

A Lateral Movement




This is a great picture of haunches-in. Asterios, Charlotte Jorst's 8-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding, is making it look so easy, from his lively and expressive collected trot to his 35-degree angle to the track and his uniform bend around my inside leg that creates four distinct tracks: outside fore, inside fore, outside hind and inside hind.

WORKBOOK

Part 3: Haunches-in

This licensed Reitlehrer FN shows you simple ways to introduce the movement and use it to increase collection, flexion and bend.

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IN HAUNCHES-IN, YOU SLIGHTLY BEND your horse around your inside leg so his forehead remains on the track and his quarters shift inward. He maintains a constant angle of approximately 35 degrees and looks and bends in the direction he's going, with his outside legs passing and crossing in front of his inside legs. If you were to look at him from the front, you'd see four distinct tracks: outside fore, inside fore, outside hind, inside hind.

Haunches-in is a very useful training tool. It increases your horse's agility, mobility and organization, and it confirms and improves on the qualities you began to develop with shoulder-in: engagement of the quarters, collection, flexion and bend. While the gymnasticizing benefits may seem to come from the crossing over of his *outside* hind, they actually derive from the increased engagement of his *inside* hind. As his body moves sideways over it, he bends his joints and carries even more weight.

The Gaits for Haunches-in

Unlike leg-yield and shoulder-in, haunches-in can be performed at the collected walk, trot and canter. At the **collected walk**, you and your horse can, of course, get a feel for the movement and start to figure out and coordinate your aids. Haunches-in at the walk can very specifically school your horse to move away from your outside leg. And I often use haunches-in in a very lively medium walk on a 10-meter circle in preparation for turn on the haunches or walk pirouette—this reminds my horse to stay active and lively as he shortens and collects his walk for the turn.

Collected trot is great for many horses learning haunches-in because of the natural fluidity of the gait. What's more, it produces the most suppling and gymnasticizing effect as your horse swings his diagonally paired legs forward and across. And, of course, the collected trot is the gait for the movement as it appears in Second Level Tests 2 and 3 (where, just to confuse you, the test writers use the French term *travers*, which is pronounced *trah-vair*).

At the **collected canter**, a 10- or 15-meter haunches-in circle increases collection and gets your horse more supple on the inside and more responsive

to your seat, leg and rein aids on the outside. He not only increases the engagement of his outside hind (the first leg to touch the ground after the moment of suspension), he brings his inside hip a bit lower, which encourages him to bend the hip, stifle and hock joints of his hindquarters for a collecting effect. When you get farther along, haunches-in on a circle prepares your horse for canter pirouette, but you must make sure the circle doesn't get too small or, eventually, you'll have haunches-in pirouettes, which will keep him from easily bringing his forehead around. A good rule of thumb: The smaller the canter circle, the less haunches-in you should ask for, and anytime the circle gets smaller than 10 meters, be sure to position your horse in shoulder-fore.

Prerequisites for Haunches-in

The prerequisites for haunches-in are the same as they were for last month's shoulder-in—leg-yield, a degree of collection, shoulder-fore, throughness or *Durchlassigkeit*, self-carriage and balance on an 8- or 10-meter circle. In general, I would say that you and your horse should also have mastered shoulder-in itself.

This raises a question that many of my students ask: Why does haunches-in follow shoulder-in in most training programs and in this workbook? To be perfectly honest, if it suits a horse's tendency, I often teach shoulder-in and haunches-in simultaneously. Still, while I don't have it on any authority, I think shoulder-in usually precedes haunches-in because most horses are crooked by nature and want to travel with their haunches in a little bit—often in one direction way more than in the other.

Our equestrian forefathers probably experimented and came to the conclusion that if you start doing lateral work by pushing the haunches to the left or right, a horse will just get more crooked and actually diminish his propulsive and carrying power. If you teach a horse to put his shoulders in front of his hips first—as you do in shoulder-fore and shoulder-in—you'll begin his lateral movement career by straightening him, which will encourage both hind legs to flex, carry more weight and push equally. At that point, you

Leg-yield to Haunches-in



A movement that Asterios already knows—leg-yield—makes for an easy introduction to haunches-in. I've come through the short end of the arena in collected trot and cut the corner at about the centerline so that he is approaching the long side on no more than a 30-degree angle—less than I'd ask for in a leg-yield because I intend to add bend when we get to the track. At that point, too wide an angle would endanger his balance and the quality of his lovely trot.



As he arrives at the rail, I begin to leg-yield: I establish an inside left flexion, sit more on my left seat bone and bring my left leg back to ask Asterios to move forward and sideways to the right. Because this is a leg-yield, he's staying straight through his body from poll to tail. Again, I'm making sure that the angle is not very great.

have more control over straightness and balance, and you can safely move his haunches around for positive results.

