

ON THE AIDS

Horses want a place of their own. It can be the stall at the barn or their place in the herd. When we ride, this ‘place’ is under the rider and between the aids, a frame to work within—a place that the horse can call his own. It must be a place that the horse can cope with, where he feels safe and confident, but also feels free to move.

When the horse has found this place and works confidently within the frame, he will normally accept that what is outside the frame is the rider's responsibility. We ask the horse to work between the aids not only so that the rider has better control, but also because a horse that works between the aids is far more relaxed than a horse that works outside the frame.

In order to explain the meaning of the expression ‘to have the horse on the aids,’ I will give you an example. Perhaps you have had a lesson when the instructor asked you to do something specific, such as ride a medium trot, and you felt that it would not go well if you attempted it at that moment because your horse wasn't ready. You might have thought that you need to make a circle in order to prepare the horse. In this case, your horse was not on the aids. On the other hand, you may have felt that if you asked for the movement, it would turn out well because the horse felt just right to execute the movement successfully. When it feels as though you could ask your horse for a movement and you know it would go well, that is the feeling of a horse on the aids.

When the horse is on the aids, he feels ready to do whatever you ask at any moment.

Getting the horse to work in between the aids, or as we call it, ‘on the aids,’ is one of the goals of the warm-up. A horse that is on the aids is also very close to what we call, ‘on the bit.’ When the horse is on the aids he feels framed, in place, in balance and in harmony with the rider. The horse is attentive to the rider and focused on his job.

A horse that is in between the aids feels more safe and secure—he has a feeling of being ‘at home’ in his work space. What's outside that frame is the rider's responsibility. Unfortunately, there are many horses that do not understand how to be in between the aids, or don't dare to be in between the aids, and as a result, feel more comfortable outside the frame instead of within it.

In order to ride a test that requires correct execution of particular movements at specific points in the arena, the horse must be on the aids. When the horse is on the aids, it is also much easier for the rider to concentrate on the small, precise details, and to create something positive rather than riding the horse around the arena hoping that everything goes well.

HOW TO BRING THE HORSE ON THE AIDS

Before the horse can be asked to come between the aids, the rider must make sure that the horse understands each individual aid. In addition, horse and rider must be in harmony, and the horse must be mentally and physically relaxed. When a rider brings a tense and inattentive horse into the arena, and consistently reacts to what the horse is doing rather than acting as the leader, I know that the rider will be unable to bring the horse on the aids once he gets in the saddle. If you haven't already done so, please read the chapter in Section 3 (Understanding the Horse) called The Psyche of the Horse before you continue with this chapter.

Bringing the horse on the aids begins as soon as you make contact with the horse, including handling the horse in the stable. It is important that everything is done calmly, quietly and consistently from the moment the halter is put on the horse. Once again, it should always be the rider who gives the signals, and the horse that obeys these signals. If the horse's behavior on the ground causes the rider to react instead of lead, it will be the same during the work under saddle.

The ability to get the horse on the aids includes being able to lead the horse quietly and obediently into the arena. The horse should stand still while the rider mounts, and not move forward until the rider tells him to do so. If the training session begins this way, the rest of the work will be much easier.

It is very important that each request of the horse begins with the rider's thoughts causing a response in his own body, which in turn sends signals to the horse. I like to say, "**See it, feel it, do it.**" Before you take the first step forward on your horse, you should have a clear picture in your mind of your horse doing the movement correctly. Look at this picture long enough for you to imagine how it will feel, and then ride this horse you see in the picture. Make sure that everything your horse does starts as a thought in your mind.

The opposite would be, "**Do it, feel it, and become disappointed.**" This is the case when a horse has not been given clear signals telling him what to do. As a result, he has to guess, guesses wrong and is then corrected by the rider. This is a waste of time, and in such a situation, the horse will never work on the aids.

During the first part of the warm up, when the rider is not yet asking much of the horse, it is still important that it is the rider who makes all the decisions. It is of essence that the rider is very decisive with regard to direction, speed, when and where to do what, and that all the work is done quietly and calmly.

