

# TURN ON THE HAUNCHES

The turn on the haunches is one of our most important exercises. It is invaluable as an educational tool. A turn on the haunches is executed in walk on a very small circle with the forehand walking around the hindquarters (which are traveling on a much smaller circle).

The horse is bent around the rider's inside leg, moving in the direction of the bend. The horse moves his forehand by bringing the outside front leg in front of and past the inside front leg. The hind legs step forward a little and in under his body. Turn on the haunches is a collected movement - a movement that requires a certain degree of collection in order for the horse to be physically able to execute it correctly.

## THE PURPOSES OF TURN ON THE HAUNCHES

- To increase collection and carriage.
- To bring the horse under the aids.
- To create a need in the horse to reach forward and down.
- To develop the rider's feel for how the aids influence the horse.
- To help the horse learn half-halts.
- As a preparation for canter pirouettes.

## THE AIDS FOR TURN ON THE HAUNCHES

After making a half-halt to collect the horse and consequently shorten his stride, the rider moves his inside hip forward. The inside leg, with a lowered knee and heel, is placed directly behind the girth. This encourages the horse to move his inside hind leg further in under his body while at the same time bending his body around the rider's inside leg. This also signals to the horse to move out towards the outside rein. The rider asks the horse to bend in the direction of movement by turning his inside wrist slightly inward. The rider's outside leg is moved back from its normal position as needed to keep the hindquarters in place. The outside rein keeps a light contact to regulate the tempo and bend. If necessary it supports the rider's outside leg. The rider's weight is placed slightly in the direction of movement. His outside shoulder moves forward a little. The horse should follow the rider's weight and not be pushed around the turn by the rider's outside

leg. It is very important that the balance, the tempo of the walk, and the desire to go forward are maintained.

When a horse executes a turn on the haunches correctly, he feels upright and in balance the whole way. He makes the turn without tension and maintains a steady tempo. Each stride is the same. Keep in mind that it is the collection that should keep the horse almost on the spot, not the rider's hands. Don't move the horse around with your leg, but rather let his bend and your weight, placed in the direction of movement, bring him around.

## WHEN TO TEACH TURN ON THE HAUNCHES

Teaching the horse turn on the haunches starts early, each time we ask him to turn or make a circle. We use essentially the same signals for turns and circles as we do for a turn on the haunches. But before we ask the horse to do a real turn on the haunches, he must understand certain aids.

He must understand the driving, the resisting, and the weight aids. He must know about moving from the rider's inside leg into the outside rein, and be able to bend around the rider's inside leg. And he must be able to achieve a certain degree of collection. When he can do all of the above, he is ready to learn turn on the haunches.

It is helpful to use cones. Place them in a square, for example on a circle in the middle of the arena, inside the track. The idea is to ride around the cones, asking the horse to make each corner by doing a quarter turn on the haunches. Let him make these turns large enough to be able to do them successfully. Shorten the walk strides through the turn. Little by little, as the horse is able to do this, make the turns smaller. Don't expect the horse at this point to be able to maintain his balance during the turn on the haunches for more than a quarter turn.

You can also practice making turns in the corners of the arena, where the walls will help the horse understand how to do it. It is also perfectly fine to ask the horse to make turns on the haunches on a circle, but be careful not to allow the hind quarters to swing in or out during the turn. Forward is allowed but not sideways.

Avoid allowing the horse to take longer and longer steps as he goes through the turn, since this will invite him onto the forehand. Should this happen, ride straight out of the turn and help your horse find his equilibrium and become balanced again.

When the horse no longer has problems with the quarter turn on the haunches, an experienced

rider can school the turn half way around or a full 360° to give the horse a chance to practice. It takes time and many turns on the haunches before the horse knows how to make them correctly. If the horse has developed a habit of tensing in this movement, it will take time for him to learn to relax, so have patience. The trick is to ride both the horse and the movement at the same time and not to disturb him as he moves around the turn.

The horse is doing the turn on the haunches correctly when he can stay on approximately a 12” circle with his hind legs.

### WALK PIROUETTE

A walk pirouette is ridden in the same manner as a turn on the haunches but must be more centered, which requires more collection and balance. In the walk pirouette the horse picks his inside hind foot up and puts it down in the same footprint. In essence, a walk pirouette is a turn around a point that is placed under the horse’s inside hind foot. A horse that has reached Grand Prix can also do this movement in trot. We call this a piaffe-pirouette.

### TURN ON THE HAUNCHES AS A TOOL

Turn on the haunches is a fantastic exercise to teach the horse how to answer half-halts or to teach him to step more in under his body with his hind legs. Walk forward with energy, and then make a half-halt, immediately followed by a turn on the haunches. If the horse doesn’t answer the half-halt correctly, he will run into problems in the turn on the haunches. It won’t take long for the horse to start anticipating the turn on the haunches and begin shortening his stride even before the rider asks for the turn. When this happens, reward the horse and skip the turn, riding straight ahead instead. Repeat the exercise until the horse understands.

Turn on the haunches can also be used to help supple the horse. Vary between free walk and walk in shorter strides, followed by turn on the haunches. The collection that is achieved in the turn on the haunches creates a need in the horse to stretch his muscles, resulting in a suppling effect. Allow the horse to stretch by letting him reach forward and down for a few strides after the turn.

### MOST COMMON FAULTS

- The horse is not properly prepared.
- The horse lacks sufficient collection.
- The horse does not give on the inside.
- The horse tilts his head.
- The horse loses his will to go forward.
- The inside hind leg gets stuck.
- The hindquarters move in.
- The outside hind leg steps out.
- The rider collapses his inside hip.
- The rider is too heavy-handed, trying to slow the horse with his hands.
- The rider tries to push the horse around the turn with his outside leg.