

Alice Trindle Presents:

Developing a Willing Partnership

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Alice Trindle was born on a ranch in eastern Oregon, the only daughter in a family of five brothers. She learned to ride behind the back of the saddle holding on to her brother's belt loops. In the past 15 years Alice has continued her relationship with horses, and had the opportunity to study with several true horsemen such as Tom Dorrance, Ray Hunt, Dennis Reis, and Bettina Drummond. She conducts clinics in Oregon, Washington, California, and Idaho, and offers multi-day horsemanship retreats at her ranch in eastern Oregon.

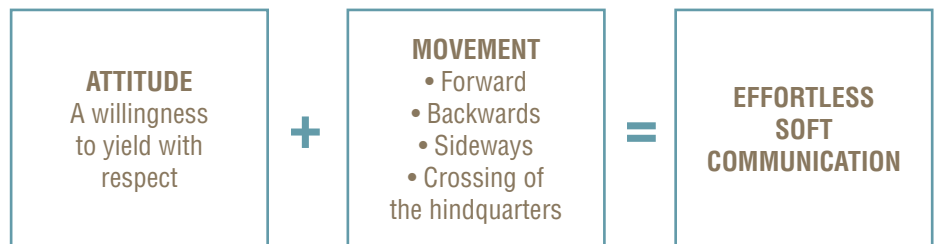
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Shoulder-in Postures

Clinic #9 in a series of ten

Moving Sideways with Shoulder-In Postures

As we near the end of this series of ten horsemanship clinics, I am drawn back to eight months ago when we started talking about the importance of the “BASICS” in developing our horsemanship journey. You will recall that we discussed that horses view their world, and their relationship to the other creators in their environment through two filters:



Over the course of this past year as I have met so many wonderful aspiring horsemen, I have continually acknowledged that our greatest successes emanate from our awareness of the basics... Attitude and Movement. In these last two clinics we will be discussing “Sideways” movements in both shoulder-in and half-pass postures. They are critical components in achieving self-carriage, balance, and rhythm and straightness in your horse, and they ultimately will help to position your horse for other maneuvers and jobs.

Why is the Movement SIDEWAYS An Important Basic?

To truly understand the answer to this question we need to begin with some simple definitions. Different horsemanship disciplines use a variety of terminology from side pass and leg yield, to shoulder-fore and shoulder-in, from haunches-in to half-pass in describing types of “sideways” maneuvers. So let's make sure we are on the same page with a very basic definition...

Sideways movements are those that require the horse to carry the energy from its INSIDE or OUTSIDE hindquarter towards the opposite fore quarter. Moving AWAY from the bend or moving INTO the bend.

Therefore, the typical definitions of all the terms previously listed would qualify as “sideways” type movement.

So what is the importance of adding “sideways” to our basic foundation? The first thing that comes to mind, being an ‘ol ranch girl, are the practical uses, such as getting a gate from atop your horse, keeping your horse laterally rounded when watching livestock, or keeping a rope tight when doctoring a calf. The bottom line importance for both the ranch horse and the dressage discipline is exactly the same...

Sideways movements help the horse and rider to balance, particularly laterally, & ultimately with vertical flexion, in order to promote “self-carriage” and posture.

Definitions:

Shoulder-In: The chest of the horse is towards the inside of the arena, & as the horse moves forward, his front legs appear to cross, while the hind quarters stay basically on track. The horse's eye is slightly to inside of the small bend, and the energy moves from his inside hindquarter to the outside shoulder & rein – away from the bend.

Leg-Yield: The horse moves forward and on the diagonal, with both hind and fore legs crossing alternately. The movement is from the inside hindquarter to the outside rein or shoulder – moving away from the slight bend.



Preparing Shoulder-In left with movement from left hind to right front foot traveling on the same track



Note how hind legs are crossing. This is a leg yield, not a proper shoulder-in

Shoulder-In & Leg Yield Exercises Result in HUGE Accomplishments!

As with most of my suggested training activities, I find great success by starting on the ground, or with “work-in-hand.” (Please review Clinic #1, #3, and #5; You can find these archived on: www.nwhorse.com) Try these maneuvers first with your horse's halter and 12' lead rope, and then progress to closer-in work and the use of the snaffle bit bridle set-up, and dressage whip.

Our first order of business is to free-up the hip. Review the exercises described in Clinics #1, #2, & #5 – Turn-on-the-Forehand, Sideways on a Circle, Work-in-Hand maneuvers. As the hip develops effortless movement, the horse will begin to seek the balance from his inside hind to his outside fore quarter. A little feel on the outside rein actually invites the movement of the inside hip.

Breathe, Think & Visualize the patterns and balance of movements you wish to achieve

Feel the air between you and the horse, and drive or roll it forward on the line you are seeking for the horse to travel, as if you had a huge ball between the two of you.

Allow the horse and yourself to seek a balanced, rhythmic dance.

Reward comes to both horse & human when the dance is effortless, and you both stop to congratulate one another!



Shoulder-In posture from Work-in-Hand positioning

Now let's apply these sideways maneuvers under saddle. (Note: It may be very helpful in assisting the human to understand the feeling of shoulder-in and leg-yield posture by having a competent helper on the ground, doing the work-in-hand maneuvers, while you are on-board.)

First visualize the pattern and movement that you are desiring to accomplish. Let's start with a few steps of shoulder-in to the left as an example.

See yourself riding the horse forward at the walk, with all four feet tracking up – inside feet on the inside of the railroad track, and the outside feet on the track nearest the wall. Next see yourself bringing the inside front feet slightly off the track, towards the inside of the arena, as if you were starting a circle. The hind feet continue to stay on track, with the inside hind foot traveling on the same line as the outside front foot.



Feel for a small compression of your left calf at or in front of the girth, the balance of your shoulder blade weight over your right seat bone, and a caressing of your fingers on both reins. The outside - support, or right rein invites the movement of the left hip, and the inside – active, or left rein simply keeps a slight bend in the horse to the left. Lengthen your right or outside leg ever so little, keeping it just behind the girth, and ready to help the horse should he (or you!) over bend to the left.

Focus slightly in the direction of travel, keeping your shoulders perpendicular to the ground, and basically at the same angle as the horse's shoulders.

Allow the movement to happen from the inside hip to the outside shoulder or rein. Don't try to PUSH or FORCE the horse sideways! This is a very human response and it essentially puts you and the horse out of balance. Trying to push the horse sideways will take away all rhythm, and will not allow progression towards self-carriage and lightness in your lateral movements.

Reward yourself and horse by going forward, on the original railroad track, with a mental and maybe even verbal – At-a Boy – Good Job!



Shoulder-In left, with the left hind foot and right front foot tracking on the same line

Putting Practical Applications to Shoulder-In & Leg-Yield Postures

There are a number of great books available to assist you with patterns and exercises to correctly develop your shoulder-in and leg-yield postures. Here are some that have helped me:

- The Handbook of Riding Essentials by Francois Lemaire de Ruffieu
- Gymnastic Exercises for Horses by Eleanor Russell

“The shoulder-in is without question the most useful and productive of all the exercises and lessons in the training dictionary and it is basic to all advanced dressage.”
(Advanced Dressage by Anthony Crossley)

I have found this statement to be quite true no matter what pursuit and jobs I have with my horse. These lateral movements will prepare you and the horse for correct canter work, for balanced transitions, and for straightness. Leg-yield and shoulder-in movements will loosen and tone your horse's muscles, strengthen his hindquarters, while engaging his “Attitude Filter” in a positive way.

They will help to create the picture of a balanced horse & rider that flows in a beautiful dance! TNT