

Received via e-mail from a Western-trained observer:

I was watching a student of yours working with a horse in training and making turns on the forehand. You should both know that turning on the forehand will not engage the horse's hind end. In fact, turning on the forehand disengages the hind end and basically stalls the horse's motion. You cannot get collection with the horse in neutral. To teach a horse to engage his hind end you must teach a horse to turn on his haunches. This will put his hind end under him and teach him to use himself in a correct manner.

Regards, Mary

BILL: This criticism wouldn't come only from a western rider. I've heard it from Europeans with a certain background as well. But specifically here's the background on what Mary saw: the horse in question is one of those "plodders" who's oblivious to his owner, drifts around long and flat, and needs in almost every sense to "get with program." What my student-trainer was doing was pushing the horse off her leg, making something akin to a big-angle leg yielding with the forehand on a small circle and the hindquarters on a much larger one.

With a horse like this one, the first job is just to get him forward off the leg *in real time*. The second is to make his forehand displaceable laterally. As Major Lindgren and I wrote in the USDF Instructors Manual, if you do this with your inner leg in the vicinity of the girth (not by bringing your inside leg back just to swing the quarters), you create a movable center of gravity that yields around his inside shoulder. Your modifying outside leg (behind the girth) channels his energy forward into your receiving, regulating outside rein. Forward thought is never lost. Forward movement is instantaneously available on demand.

When you can shift the horse's center of gravity laterally, he unblocks and becomes susceptible (try it) to a half halt that can displace his weight longitudinally and produce engagement. This isn't to say turns on the haunches aren't also valuable in the training process, but with a green horse (or one with a troubled background) it's more believable to begin with an exercise that lets him move away from a leg he's bent around than one which requires him to look in the direction he's turning.