

THE REIN BACK

The rein back is a collecting exercise and is executed following a halt. The horse steps backwards, moving his legs in diagonal pairs when it is correct. This movement can only be ridden in the walk.

Rein back is not a movement we teach to inexperienced horses. It should only be attempted once the horse responds correctly to driving and resisting aids, and understands how to move away from the rider's inside leg. Therefore it is a good idea to wait to teach this exercise until the second year of training.

The easiest way to teach rein back is from the ground without a rider. You will need a dressage whip and a place where the footing is level and firm. The best place would be in an arena on the track with the wall for support, or along a fence or other boundary.

Ask your horse to stand still. Stand in front of him with your head turned towards him. Stretch up (make yourself tall), take a **light** hold of the reins and point the whip towards the coronet of his foreleg. At the same time as you stretch up and ask the horse to go forward with your voice, resist him slightly with the reins while touching his coronet lightly with the whip. This should cause the horse to take a few steps backwards. However, if this does not happen you may **never** jerk on the reins! Instead, increase your voice aids and step toward the horse a little, while at the same time touching his coronet with the whip. Continue this until he understands.

As soon as the horse takes a few steps back, stop giving the aids and praise him. Continue working this way until it becomes easy and you can see that your horse understands and is no longer nervous.

The first time you try the rein back from the horse's back it is a good idea to have an assistant on foot with a dressage whip to help you. A good rein back starts with a good halt. The more correct the halt, the easier the rein back. Once the horse stands straight, quiet and relaxed he can be asked to rein back. It is often helpful to lighten your seat a little, rather than sitting deeply in the saddle, when working on rein back with a young horse.

EXECUTING THE REIN BACK

The horse is ridden from the hind end, forward into a resisting rein. The rider should move both lower legs back a little while gently driving the horse forward, squeezing the reins lightly and

continuing to drive until the horse begins to step back.

The aids for rein back are lateral, meaning that the left rein and leg act together, then the right leg and rein, and so on. Which side to start with depends on which diagonal pair of legs the horse moves first. You can look down at the horse's shoulder until you get a feel for it. When the horse moves his right shoulder (which means he is moving his right front leg and left hind leg) you should use your right leg and rein. When the horse moves his left shoulder, use your left leg and rein. Release the rein and lighten your leg pressure as soon as your horse responds. Most horses consistently start the rein back with the same diagonal pair. You will begin to know which pair your horse prefers to start with once you have practiced the movement a number of times.

You should sit straight over the horse applying a little more weight to the seat bone on the same side as the rein and leg aids you are using at the moment. The horse should step straight back while lifting his legs clearly and quietly in a steady rhythm. He should not drag his feet.

It is important to drive the horse forward to a lightly resisting rein. Never pull him back with your hands. If the rider pulls on the reins too much, the horse will go against the hand, causing him to drop his back and drag his feet. Encouraging the horse to think forward and to reach out to the bit while he steps back will help him to step back in a straight line.

Before starting the exercise, the rider should decide how many steps back he wants the horse to take. If, for example, the rider chooses to take 6 steps back, it is helpful to count *one, two, three, four, five*, and then stop giving the signal. The horse will tend to take one step more on his own before he goes forward. If the rider asks for six strides the horse will often take seven. Always think forward after the next to last stride. Normally there is no halt after the rein back; the horse should immediately go forward after the last step.

If the horse becomes crooked, the rider should move his leg back on the side in which the horse is stepping out and at the same time open the rein on that side. This rein action reinforces the rider's leg. It is a good idea to practice rein back on the track to help keep the horse straight.

Also, keep in mind that horses feel more comfortable executing a rein back in solid footing. It is not a good idea to ask for a rein back when the footing is deep and uneven.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The halt preceding the rein back should be as correct as possible.
- The nose should stay in front of the vertical.

- The horse should be driven forward from behind.
- Use lateral aids.
- Release after each stride.
- The horse should step back in a straight line.
- Count the strides.
- Do not school rein back in deep footing.
- The movement should look effortless.
- ***Never pull the horse backwards with the reins.***

MOST COMMON MISTAKES

- The horse goes against the hand.
- The rider uses too much rein aid.
- The horse moves his haunches out or in.
- The horse drops his back.
- The horse does not clearly move his legs in diagonal pairs.
- The horse drags his feet.
- The horse hurries or runs backwards.
- The horse steps wide with his hind legs.

Suppleness is a deciding factor for a correct rein back. If the horse goes against the hand in the rein back, it is because he is not supple enough. In order to perform a correct rein back, the horse must be relaxed and free of tension.

If it is difficult to get the horse to start the rein back it can help to make a few steps of a turn on the forehand and then immediately ask for the rein back. This makes the horse more attentive to the rider's legs.

Once again, remember to work on solid footing when teaching the horse to rein back.