Training Tip: If your horse has a natural tendency to carry his haunches to the right, asking for a very “steep” haunches-in right all the way down the long side in the beginning could encourage his already “built-in” mistake—and you NEVER want to do that. Always use very light outside aids to bring his haunches right, with frequent 10-meter circles so he learns to respond to your inside leg. And for every one time you do haunches-in to the right, do it two times to the left, and always make sure that your horse has the same degree of angle both ways. If it's only 20 or 25 degrees to his hard side, make sure it's only 20 or 25 degrees to his easy side, and not 30 degrees. Rather than avoiding haunches-in to the easy side, make sure it's consistent with the difficult side.

Get Started

The easiest way to introduce haunches-in is with a movement that you and your horse already know and have mastered—leg-yield facing the long side—because it

helps you get the angle first and THEN add the bend (for leg-yield details see October 2007). I'll demonstrate this method in collected trot in the photos above, but you may want to try it first at the walk. As long as your horse doesn't get “stuck,” it may help you to concentrate on the feel of the angle and your aids.

But so many horses learn in so many different ways that yours may feel more comfortable if you establish the bend first and then add the angle. If so, introduce haunches-in on a 15- or 20-meter circle. On the right rein, with your horse aligned poll to tail with his spine on the track, start “thinking” about leg-yielding to the right, away from your outside leg. But instead of changing the flexion to the left and sitting on your left seat bone, maintain the flexion to the right, sit on your right seat bone and, as your horse stays bent, use your outside left leg to ask him to bring his haunches in on an angle. He should track on two concentric circles: His forehand straight on the outside circle and his haunches on the inside circle.

Whichever method you use, once your horse shows that he understands your

aids, move on to haunches-in as it is somewhat similar to that in the Second Level dressage tests: Circle 10 meters in the corner and do haunches-in down the long side. For details, see the photos on page 46. And finally, also on page 46, I'll show you how to straighten your horse after a haunches-in—not by pushing his haunches back to the rail behind his shoulders (which encourages crookedness), but by moving his shoulders away from the rail to in front of his haunches, then leg-yielding to the rail.

Haunches-in at the Canter

This is purely a schooling exercise that isn't called for in any test. But because cantering haunches-in encourages your horse to lower his inside hip, it increases the elasticity of his canter. A few things to keep in mind:

■ It's tempting to bend your horse's neck more to the inside than it should be, but this inhibits his inside hind leg's all-important ability to reach forward and under, then sideways. Focus instead on giving lots of small, soft half-halts on the outside rein, then releasing, but without

3



4



After a few strides of leg-yield, I gently and gradually—over a distance of 10 to 15 meters—ask Asterios to change his flexion from left to straight. Remember, a horse can't go from one flexion and bend to the other without at least a moment of straightness, so I sit evenly on my seat bones, give a little on the left rein and take a little on the right.

With my new inside right leg supporting Asterios at the girth, I rhythmically increase my new outside left leg to ask him to bend through his body and bring his haunches to the right. To help him, I sit with my weight a little more on my inside right seat bone and keep my hips parallel to his hips. At the same time, I keep my shoulders parallel to his shoulders, so my chest and eyes look straight down the long side. Asterios is uphill and bent, and by keeping his angle consistently shallow, I help rather than hinder him.

pulling back on the inside rein.

■ If your horse gets a bit sticky and starts hopping behind, immediately canter forward with a longer, more ground-covering jump in working canter. Move to a larger circle and try again, asking for a bit less angle and bend.

■ If your horse just doesn't want to accept your haunches-in aids, return to the trot or walk where the footfalls are clearer and the gaits are easier and less tiring on his legs. When he responds correctly at the walk or trot, try again at the canter.

Training Tip: When you start haunches-in at the canter, you want to have a ground person who can immediately tell you, "Your haunches are in too far," or, "Your horse is moving away from the circular track." Quite often, you can ask for haunches-in on an 18-meter circle, and without knowing it, you let your horse fall in, which defeats the suppling, strengthening purpose of the exercise. You always want to take advantage of an exercise to improve your horse but not let him take advantage of the exercise to be lazy. A ground person can see what you may not feel.

Haunches-in as a Test Movement

In Second Level Test 2, you ride haunches-in left from F to B, straighten, turn left at B and right at E, and ride haunches-in right from E to H. In Test 3, you ride shoulder-in right from K to E, circle right 10 meters at E, then ride haunches-in right from E to H (later, you repeat this series of movements to the left). Whether a corner or a circle precedes the haunches-in, be sure to maintain the bend so that all you have to do is bring your horse's haunches to the inside. If you go from bent to straight, you have the challenge of starting all over again, which can make the movement look rough and disorganized.

When you straighten, remember that sometimes what you do in schooling is not quite what the judge is looking for in a test. It's fine—and it's important—to make sure that you position your horse's forehead in front of his haunches, but in a test, you have to be careful that you don't get marked down for not being on the rail when you approach B or come into the corner at H. In addition to schooling the straightening as I've shown you, also prac-

tice putting your horse's forehead in front of his haunches without getting too far from the track.

