

THE PURPOSE OF THE MOVEMENTS

Before we discuss the various movements, I'd like to give you a little background. Long ago, some intelligent people sat down together to create movements and exercises that could be used to educate a horse. The purpose of these exercises was to help the horse develop strength and elasticity, obedience, and also to increase the horse's ability to stay in balance while carrying a rider on his back. In addition, these exercises built the horse's self-confidence, as well as taught him to respond in numerous ways to the rider's signals.

These people discovered that certain exercises developed elasticity while other exercises developed strength; some developed collection while others developed suppleness. These exercises and movements became a set of tools that were drawn upon to educate the horse, and they remain the tools we use today.

THE PURPOSE OF THE MOVEMENTS

- To supple the horse and to make him more elastic.
- To build the horse's muscles and to make him stronger.
- To help the horse become straight and equally strong, elastic and balanced in both directions.
- To increase collection, progressively shifting the weight further back.
- To teach the horse to answer smaller and smaller signals.
- To make the horse obedient and cooperative.
- To develop confidence.

The movements are not goals in themselves. They are tools we can use to reach the goals.

There is a goal for every movement, and we as riders and trainers must know and understand those goals. The movements can be thought of as tools. Just as a carpenter knows which tool to use for each job, we must also understand each movement that we ask the horse to execute. The carpenter doesn't pound in nails with a level or screw in screws with a hammer, he knows which tool to use for each occasion, and we, as riders, should do the same.

There are set rules for how to execute a movement. Many people may think "Of course!

Otherwise, how would a judge be able to evaluate a movement in a test?” Or they might think that it gives the trainers something to correct. But this is not the right answer. Each movement has been well thought out and should be done in a certain way so that it will contribute something positive to the education of the horse. If a movement is ridden incorrectly, the horse will learn something that is incorrect. Obviously, if a movement is done correctly, the horse will improve.

An incorrectly performed movement can be quite damaging to the horse.

Naturally, we cannot expect the uneducated horse to perform movements correctly. But when we practice the movements, they should be ridden in a way that leads the horse in the right direction. Before you ask your horse to perform a movement you must make sure that he will be able to do it. Is he strong enough? Is he supple enough? Does he understand the signals well enough? Is he mentally and physically relaxed?

Avoid problems. If problems arise it was most likely too early to ask the horse to do that particular exercise. Maybe he is too young, not mentally prepared for this movement or does not understand the signals well enough. When you teach new movements, they should be broken down into the basic components, taught separately, and eventually put back together. ***It is important that the horse leaves the arena with answers and not with questions in his mind.***

The order in which we teach the horse the various movements is very important. When we introduce a new movement, it should not feel completely foreign to the horse. You should start at a point that is familiar to him and then build on that until he understands the whole thing. For example, when the horse has learned how to follow the rider's weight, then he is ready to learn leg-yields. When the horse understands how to respond to the driving and the resisting aids, he can learn how to answer half-halts. When the horse has learned how to stay in balance on a bent track, then he can learn how to go out into the corners. A horse that has learned how to do a turn on the forehand finds it easier to understand the aids for rein-back. And so on. Thoughtfulness and common sense are your best tools.

We must also remember that it is not enough that the rider gives correct aids. Think if the best ballet dancer in the world came to tell us how to do certain dance steps. He explains every detail very correctly, and even shows us how to do it himself, dancing around executing the most beautiful steps. Then he asks us if we understand what he means. “Yes,” we say. “Good,” he says, “Step out on the dance floor and show me!” And what would that look like? Awful, of course! He would complain, and we would tell him that we have to practice before we can do it well. So keep in mind that before we can expect a horse to be able to perform a movement well, he must have the opportunity to practice.

Furthermore, we must remember that it is the horse that has to do the movement, not the rider. “That’s obvious!” you might say, but the fact is that sometimes it looks like the rider is more active than the horse, as if the rider is trying to move the horse by force. The horse is supposed to do the movement in response to the smallest possible aids. The rider should sit as quietly as possible, but always go along in the direction of the movement. We have taught the horse that he is supposed to follow the rider; that he belongs right under the rider. For that reason it is incorrect for the rider to push the horse away from him. We can say that the rider should place himself where he wants the horse to be in the next step. The rider should never get left behind. It is impossible to lead the way if one is following behind.

When you decide to ride a movement, make sure it falls within a logical progression of the education of the horse, and that it makes sense as a tool toward your goal. Before you do anything, first ask yourself, “What do I want to accomplish right now?” Once you have the answer to this question you can determine which movement to use to help the horse understand the goal.

Before you ask your horse to perform a movement, have a clear picture in your mind of what you want to achieve. You must be mentally prepared. And, if necessary, stop once in a while and think things through. If you have a clear idea of what you want to get out of the movement before you start, you will have a better chance of making it happen. By defining your goal before you start the movement, you will also be able to evaluate it afterward, decide if it went well, and determine what needs to be corrected or improved. As a result, you will be able to explain to the horse in a more understandable way how better to succeed, and you will see improvements in a shorter time.

