

A Lateral Movement



In this renvers—or haunches-out—Charlotte Jorst's 8-year-old Dutch Warmblood gelding Asterios is balanced and uphill and is looking straight down the rail in the direction he's moving. He's nicely bent through his body and is maintaining an angle that allows you to see four distinct tracks: outside right fore, inside left fore, outside right hind, inside left hind.

WORKBOOK

Part 4: Renvers

A licensed Reithlehrer FN explains why this counterintuitive movement helps you rev up your horse's response.

By Volker Brommann
Photos by Tass Jones



Renvers (pronounced *ron-vair*) is the inverse or “mirror-image” of last month’s lateral movement, haunches-in. You could call it “haunches-out,” because your horse’s tail is toward the wall and his forehead is inside the track, with his forelegs moving straight ahead on the line of travel. Except for the fact that his “inside” is now toward the outside of the arena, the same principles and conditions that apply to haunches-in apply to renvers: Your horse is flexed and slightly bent around your inside leg. He looks in the direction he is traveling. He maintains a constant angle of about 35 degrees, with his outside legs passing and crossing in front of his inside legs. From the front or the back, you can see four tracks: outside fore, inside fore, outside hind, inside hind.

Renvers is a required movement in Second Level Test 4 where, because it follows shoulder-in, it demonstrates effectiveness, agility, obedience and coordination. Still, not everyone schools renvers very much or very often. As a lateral movement, it doesn’t really accomplish more than haunches-in to improve collection, strength or suppleness. Renvers offers the same gymnasticizing and straightening effect, and also improves impulsion, suppleness and contact. The question, then, is ...

Why Bother With Renvers?

You have the rail supporting and guiding your horse’s quarters, so it is an excellent way to establish and maintain a lateral bend. You bring your horse’s outside shoulder in and position it underneath him (where it becomes his inside shoulder), so it is a very good correction if he has a tendency to lean and fall on his outside shoulder. It is a different way to increase control and position, so it encourages you to be even more coordinated with your aids, and it asks your horse to concentrate even more intently on them—always a benefit, and one that will really pay off when he needs almost total coordination and attentiveness for trot and

canter half-passes and zigzags.

As with haunches-in, renvers at the collected walk allows you and your horse to familiarize yourselves with the movement and coordinate your aids. Renvers at the collected trot produces the best suppling effect. And renvers at the collected canter on the long side can be very useful for improving collection, because it really engages the outside hind leg. (Renvers on a circle rarely helps the canter because it can alter the quality of the gait and make it choppy.)

When you start to ride counter-canter around the short side, a little renvers-positioning can help your horse hold the counter-canter and not fall into trot, cross-canter or make a flying change. A very short moment of renvers-like positioning on a trot circle can occasionally be helpful if your horse has a tendency to overbend to the inside and let his haunches fall in. But you have to be very careful not to “abuse” this straightening exercise or your horse will get crooked the other way.

Because renvers feels a little unnatural, it seems harder, although the difficulty is mostly mental. For you, it’s odd to have to sit on your left inside seat bone when the wall is on your left side, for example. And while most horses are very willing to lean their shoulders against the wall and take their haunches away, you very rarely see one that says, “Oh, I want to let my haunches fall out to the wall and my shoulders fall in.” Besides, at almost every step in your horse’s training—on circles, in corners, on the rail, in previous lateral work—you’ve stressed the opposite position to some degree or other, so that by now it seems easier, more logical and more inviting. For that reason alone, renvers is valuable, because it brings you another step closer to the ideal in dressage: to ride your horse anywhere in the arena, in any position.

Get Started

Because your horse has to be bent to the outside of the arena in renvers, there is no simple, obvi-

ous way to set him up for it, as with a 10-meter circle such as you used for shoulder-in and haunches-in. The best way to introduce the idea of this fairly counterintuitive movement, then, is to ride straight down the long side of your arena and smoothly ask your horse to go from an inside flexion to straight to an outside flexion (remember, you never go from one flexion or bend to the other without at least a moment of straightness). Do this gradually, smoothly and repeatedly down the long side, as I demonstrate in the photos at the right, until your horse is very willing and able to go from inside to outside flexion with ease and balance.

Now come through the corner onto the long side and gradually and smoothly, and over the course of several strides, ask for renvers as I'm doing in the photos below. Straighten your horse before the end of the arena by allowing his shoulders to return to a position in front of his quarters.

I don't recommend riding through the corner in renvers. It is best kept on the long side, the quarterline or the centerline, where, if you want to use it to increase agility, you can ride it in conjunction with shoulder-in, haunches-in or leg-yield. On the centerline where you have the room, you can also circle in the correct direction of bend.

