



EQUINE SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL

SEAT AND POSITION OF THE RIDER

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'THE PRINCIPLES OF RIDING' IS A POPULAR TERM IN THE EQUESTRIAN SPORT. WHAT EXACTLY ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF RIDING AND HOW ARE YOU ABLE TO IMPLEMENT THEM INTO YOUR TRAINING TO IMPROVE BOTH YOURSELF AND YOUR HORSE? IN THIS SERIES OF FIVE ARTICLES WE GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE PRINCIPLES OF RIDING. THIS SERIES HELP YOU MASTER THE BASICS OF YOUR RIDING BECAUSE THE BASICS ARE MORE CHALLENGING THAN WHATEVER COMES LATER.

"YOU MUST TRAIN YOURSELF FIRST BEFORE YOU START TO TRAIN YOUR HORSE."

Horse riding is a rather complex activity; thinking, seeing, feeling and doing are interacting all the time. Basic requirements for every rider are a correct position, an independent seat, balance and riders feel.

How well you are able to perform is dependent on your natural ability, your posture, weight and coordination ability and above all your mentality towards your horse and yourself.

When riding, you get confronted with your shortcomings all the time since the horse mirrors the rider. *This article provides tips and tricks to develop your seat and position.*

INDEPENDENT SEAT

Having an independent seat means that you are able to follow the movement of your horse, even the unexpected ones. Besides that, you should be able to move your legs and arms **independently** in relation to each other and to your upper body.

DO YOU HAVE AN INDEPENDENT SEAT?

What happens with your hands when you give your horse a stronger leg aid? Are your hands **moving along** with the movement of your legs or are you able to keep them still, in the right place and as relaxed as before?



BALANCE

Balance is based on your center of gravity (*located near your belly button*) in relation to your support surfaces; buttocks, knees and feet. *When riding you should be able to draw an imaginary line from your shoulder to your hip, to your heel.* Keep in mind that the moment the rider moves, the horse needs to find his balance again. You can compare this with carrying someone on your back. When this person leans to the left and asks you to walk straight it is significantly more difficult than when this person sits still and straight.

RIDER'S FEEL

You can roughly say that rider's feel represents the proper intensity, the proper location, the right moment and good coordination between the different body parts when giving an aid. One general advice: *If the horse gives the reaction you want, directly release the pressure of your leg, hand or seat.* In order to improve your riding, you need to know and understand your own body before you can control your own body. This sheds light on the importance of a **well-educated coach** who can guide you in this path of development.

EXERCISES

In my coaching and clinics, I often meet people who have difficulties with their seat. Many riders are working on seat and posture every day again. There are a few exercises to avoid the most common seat problems. Before you critically look at yourself, *make sure that your saddle fits you and your horse perfectly.* This makes practicing and riding easier and more fun.

NOT RELEASING THE REINS

How can you passively resist without pulling on the horse's bit? Passive resistance works like a side rein. A side rein is able to block the horse from pulling forward but will never pull backwards. And when the horse is leaning on the bit, the reins gently move with the movement of the horse. If your horse is used to be lunged, *a useful exercise is to ride with two cups of water in your hand and try not to spill when walking, trotting or cantering.*

With this exercise you combine practicing your balance, independent seat and your contact with the horse's mouth.

LEANING TO ONE SIDE OR COLLAPSING IN THE WAIST

Before going into any more detail, ask yourself: when was your last assessment of your weight distribution? Are you collapsing in your waist or leaning to one side? Are you having equal pressure on both seat bones? Are you sitting balanced in the middle of the saddle? Which seat bone do you feel more clearly? To which side would you rather shift? Do you have even pressure on both stirrups?

It's important for you to know if you are collapsing or if you are leaning. There is a significant difference between the two. You can for example shift your weight to the right by moving your entire upper body to the right and feel more weight on your right seat bone and stirrup. However you can also move your upper body to the right and feel more weight on the left seat bone. In the last case you are collapsing in your waist.

Did you find out if you are collapsing or leaning? Here is one last tip: *image that somebody is gently pulling from a string attached to your helmet, so you straighten your upper body and you are not arching your back.* If you have a correct position and someone would 'remove' your horse you will still be in balance and stand on your feet.

SWINGING LOWER LEG

Swinging the lower leg often causes **conflicted aids**. Whereas you want to be clear to your horse that an impulse with both calves should make him go forward, and an aid with one calf asks him to go side wards.

This problem often comes from a *not stabilized higher positioned body part.* If you are sure your upper body is not the reason for the swinging, then you can follow the three steps below.

Step 1: Check the position of your seat bones; pretend that your seat bones are like a plug in a socket. Make sure that the sticks are **pointing down**, not forward nor backwards.

Step 2: Is your knee squeezing or are you riding with an 'open knee'? If so keep in mind that your knee is a shock absorber and is best able to when lying gently along the saddle.

Step 3: When a trainer tells you to put your heels down, it doesn't mean you should shaft your heel forward. Pretend to drop your weight into your heels.

The leg should lie like a wetted pasta string around your horse.

Last but not least, make sure that you are following the **horses' movements** instead of moving actively. Paying attention to all these details will make the difference between becoming a good rider or a medium rider. 🐾

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