

RIDING THROUGH CORNERS

This is a very important and often neglected exercise. Corners provide a chance to prepare the horse for movements that often begin immediately following a corner.

Unfortunately, the horse often has to struggle to stay balanced in the corner and tenses as a result, falling on his inside shoulder and consequently coming out of the corner on his forehand. In this case, the following has taken place:

The horse, while moving straight forward, has a great deal of his weight traveling in the direction of movement, so if the rider was to suddenly ask the horse to both bend and turn at the same time without proper preparation, the horse would be up against a serious problem attempting to stay in balance. "Without proper preparation" means that there has been no half-halt, or that the half-halt has not come through. As a result, the horse is forced to place his weight over his inside shoulder and lean against the inside rein and leg. This results in a loss of self-carriage.

Riding through corners in this manner invariably leads to the horse finishing the turn on the forehand, and will soon cause the horse to lose his confidence in such work. Furthermore, any attempts to execute a movement after riding a corner this way will fail.

We often neglect to make proper half-halts before the corner. These half-halts are essential to increasing engagement, which in turn enables the horse to shift his center of gravity further back. This makes it possible for him to go through the corner sufficiently well balanced, and to maintain a steady tempo.

THE CORNER

When riding the horse through a corner, the rider should make a preparatory half-halt, and must remember to keep the horse on the outside rein. In order to keep the horse on the outside rein, the horse should be encouraged to find his way out into the corner using diagonal aids, at which point the rider should support him with the outside rein and leg, catching up the energy with the outside aids.

It is wrong to push the horse into the corner by using the inside aids. Instead, teach an inexperienced horse to go outward into the outside rein by using the following exercise. Ride down the long side and as you approach the corner, turn a few strides early so that you will be

positioned several feet inside the track on the short side as you begin to turn. This gives you space to move the horse out towards the short side and into the corner by using your inside leg. The idea is to teach the horse that each time he sees a bent track ahead of him, he should move outward into the outside rein. The rider uses the same aids that he uses to bend the horse, together with his weight, to tell the horse to turn and travel in the direction of his bend.

HOW FAR SHOULD THE HORSE GO OUT INTO THE CORNER?

How deep into the corners a horse should be ridden depends on the horse's level of education. If he can make a 10-meter circle, then he can make a corner of the same diameter. The same applies to all other turns, for example when turning onto center line. During the warm-up, do not ride any deeper into the corner than the horse is supple enough to handle.

When riding the short side of the arena, think of it as two corners and a straight line in between, rather than a half 20-meter circle. Once horse and rider understand how to negotiate a corner correctly, corners can also be used to prepare for the movements that follow. By using half-halts, the rider encourages the horse to bring his hind legs more under himself, which moves the center of gravity further back. Then as the rider drives the horse forward, the increased energy creates more lift in each step rather than a lengthening of the stride, and creates a reservoir of compressed energy that can be used in the upcoming movement.

If the horse has learned to go through corners incorrectly, by cutting the corner short and leaning into the turn and against the rider's inside aids, the following exercise will help to resolve the problem. Start on the track. Ride straight forward toward the approaching wall, making a halt as you approach the wall. The horse may not change direction. Once he stands still, give him a pat, ride through the corner, on to the next corner and do the same thing again. When this becomes easy, begin riding through the corners without making a halt. Don't force your horse to go deeper into the corner than he is ready for, since part of the purpose of this exercise is to give him confidence when going through the corners. Once this works well you can try it in trot, but make a transition to walk about 20 feet before the corner and then walk through the corner. Once the half-halt you apply as you approach the corner goes through, you can complete the corner in trot.

There is more than one way to ride a corner, depending on what you want to get out of it. If you feel your horse needs to be rounder, then ride through the corner in a lower frame and with more bending. If you feel you need to use the corner to create more collection, ride through the corner with a straighter horse, asking for less bend. When your horse feels better balanced after the corner than before, you know the corner was correct.

MOST COMMON MISTAKES

- The rider collapses his inside hip.
- The rider leans forward.
- The rider tries to push the horse out into the corner with his inside aids. Remember that it is not possible to move the horse. He must follow his weight.
- The horse is positioned incorrectly.
- The horse is not bent enough around the rider's inside leg.
- The horse falls on his forehand.