First, Change the Flexion



I've come through the corner and am riding straight down the long side, creating activity in the trot and making sure Asterios is even between both leg and rein aids. I'm also making sure I'm balanced evenly in the saddle as I start a soft take and give on the outside left rein to make him supple to the left. That way, I can smoothly and gradually ...

Now Add Angle and Bend



I use the corner from the short side to keep Asterios even on both reins and up and energetic so that when I arrive on the long side I won't have to adjust. Right from the beginning, I can start to ask for renvers with the same quality of rhythm and energy in the trot.



I prepare Asterios for the renvers by carefully leaving some space between the wall and his haunches. He won't feel claustrophobic, and I won't feel as if I'm having to SHOVE him out—he and I are both going to want the feeling that I'm bending him around my new inside left leg nearest the wall.



... change his flexion to the left. I keep my legs evenly on Asterios so his haunches don't drift left or right, and he maintains rhythmic, forward activity and uphill balance. At the same time, I keep a soft but solid contact on the right rein to ensure that even though a change of flexion has taken place, Asterios is evenly into both reins. My weight doesn't change because I'm just asking for a slight change of flexion in the poll and not for any sideways movement.



After several strides of outside flexion, I smoothly bring Asterios back to an inside flexion, which, again, can take place over 8 to 10 meters depending on his suppleness. He's going nicely forward and without fuss or argument, and we've had two changes of flexion while the rhythm and activity have stayed consistent, energetic and rhythmical throughout.



I begin to ask for the renvers by sitting deeper on my new inside *left* seat bone and bringing my left leg forward toward its new inside position at the girth. I bring my new outside right leg back behind the girth as I begin to gradually change the flexion to the left. Both of my legs are responsible for keeping Asterios moving energetically forward and maintaining the rhythm of the trot.



And here we are in renvers. I'm looking straight down the rail with my shoulders perpendicular to the track and parallel to Asterios's shoulders, but I've turned my seat so my hips are looking into the arena—parallel to Asterios' hips. My rein aids are elastic. I never hold the left inside rein too long, and I encourage Asterios to chew the bit by moving it slightly so he's willing to accept the left flexion. With small half-halts on the right, outside rein, I keep his shoulder from going too far away from the track.

Second Level Shoulder-in to Renvers



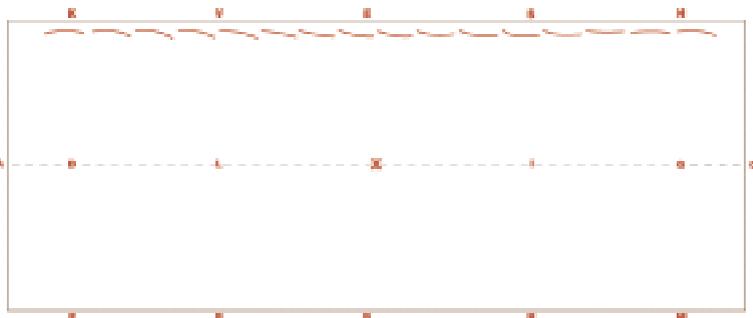
Even though I'm riding the shoulder-in right, I'm already THINKING about the renvers left and the fact that the left rein, which is now my outside rein, will soon become my inside rein. While I want the feeling that Asterios is even in both reins, I'm giving him the idea that he's going to change the flexion and bend. More give and take than normal on the left rein keeps him supple in his poll and musculature, without blocking what's going to be his new inside left hind leg once he's in the renvers.



As I begin the transition, I stay supple in my hips so I don't disturb Asterios' movement, and so I can really follow his back and he can clearly and unequivocally feel my aids: my weight changing from my inside right seat bone to my new inside left seat bone; my old outside left leg moving forward to the girth and becoming my new inside driving, supporting leg; my old inside right leg moving back from the girth and becoming my new outside leg, encouraging his haunches to move left and his outside right hind to step forward and sideways toward his inside left shoulder.



Now, in renvers, my weight is clearly on my new inside left seat bone, and my new outside right shoulder is sufficiently forward for my shoulders to be parallel to Asterios's shoulders. My inside left leg at the girth maintains impulsion and my outside right leg a bit behind the girth maintains the lateral bend around my inside leg. It also ensures that Asterios' outside right hind doesn't step sideways, but crosses close to the inside left hind in the direction of the inside left fore and his center of gravity. He is very uphill and NOT diving down onto his left shoulder.



The photos and diagram above illustrate movements 8 and 9 in Second Level Test 4—shoulder-in right from K to E and renvers left from E to H. Earlier in the test, movements 4 and 5 ask for shoulder-in left from F to B and renvers right from B to M.

As I've said before, no two horses learn the same way. Yours may catch on to renvers faster if you ask for a haunches-in left, say, first on the centerline, then on the quarterline to the left of the centerline, then on the second track to the left of the quarterline about two or three feet to the right of the rail. Keep moving the haunches-in left closer and closer to the rail until you get there, and he'll be in renvers left.

