

# THE GOOD AND THE BAD

There is a lot of talk about how to give aids and how to ride movements correctly, and of course this is important. Out of all of this, there are two aids that we use the most and that we therefore must understand completely. The driving aids and the resisting aids are used to a greater extent to influence the horse than we might realize. We use them primarily to make half-halts and transitions, but also in many other situations.

## THE GOOD

Let's begin by talking about the most important aid, the **driving aid**. The driving aid creates a lot of positive reactions in the horse. So, sit tight and ride along, because now you'll really need to focus.

### **The driving aids create the following:**

- First and foremost, **energy**—Working with a horse that lacks energy is like trying to sculpt with dry clay. In a horse, the energy can be compared to the moisture which makes dry clay damp and much easier to work with and create something.
- **Thrust:** Driving aids also ask the horse to thrust (push) forward with his hind legs. This creates power and pushes his body forward. It should feel as if the horse pushes his body forward out from between the rider's legs.
- **Balance:** The rider gets a feeling of having more horse in front of him than behind him. The energy from the hind legs should move over the topline, activate the croup, activate the back muscles and continue through the neck all the way forward to the bit.
- **Contact with the horse's mouth** – A connection is generated by the horse reaching forward to the bit. The energy continues from the bit, through the reins and back to the rider's hands.

As a result of the driving aids, we get a horse that **works through the whole top line** and is connected. The muscles begin to work in unison, so later when the horse begins to work in a more elevated frame, the top line can function like a strong spring. We talk about having a feeling that the horse's hind legs step forward into our hands. We say that "the aids should go through." Most often we take this to mean *over the top line*. But if there is tension in the top line or the horse can't be straightened, the driving aids won't go through. Imagine the top line as a long pipe. If there is dirt in the pipe, representing tension or stiffness that blocks the energy, the energy can't go through the top line, forward from behind and all the way out to the bit. So we

must **clean out the pipe**—the top line—so it is free of tension and supple. Since we can't blow air through the top line (as we could with a pipe), we must remove the tension by sending energy through the top line instead. To do this successfully, the top line must be relaxed. A horse who moves forward in a relaxed manner with a lowered neck can be said to have a relaxed top line. Only when the horse is relaxed and letting go of all tension over his top line, can the energy from the hind legs go through and forward to the bit. Otherwise it is impossible.

If you don't yet understand this concept clearly, read the above again until they make sense. We all must sometimes hear or read the same words many times to completely understand (including the author).

But I want to talk more about the driving aids. Before a horse can develop self-carriage, he must be able to step forward and under his body with his hind legs. This happens primarily by riding the horse forward by using the driving aids, and not, as some riders think, by shortening the horse. The hind legs should move forward and in under the horse's center of gravity. Observe horses that are being ridden forward compared to horses there are being ask to work in a shorter pace. You will see that the horse who is moving forward is stepping further towards his center of gravity. As a result, it becomes easier for him to thrust himself forward with his hind legs, use his back more, and as a result lighten his forehand and increase the freedom in his shoulders. Furthermore, a horse working in this way conserves his hocks and stifles by using the muscles on the back of his hind legs and over his top line for the majority of the work instead of overloading his hocks and stifles.

When the energy goes through, moving from behind and forward, it becomes possible for the horse *to balance without using negative tension*. Imagine if you were trying to balance a bicycle at a standstill, compared to when it is moving forward. Read the chapter in this section (The Basics) called Balance and Equilibrium.

Driving aids, by creating energy, are also primarily what **makes the horse straight**. If you haven't already read the chapter in this section (the Basics) called Straightness, you should do so now. It is the **driving aids that create "swing"** (moving forward with free, swinging strides).

Last but not least, it is also the driving aids that **create collection and self-carriage**.

Then what do the **resisting aids** create? The answer could be "Nothing." For what is the resisting aid really? It's **only a signal**. We drive when we want to speed up and we also drive when we want to slow down or shorten the stride and collect. But the horse has to know if he is supposed to speed up or to collect when the rider applies the driving aid. This is where the **signal** comes in, we call it a resisting aid, and it tells the horse how he should respond to the driving aid.

## THE BAD

The driving aid can create a lot of **negative responses** if it is used incorrectly, i.e. as more than a signal.

### **Examples:**

- Open mouth
- Tongue above the bit
- Short, compressed neck
- Tense back
- Lack of self-carriage
- The horse moving on two tracks
- Pacey gaits
- Four-beat canter
- Loss of confidence
- Nose behind the vertical
- Lack of thrust from behind
- Tense and/or sore muscles
- Loss of “swing”
- Loss of quality in the horse’s natural movement
- Falling on his forehead

This means we won’t get all the positive answers to the resisting aid that we are looking for if the resisting aid is incorrect and/or dominating.

### **Important to keep in mind:**

- The horse should carry himself, and not be carried by the rider’s arms
- The horse should hold his neck and head in a natural way
- The frame of the horse’s neck should be formed as a result of how he uses his body behind the withers, and not shaped by the rider’s hand
- The horse should learn to carry the rider right above him, i.e., right above his center of gravity. The horse should feel “in place” between the aids, inside a frame but free—not held in place in any way.

The horse’s head and neck are his balancing pole. So, he would naturally like to place his head and neck where he feels he is in the best balance. He chooses the placement of his head and neck

based on how he uses his body behind the withers.

Remember that the contact with the horse's mouth should come from riding the horse from behind and forward to the bit, and not by pulling the bit backward to his mouth. **Imagine a red line right behind your hand.** Don't let your hand go behind that line.

The horse's mouth is very sensitive. **With the right fine, light contact it becomes possible to send small, fine signals through the reins to the horse.** If the signals become more than that, then no doubt, something negative will come of it.

A rider who can keep his own body in balance and ride with a light and sensitive hand has the best chance of getting the most out of his horse, and to bring out his natural, inborn ability to its fullest capacity.

In conclusion: **Always ride your horse from behind and forward to the bit in all situations.**

For more information, also read the chapters in this section (The Basics) called Half-halt, Transitions, and The Aids.