The most difficult, but also the most important part of riding a movement, is the preparation. Picture the movement in your head and have a mental checklist of the steps you intend to take before you start the movement. ***When you are ready to ride a movement, you should have the preparation and the problems behind you and only the movement itself ahead.***

It is important that what you do makes sense to the horse. When you ride a movement, make sure that the horse understands what you want before you finish your work with that movement. Otherwise, you will end up taking the horse back to the stables with questions in his mind, leading to a horse that is frustrated and suspicious. It is a waste of time to begin work on something and to stop before the horse has had a chance to understand and feel successful. When this happens, the very best case is that you could start over again the next day, but normally this will be much more difficult since the horse may have lost some confidence as a result of the experience and is now suspicious of the whole thing. So continue your work session until the horse thinks “Aha! I understand.” This does not mean, however, that you should ride around

doing the same movement repeatedly. That will only make your horse sore and will not produce anything positive. If, after a period of time the work is not productive, there is only one answer, and that is: ***back to the basics.***

The idea is that the horse is supposed to learn something, and from whom does he learn? The rider of course! But how does he learn? ***He learns from the situations that he is put into. In other words, he learns from the movements.***

RIDING THE MOVEMENTS

When the goal is to be able to perform movements at higher levels, it is not enough just to be able to influence the horse correctly in physical terms. The horse must also have a chance to practice, just as we would expect if there was something we wanted to master ourselves.

Once again, before you ride a movement you should be able to imagine your horse performing the movement correctly. You should see it so clearly in your mind that you know exactly what it feels like when the horse performs the movement perfectly. You should ride the horse that is in that picture, not the horse that you are sitting on at that moment. If you ride that horse that you are sitting on, things will not improve, and the horse will not develop and advance to higher levels. If you ride that horse in the picture—that super moving horse, executing a perfect movement—and if you sit in the saddle and influence the horse as if everything is correct, a disharmony will arise between you and your horse. It is this disharmony that will provide the situation in which the horse will learn. In this case you should not correct the horse any more than is absolutely necessary. The horse will dislike this disharmony between the two of you and will begin to figure out how to shape his body so that he will fit into the parameters that you have created. Of course, these parameters must be realistic and the horse must be somewhat familiar with the movement in order for this to work. In this manner, you create a problem for the horse, a problem that the horse will learn to solve with your help.

To a large part, this is the reason why more experienced riders can educate a horse more quickly and with fewer problems. The more experienced rider has been there before, and knows what he is looking for and how to find it.

This situation is comparable to a math teacher who decides that his student is going to learn to solve a mathematical problem in a specific way today. The teacher presents the student with an assignment intended to help the student learn to solve a problem. He says to the student “Go ahead and start to work on this assignment. I will help you, but you have to do the work, since it is you that has to be able to solve the problem.” The teacher’s job now is to assist and to set limits, and to help keep the student from heading down the wrong track. As riders we can

sometimes become too dominant, perhaps ask for too much, in a way that puts the horse in a position of being corrected all the time, never giving the horse a chance to figure out how to solve the problem. Remember that it is the horse that must know the movement and how to do it.

It often happens that we use aids that are too big and too strong in the hope that the horse will give a better response. But this is completely wrong. ***In the horse's opinion, there is nothing worse than strong aids and pressure.*** When we give signals to the horse, they should always be as small and light as possible. If he does not answer, then a stronger or louder aid can be appropriate. Before giving a strong aid always first give a light one, even if you know that the horse is not going to answer. When you have to resort to a louder aid, the horse should think: "All right! The rider did ask me once before and I am the one that was not paying attention. Next time, I'll listen the first time."

The worst thing for a horse is pressure. For that reason, the horse wants nothing more than for the pressure to go away, for the rider to lighten his aids. Remember that pressure creates counter pressure. So the best way to reward the horse is not to give him carrots, but rather to take the pressure away. Then he understands that he responded correctly.

We may never pressure the horse into submission. Make sure that in his eyes everything is logical, simple and uncomplicated, and that there is continuity and a common thread throughout the work. It is really astounding how much a horse can learn in a short time if he is taught in this manner.

So one more time: Use your common sense and have patience. Every little step forward is exciting and the most important thing is to be able to recognize it. Educating horses is like taking a long voyage - the exciting part is to arrive at and see new places. When you finally arrive at your destination the trip is over.

It is important to create trust. Everyone agrees with this, but it is not so simple. It does not take much for the horse to lose trust. For example, it is easy for a horse to lose his balance in a movement. Perhaps for some reason or another, he is sore and that is why he protests. He could have gotten cast in his stall, or was standing in the cold rain, or is badly shod. There are innumerable reasons why some days the horse may be uncooperative. But again, use your common sense and listen to the horse, he is the only one that can tell you what is wrong.

In the end, you should have a horse that is proud to show what he knows, not a horse that does what he is told through force. ***Sometimes the smartest thing a rider can say to himself is, "not today."***