevent the horse's hindquarters from trailing

Your hands remain together in the centre of your torso as you turn slightly to the inside of the horse's bend

- Always give aids in rhythm as the inside hind leg comes off the ground.

Riding leg-yield

- In walk, turn onto the three-quarter line of the school and ride straight, parallel to the outside track. Do not let your horse drift, and concentrate on forward movement.
- Staying parallel to the track, ask your horse to walk forward and over, away from your inside leg. Keep your inside hip back and control his hindquarters with your outside leg.

Training tip...

If your horse loses rhythm, he will lose balance and vice versa, so ride with an even rhythm and maintain it.



- Repeat the leg-yielding exercise a couple of times on each rein and then try the same in sitting trot. In trot, especially, remember to keep your outside rein so that your horse doesn't jack-knife into his outside shoulder.
- Once you're comfortable doing this in walk and trot, pick up canter. Ride a 20-metre circle first to establish good bend, then go large, turn onto the three-quarter line and leg-yield out to the track. Don't draw your inside leg

back or your horse may think you're asking him for a flying change. Repeat a few times on each rein.

Leg-yield variation

- On a circle, spiral in to a small circle and gradually leg-yield out to a larger circle. Imagine dropping a pebble into a pool – the ripples of water gradually go wider, but their shape remains the same. Keep the bend and the shape of your circle.



Ride a small circle then leg-yield out onto a bigger one



Shoulder-in

Aids for shoulder-in

Ensure you have correct bend with the horse accepting the outside rein. At the entry into the shoulder-in, turn your body and hands to the inside of the bend, bringing the horse's shoulders off the track so his inside hind leg is on the same line as the outside foreleg. Your outside leg holds the hindquarters on the track.

Do not twist your body or the horse's neck. Your inside leg connects with your outside hand. Use your inside leg in rhythm with the horse's inside leg. Do not draw the inside leg back as it will push the quarters out.

- You're looking for a bend behind the shoulders and engagement of the hindquarters. Your horse should move on three tracks. Begin by

collecting on a circle to establish correct bend.

- Don't ask for too much angle – three tracks, not four. Think of bringing the shoulders in off the track, not pushing the hindquarters out.

Change rein with a demi-pirouette

- Engage your back, move your outside hip and leg back and move both hands slightly to the inside to bring your horse's shoulders around his hindquarters. Do this in walk keeping the horse's hind legs active.

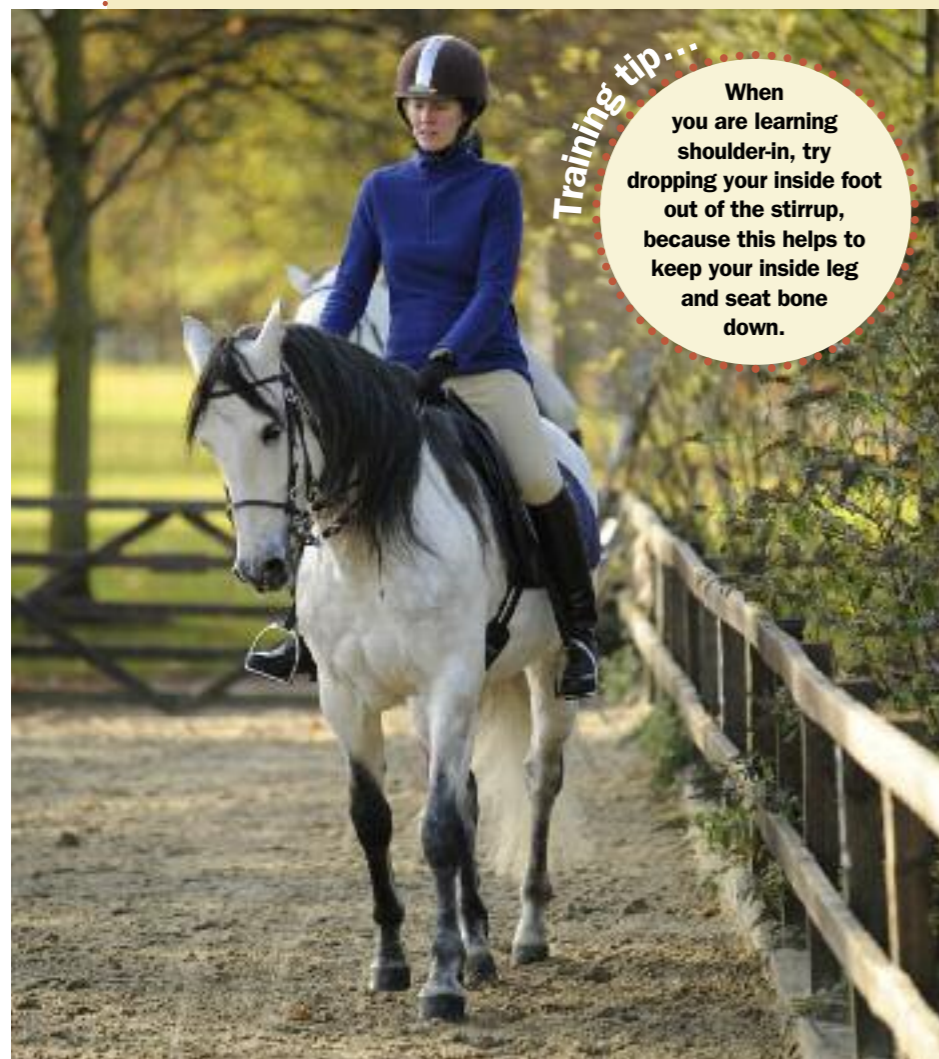
Combine the two

- Ride sitting trot on the left rein and leg-yield from the three-quarter line to the track and go large. Then ride shoulder-in down the next long side. Don't let your seat slip or twist to the outside or lift your shoulders. Stiffening will block your horse's movement – you need to stay out of his way to allow him to perform the movement correctly.



Training tip...

When you are learning shoulder-in, try dropping your inside foot out of the stirrup, because this helps to keep your inside leg and seat bone down.



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