When the following can be accomplished successfully, half-halts and various exercises can be used for fine tuning in order to bring the horse on the aids:

- The rider can ride the horse straight forward from the halt into walk and trot, and can also easily make a straight halt.
- The rider feels it is he who has placed the horse exactly where he is at that moment.
- The rider dictates the speed and tempo.
- The horse has no problem standing still in the halt.
- The horse places himself directly under the rider.
- The horse responds correctly to the aids.
- The horse is mentally and physically relaxed.

The rider should also develop the feeling of having the horse on the aids everywhere in the arena, and during all the movements, by working on circles and other exercises suitable to the horse's age and level of education. The horse is truly on the aids when he can be ridden in this manner not only indoors, but outside as well, including on the trails and in the fields.

A horse that is on the aids is supple and works without physical or mental tension. He does not swish his tail or show discomfort in other ways. There is harmony between horse and rider and the horse answers the rider's signals without delay. The horse stays between the rider's aids without being held there.

Remember that everything the horse does begins as a thought in the rider's head.

WHEN THE HORSE IS NOT ON THE AIDS

If the horse is not on the aids, the best thing we can do is to start this part of his education all over again. It won't take a long time if done correctly and is a very important part of a good training plan. You will get a significant return on the time you put into getting the horse on the aids, in terms of better results and long-term soundness, a happier horse and a much more pleasant riding experience.

How to start this work:

- Print out the form, Status Analysis and fill it out.
- Print out a Plan for Training, and fill it out with the goal, "The horse on the aids." Follow the directions and suggestions in this chapter to complete the form.
- Read the chapters in this section (The Basics) called The Aids and Harmony, and from Section 3 (Understanding the Horse) read the chapters called The Psyche of the Horse and

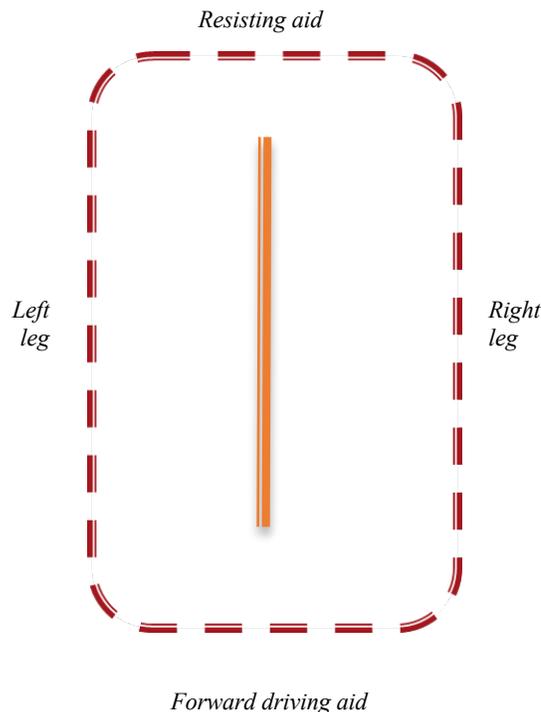
The Pyramids.

- For further suggestions, read the chapter from Section 4 (Setting Goals and Developing a System) called Self-test.
- Consult with your trainer to make sure the two of you are in agreement.

When your horse is on the aids you will feel that he is doing everything exactly as you intend. You will feel it is you, the rider, who creates everything the horse does. ***It is you who acts, and the horse who reacts.*** And once again, remember that getting the horse on the aids begins with the work on the ground.

THE HORSE ON THE AIDS - INSIDE THE FRAME

Imagine your horse on the aids, your body and aids creating a frame around him, like a box. You have helped the horse to find his place right in the middle of the box so he feels space all around his body. He should not feel trapped or held in place. Whether you are moving in a straight line, turning or moving sideways, your body and aids move the box, and the horse should follow, staying right in the middle of the box.



A horse on the aids should:

- feel free inside the frame
- find space enough inside the frame

- have no questions about where the frame is
- feel confident inside the frame, as if the box is his home base
- follow the frame