

THE HALT

In the halt, the horse should stand completely still, positioned right under the rider, with his weight distributed evenly over all four legs. The front legs should be vertical and next to each other. The hind legs should be next to each other with the toes placed below a vertical line dropped from the point of the hip (somewhat dependent on conformation and level of education).

The horse should be focused on the rider and completely relaxed while waiting for the next signal from the rider. He should be thinking forward, ready to move off when asked, and should also continue to reach forward to the bit and remain under the aids. The horse must stand immobile for 5-6 seconds before moving forward or making the next movement.

A well-educated horse can go directly into a halt from each of the three gaits. For example he can go directly from canter to halt without taking any intervening steps before he comes to a standstill.

When first teaching the horse to halt, simply ask that he stands still. Asking too much at once may cause the horse to become afraid of the halt. Keep in mind that the horse is a prey animal, and to him it can feel dangerous to stand completely still, under the aids, with all his attention on the rider. One time it took me an entire year to teach a horse to stand still in the halt because he had become afraid of the exercise.

When the horse can stand immobile and relaxed, it is time to work on making him completely straight. Once he can stand straight and quiet without tensing, he can be asked to stay on the bit. And when he accepts all these things, it is time to teach him to stand correctly balanced on all four legs. Usually he will do this on his own once the first criteria are established.

By asking for one thing at a time, it is possible to give clear feedback to the horse to let him know whether he has answered correctly or not. And you can avoid the need to make corrections for issues other than what you are working on - the horse has not made a mistake when he fails to do something the rider has not asked for. On the other hand, once the horse has learned one of the criteria, it is very important that you consistently expect him to answer correctly.

You must remember that it is the horse that stops his own body. It is not a good idea to try to stop your horse with sheer strength. To physically stop your horse, you must jump off and stand in front of him. Do not try this unless your name is Tarzan.

The horse is brought to a halt by the rider's aids, which create a response from the horse to

change his balance so that his center of gravity is moved further back. As a result of this shift in his center of gravity, the horse feels it necessary to stop in order to keep his balance. In principal, we do the same when we stop.

HOW TO MAKE A HALT

The preparation is most important. If the horse is not correctly prepared, he will be unable to execute the halt even if the rider is giving the aids correctly.

THE PREPARATION

The rider makes repeated half halts to shorten the strides sufficiently for the horse to be able to make the halt. During the preparation it is important for the rider to continue driving the horse forward in the gait the horse is in so there will be no question in the horse's mind as to exactly when he should halt.

THE AIDS FOR THE HALT

The rider stretches upward, sits deeper in the saddle and more or less says stop with his seat by bracing his back and tightening the muscles under his seat bones. Not the thigh muscles! Tensing the thigh muscles leads to many mistakes. The lower legs drive the horse forward as necessary to a light resisting rein, and help to keep him straight. In precisely the moment the horse stands still, it is important to relax the hands and give a little without completely letting go of the contact with his mouth. The horse still needs to have something to go forward to (the bit).

A well-educated horse can make a halt while the rider moves his hands forward. The advantage to being able to do this is that it makes it easier for the horse to angle his hind legs and step more in under himself. If your hands influence the horse with too much resisting, the horse will tense his muscles in the top line in such a way that the joints in the hind legs will become locked. This will cause the horse to have difficulties moving his hind legs in under his body. If the rider's hands are too rough it could result in the horse taking a step back once he has stopped and that is a major mistake.

Remember that the halt is the starting point for the next movement. If the horse does not stand correctly in the halt you cannot expect him to do the next movement or transition successfully.

THE PURPOSE OF THE HALT

The halt is a test of obedience. For the horse to stand completely quiet with all his attention focused on the rider, it requires both obedience and trust.

SUGGESTIONS

- It is a good idea to start training the halt from the ground. If you can get the horse to stand quietly, straight and relaxed when you are working him from the ground he will understand you much better when you start the same work from the saddle. Start on the track along the rail and then proceed to other places in the arena.
- Some horses are fresh and very energetic at the beginning of the lesson. In this case, it is not a good idea to start the day by practicing halts right away. It will only lead to tension. Wait until the horse is more relaxed.
- Start by practicing walk-halt transitions. The most important is to have the horse right under you and in balance. He does not need to be on the bit.
- If the horse has a tendency to halt with a hind leg back or a shoulder out, it can be an advantage to train halts out of shoulder-fore.
- If the horse wants to come off the bit when moving forward from the halt, it helps to take a few steps in leg-yield when moving forward. The same applies to a horse that is in a rush to move on. It is important that the horse waits for the rider's signal to move forward.

MOST COMMON MISTAKES

- The horse does not understand the aids which ask him to step more in under himself with his hind legs.
- The horse is on the forehand. If the horse feels like he is about to fall down a stairway at the same time that he is supposed to make a halt, he will not be able to halt correctly.
- The rider tries to physically stop the horse.
- The rider's hands are too rough.
- The rider squeezes with his thighs, pushing himself out of the saddle. This also causes the lower leg to come off of the horse and become ineffective.
- The horse moves his hind legs back. The reason for this is either the rider's hands are too rough or the horse has pain somewhere that is alleviated when he moves his legs back.
- The horse steps back.
- The horse is not straight but stands on two tracks.
- The horse shortens his neck.
- The horse does not stand still.

- The poll is not the highest point.
- The horse does not stay between the aids.