Haunches-in Problem Solving

■ Your horse gets irregular and loses his rhythm. This is probably the biggest problem I see when students start to introduce haunches-in. While the angle for a confirmed haunches-in is about 35 degrees, in the beginning you don't want to ask for so much angle that your horse has to cross his front legs too much. This will ruin the quality of the haunches-in by disturbing his footfall and the fluidity of his trot. In fact, anytime you feel him shorten his trot or get irregular, either lessen the angle, ask for less bend or ride more forward to almost a working trot and it can usually be fixed.

■ You pull your horse's neck over and in. First, remember to release the inside rein and maintain enough outside rein. Then check that you're not pushing your outside arm and hand forward because you're turning your upper body too much. Once you've addressed your position and aids, concentrate on getting your horse to look where he's going. Down the long side,

10-meter Circle to Haunches-in



After coming through the corner in collected trot, I position Asterios for haunches-in right with a 10-meter circle to the right, because the movement is always easier when it's set up with some kind of bending aid. In Second Level Test 2, for example, the bend takes the form of a corner; in Second Level Test 3, it is a 10-meter circle such as this one, that's ridden at E, and later at B. So this exercise not only gymnasticizes Asterios, it gives me a chance to practice the test movement.



Asterios stays energetic and bent around my inside leg and not falling against it. This is going to help me remind him that he's supposed to bend through his rib cage in the haunches-in and not just allow his haunches to fall in. He's also moving nicely from my inside leg to my outside rein, another prerequisite for a good haunches-in.

make sure he's looking at the far corner. On a circle, make sure his forehead is perpendicular to and his spine is parallel to the circular track.

■ You horse has too much angle and bend (and so gets irregular and loses rhythm). This usually happens when you try too hard, override the movement and ask for too much with your outside leg. Instead of starting a "battle of aids" by pressing harder with your inside leg, use less OUTSIDE leg and only add more if necessary. If that doesn't help, use your inside leg to ride a little more forward to the outside rein. In the beginning, ask for only a few strides at a time, so the angle doesn't get so large that the movement deteriorates.

■ You sit to the outside. You're probably using your outside leg so much that it's literally pulling you to the outside. This can be a hard problem to fix if you don't ride with mirrors or a ground person. And once you get accustomed to sitting to the outside, you can begin to think that it's normal. The best solution, of course, is to ride with mirrors or a ground person. Whether you have them or not, try to keep your aids very light—so light that they won't displace you. Or ride a circle and ask yourself, "Am I sitting straight on my horse's back? Are my shoulders and hips perpendicular to the track? Do I have equal weight on both seat bones?" Ask for haunches-in and try to maintain that same feeling, but anytime you start to feel crooked or slip to the outside, go back to straight on the circle and restore your position.

Finish the Haunches-in



The correct way to finish a lateral movement is to align a horse's forehead in front of his haunches—his engine. Pushing the haunches back behind his shoulders will just make him crooked, and we never want that to happen! I've been in haunches-in, but by slightly relaxing my outside leg, asking a bit more on my outside rein and sitting evenly on both seat bones, I'm starting to bring Asterios' shoulders away from the rail and into the school.



As we approach the rail at the end of the circle, and about a stride before finishing it, I bring my outside leg farther back and close it more to ask Asterios to go slightly sideways down the long side while maintaining the even bend through his body.



I don't focus too much on my outside leg. Instead, I try to make sure I keep Asterios between my guarding inside leg and my outside rein. Yes, I am moving him sideways with my outside leg, but I'm not *shoving* him over. Instead, I have my weight to the inside, and my inside leg is serving to keep him moving forward and not falling to the inside. If, at any time, I were to lose the bend or angle, I'd immediately circle 10 meters.

Asterios' honors at the 40th Annual California Dressage Society Championship Show in October 2007:

CDS Adult Amateur Prix St. Georges Horse of the Year • CDS Adult Amateur Intermediaire I Horse of the Year • Great American Insurance Group/USDF Region 7 Adult Amateur Prix St. Georges Champion • Great American Insurance Group/USDF Region 7 Adult Amateur Intermediaire I Reserve Champion



Asterios is now perfectly straight and aligned on the second track where his haunches were in the first photo. His hind legs are following perfectly in the track of his forelegs, and I'm making sure my inside right leg is strong enough to deal with the whole horse, because I don't want to simply bring his forehead back to the track.



And Asterios stays straight and aligned through his body as he leg yields back out to the track. This is a correct, gradual method for schooling, but in the show ring, I'd try to make the transition less obvious and more efficient. I always want to ride correctly, but I don't want the judge to take points off because I'm so far from the rail that I have an inaccurate or sloppy corner. **PH**