

TRANSITIONS

A transition is a change from one speed to another or from one pace to another. Transitions can be used as an exercise to increase the activity in the back and the hind legs, to supple the horse, to increase collection and self-carriage, and to improve the horse's technique. Transitions also teach the horse to thrust himself forward with his hind legs instead of pulling himself forward with his front legs. They prepare the horse for piaffe and passage, as well as make him more receptive to the driving and restraining aids and to half-halts.

In order to ride a transition correctly, we must first understand how a horse functions physically and how the laws of nature work. When a horse walks, trots or canters, his speed combined with his weight translate into a rather large force traveling in the direction of movement. For the horse to be able to collect, to shorten his stride and finally, to execute the transition, his center of gravity must be moved further back. To ask the horse to move his center of gravity back, we must ask him to step further under his body with his hind legs. This will cause the length of stride, as well as the speed, to decrease. If we forget this, it becomes impossible to keep the horse in balance during the transition. The horse will fall on his forehead, lose his tempo and most certainly go against the hand and lean on the bit. It is very important to keep in mind that work with transitions should lead to increased self-carriage. When the hind legs step further under the horse, it should create a feeling of the withers rising. If, on the contrary, it feels like the withers become lower, the transition was executed incorrectly.

The transition can be divided into two parts:

1. The preparation
2. The transition itself

PREPARATION

The preparation consists of using half-halts to increase the angle of the hind legs, so that the center of gravity shifts further back, collecting the horse. It is important that, while increasing the collection, the rider ensures that the tempo is maintained and that there is no loss of impulsion. The rider can feel this through the connection with the bit, as the horse pushes himself forward with his hind legs. The horse should be ridden forward into the transition by driving him into a resisting aid, which gently restrains him. Imagine a staircase in front of the horse, and that you are riding the horse forward and up the staircase, one step at a time, so that the horse's withers come up with each step. If, instead, you get a feeling of riding down the stairs in the transition, it will lead to the horse falling on his forehead.

The most common mistake made by the rider during a transition is to pull on the reins, almost using them as an emergency brake. This causes the rider to become tense and to fail to drive the horse forward sufficiently. This results in a number of problems for the horse, making it impossible to execute the transition properly.

When preparing for a transition, it is important to be aware of the following points:

- The speed is determined by the length of stride - the length of stride changes when the center of gravity shifts. As the center of gravity shifts back, the length of stride decreases. It now feels like some of the energy moves upward, like the smoke in a chimney, while at the same time some of the energy is still moving forward.
- The center of gravity can be shifted by changing the angle in the hind legs.
- Additionally, increased impulsion is essential to developing more collection. This enables the horse to go forward and increases self-carriage.
- When we say “to maintain a steady tempo,” we mean that the horse, regardless of the speed in which he is working, takes the same number of strides per minute.

When executing a transition, the rider must not tense his body, which works against the horse. Rather, he should combine his driving aids with his restraining aids so that the horse understands that he should collect. This combination consists of the rider continuing to drive the horse forward while straightening up and stretching his upper body, sitting more deeply in the saddle and bringing his seat bones more underneath himself. His hands close around the reins, creating a light resistance, signaling to the horse that the driving aids mean he should collect instead of extend.

When we make a transition, it should feel like riding uphill (imagine the horse’s front legs climbing up a staircase). The horse should feel like he is getting shorter behind the saddle, resulting in what feels like more horse in front of the saddle. That’s what we mean when we say “to have the horse in front of the legs.”

Keep in mind that when giving driving aids, it is also important to use them in synchrony with the tempo of the horse’s pace.

THE TRANSITION ITSELF

When the rider decides to make a transition, he tightens his loins and sits more deeply into the saddle, while continuing to drive the horse forward in synchrony with the gait in which the horse

is working. The driving seat should help the horse to maintain the tempo until he changes the pace. It is important that horse and rider execute the transitions simultaneously. If there is a delay between the rider's signal and the horse's answer it will cause the horse's and the rider's center of gravity to move apart.

It is important to let your hands move forward just before the horse executes the transition. If the hands are resisting during the whole transition, the horse will feel locked up in his hindquarters and as a result will be unable to step through with his hind legs.

Of course, transitions are not only made downwards, such as from trot to walk, but also upwards, for example, from halt to walk or trot. When making an upward transition, ***the horse must thrust with his hind legs*** and simultaneously shift his weight in the direction of movement. The horse must not be placed in too long a frame during upward transitions. Use half-halts to make him step further under his body and compress the muscles in his hind end and top line. Otherwise, the horse will have to pull himself forward with his front legs and will fall on his forehead. This is similar to driving your car by depressing the gas pedal before letting out the clutch.

It is important that the rider takes his own body forward, along with the horse's, during the first few steps of the transition. In fact, the rider should move his torso forward the moment preceding the transition. This will prevent the horse from feeling that the rider is left behind.

To help you understand this concept, imagine standing in the aisle way of an airplane during the take-off. You will fall backwards because the airplane is accelerating faster than you. Once the airplane is up in the air and flying at a constant speed you will have no problem walking up and down the aisle, because at that point you are moving at the same speed as the airplane.

When making the upward transition, the rider squeezes with his legs and moves his hands slightly forward without losing contact with the bit. After a few steps, both horse and rider will find the same speed and the rider can straighten up and continue to drive the horse forward.

Transitions can of course be executed anywhere in the arena, but they are also used in connection with many movements. Using transitions in movements like shoulder-in and half pass can improve the self-carriage in both the transition and the movement itself.

When we describe a movement, we try to describe the movement as it is when it is executed correctly, but remember that before the horse can execute a movement successfully, he must have the opportunity to practice many, many times. It is most important, in all the work we do with the horses, to have the feeling of being on the right track, that "if the horse and I can continue on like this, the day will arrive when the results will be really good".

MOST COMMON MISTAKES

- The rider does not have sufficient knowledge.
- The horse does not understand the aids.
- The rider's expectations are too high. Perfect transitions take time and patience.
- The rider does not create enough energy for the horse to execute the transition correctly.
- The rider uses too much rein aid. The hand should meet and contain, but not pull backwards.
- The horse tenses.
- The rider does not sit straight.
- The rider has difficulty keeping the tempo throughout the movement.
- The horse does not stay straight. If you want to be able to ride transitions between piaffe and passage someday, this is a must.
- The horse becomes croup high.
- The horse sits down too much, i.e. steps too far under with his hind legs.
- The horse's nose is behind the vertical.
- The horse is ridden down the stairs instead of up the stairs, as described above.