You can come through the corner on the right hand, turn as if you're going to go across the diagonal, and with your horse's haunches toward the rail and his body on an angle of about 35 degrees, ask for a leg-yield left. Remember, when your horse leg-yields, he moves forward and sideways, in this case, by virtue of his inside right legs passing and crossing in front of his outside left legs, but he'll basically stay straight through his body except for a slight flexion to the right at his poll.

Sit a hint more on your inside right seat bone, with your right "driving" leg slightly behind the girth to keep your horse going forward and his inside hind stepping sideways and forward in front of his left hind. Keep your left leg slightly behind the girth, guarding his haunches against falling out. After a few strides of leg-yield, smoothly change the flexion in his poll and jaw from right to straight to left. Add a little bending by sitting on your new inside left seat bone, bringing your right leg back and your left leg forward, and you'll be in renvers!

Alternatively, you can take advantage of a "setting-up" circle, which you can't do on the long side. Ride a diagonal line from M to X, say, then leg-yield left down the centerline to L. At L circle left 8 or 10 meters, and as you return to L, ask for renvers left down the centerline. You will have very clearly taken your horse through left flexion to left bend to left renvers.

Be prepared in any of these methods for your horse to say, "This is weird!" Reassure him by keeping the distance you travel in renvers to a minimum. And always straighten him by bringing his forehead toward the wall in front of his haunches and riding forward. If he has a bit more difficulty bending right than left, do renvers to the right one or

two times more than to the left.

The Second Level Test Movement

In Second Level Test 4, movements 4 and 5 ask for shoulder-in left from F to B, and renvers right from B to M. Movements 8 and 9 ask for shoulder-in right from K to E and renvers left from E to H. In training, such a transition teaches you to control your horse while you change his bend. In a test, it demonstrates your agility as you shift your seat and aids from one side to the other. And it demonstrates your horse's agility and obedience by smoothly changing his bend from one side to the other while maintaining practically the same angle.

The directive ideas for the shoulder-in are "Quality of trot, the angle and bend, balance and collection." To those ideas, the directives for the renvers add "Transition from shoulder-in" and "straightness at M." The challenge here is huge, because the transitions and the renvers have double coefficients. This makes for twice the score if you do them well—or double the loss if you do them badly.

The key to success? Don't HURRY! The judges don't want to see you swing your horse from one bend and angle to the other in one stride, even though the test calls for the movements to change at the letter. It's going to take several strides and quite a bit of horse and rider coordination to smoothly change flexion, bend, angle and your weight and aids without losing footfall, suppleness or harmony. So give yourself enough time and room before B or E to do that. To see how, look at the photos at left.

Note that technically, the angle of your renvers should eventually be a little bit bigger than that of your shoulder-in, so your horse moves on four tracks instead of three. But in the initial learning process, err on the conservative side and maintain the same three-track angle to avoid confusion and a loss of balance and rhythm.

Renvers Problem-Solving

■ **Your horse loses bend or rhythm.** Either straighten him and go forward to refresh the trot or, if you feel that his trot is still good enough, make a transi-

tion to shoulder-in or leg-yield and ride that for several strides to confirm with a movement your horse knows that he moves away from your sideways driving aids. It's OK to return to renvers when you've restored forwardness and rhythm and your horse's easy obedience to your sideways driving aids.

■ **Your horse has too much angle with too little bend in his body.** This problem challenges his balance and rhythm and is usually caused because you moved his forehead too far away from the rail or your sideways driving aids are so strong that you're pushing his haunches against the wall. If you precede the renvers with leg-yield or shoulder-in, or if you come from straight on the long side, be sure that you first make your horse supple on the side to which you're going to bend him so that you don't have to overdrive with your sideways aids. Occasionally, too much angle results when your horse is lazy. You push and push, but instead of getting a better trot, you get too much angle. If reducing your sideways driving aids doesn't produce the proper angle, slightly straighten your horse and ride him more forward.

■ **Your horse overbends his neck,** usually because you are overusing the inside rein. Increase your half-halting outside rein and use more of a softening inside rein.

■ **The angle is too shallow.** This often happens when your horse drifts his shoulder back to the wall because you aren't effective enough with your inside leg (the one nearest the wall). It can also happen because your horse just doesn't enjoy bending very much. If, for example, you're riding renvers down the M to F long side, cure this problem by straightening your horse and riding a shallow diagonal toward A. As you arrive at the quarterline, ask for a leg-yield left to get him crossing over, then gradually change the flexion and add the bend to make a renvers. (Again, use mirrors or have a friend serve as eyes on the ground to make sure that you're doing renvers left with your horse's quarters on the quarterline and not haunches-in right.) ■

Next month: Volker explains how to ride a half-pass.