

A Lateral Movement



This clearly shows that Asterios has one of the basic requirements of half-pass—a desire to go forward even as he moves sideways. He and I are in good balance, and he is obviously attentive to my aids. There is a nice bending of his body around my inside left leg and both fore and hind legs are expressively crossing and reaching forward. The impression of softness, fluidity, rhythm, energy and ease makes it seem that this half-pass is totally Asterios' idea.

WORKBOOK

Part 5: Half-Pass

A licensed Reitlehrer FN explains how this movement increases suppleness, engagement and agility.

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Photos by Tass Jones

ALF-PASS—THE FINAL LATERAL

H movement of this workbook—is best described as a variation on haunches-in. Your horse is bent around your inside leg and he is flexed and looking in the direction in which he is moving. But instead of traveling along the wall, he follows a diagonal track across the arena. Because his outside legs pass and cross in front of his inside legs, he has a bit less bend through his body than he does in haunches-in—he stays almost parallel to the wall with his forehand slightly in advance of his hindquarters. Remember, his shoulders are slightly narrower than his quarters, so his forehand has to lead a little to bring his inside shoulder more into the direction of the movement.

In schooling and in dressage tests—where half-pass first appears at Third Level—you can go from the centerline to the track or the track to the centerline. You can go all the way across a short or long diagonal from wall to wall. Or you can “zigzag” where, say, you half-pass left from F to X, then change the flexion and bend and half-pass right to M.

The Wonders of Half-Pass

This is a beautiful movement as well as a great gymnasticizing one. Your horse seems to dance with ease, grace and agility. He is cadenced and self-carrying, his shoulders are free and mobile, his outside hind leg is active and expressive, and his inside hind leg is well-engaged.

Half-pass has essentially the same purpose as haunches-in. It supples and improves your horse’s collection by increasing engagement behind. But it also increases agility: He becomes more flexible and responsive (particularly in the zigzag) and you refine the timing and coordination between your inside and outside aids and your driving and restraining aids. This in turn creates and maintains cadence and his forward-moving desire. So important is this idea, in fact, that it is a requirement in the US Equestrian Federation Rule Book that the cadence and quality of gait in half-pass must be identical to the cadence and quality of gait on a straight or curved line.

Just as with haunches-in, half-pass is performed at the collected trot and canter (although the latter is beyond the scope of this article). You can do half-pass at

the collected walk to learn the feel of the movement, begin to coordinate your aids and get your horse more obedient to them, but the suspension in trot or canter actually makes it easier for him to bend and maintain cadence.

Get Started

You and your horse are coming to half-pass with a lot of advantages. Shoulder-in has taught you to put his forehand in front of his haunches. Haunches-in and renvers have helped you place his haunches where you want them relative to the long side. What’s more, you already know the aids for half-pass because they’re the same as the aids for haunches-in. You sit with more weight on your inside seat bone, with your hips parallel to your horse’s hips and your shoulders parallel to his shoulders. With your inside rein, you create enough flexion to be able to see his left eyelash; with your outside half-halting rein, you control tempo and “receive” the movement. You keep your inside leg rhythmically active at the girth to move him forward *and* support him so he doesn’t fall sideways, and you rhythmically press your outside leg a bit behind the girth to ask him to bring his haunches in and bend evenly around your inside leg from poll to tail.

The best way to introduce half-pass is to use haunches-in. Come around the short side of the arena at the sitting trot on the left hand, say, and turn across the diagonal. Ride straight on the diagonal to about the quarterline, then begin to apply the aids for haunches-in left, and ride haunches-in along the diagonal line as if it’s the track on the long side (see diagram, page 49). It helps to imagine what I tell my students: that I’ve come to the arena, taken my tools and some plywood, and built a wall on that diagonal line. For details on this method, see the photos on pages 48–49.

But as I’ve said before, no two horses learn the same way. While haunches-in helps some horses to learn to half-pass, your horse may prefer to start with another movement he already knows—leg-yield. Coming from the right in the collected trot, turn right down centerline at C. Ride straight down the centerline to make sure your horse has impulsion and a forward desire. Then at I, begin leg-yielding left toward



Half-Pass from the Diagonal



I've come around the short side and turned onto the diagonal line at H heading toward F. For a few strides I keep Asterios perfectly straight on the line to make sure that he's moving forward with balance, energy and impulsion, and that we both know exactly where we're going. It's always important for accuracy and the correct execution of a movement to have a specific "destination."

Now that Asterios knows where we're going, I start to ask him for a little haunches-in by flexing and bending him to the left. I sit more deeply on my left seat bone, keep my forward-moving inside left leg at the girth and move my outside leg behind the girth to encourage him to move his haunches left. I keep my seat parallel to his hindquarters and my torso parallel to his shoulders. Even though I've added the aids for haunches-in, I maintain the exact same tempo and line, with Asterios' right shoulder on the diagonal track just as surely as if I had physically built a wall there.

the letter F, with your horse flexed in the poll to the right and moving away from your inside right leg. As you approach the quarterline, change the flexion in the poll to the left (your horse still moving away from your right leg), put your weight into your new inside left seat bone and begin to gradually give the aids for the half-pass left. Your horse may not give you a "performance-level" half-pass, but he'll be learning to continue moving away from one leg while you change the flexion and add the new bend.

He may catch on better if you turn left down the centerline at C, ride straight to about the letter I and turn left onto a diagonal line toward F. After a few meters, begin your aids for half-pass left. The advantage of this method is that you and your horse are both focused on going forward on this shorter, shallower diagonal line before adding the aids for the half-pass, which preserves the fluidity of the movement. And if he's like many horses, he may like to go more sideways than forward, and this is a good way to channel his energy and activity directly toward F.

If he doesn't bend particularly well, track left through the short side coming past C, and circle 10 meters at H or S. As you return to the rail, half-pass using the circle's bend and flexion as well as the way it positions your horse with his shoulders slightly leading. At the centerline, go straight. You can also half-pass only to the quarterline, then refresh the bend and position with another 10-meter circle. Half-pass to the centerline, ride another 10-meter circle, then half-pass to the rail.

Another way to take advantage of the circle is to head down the rail to the end of the long side. Before the corner, ride a 10-meter half-circle from the rail to the centerline, then half-pass back to the rail on a figure that's somewhat like a teardrop. Just be sure that as you finish your half-circle, you establish and follow a precise diagonal track to a letter on the rail.

Finally, your horse may be ready for half-pass sooner than you think. In this workbook I've given you the logical, accepted progression of lateral exercises, but many times I've introduced half-pass as early as shoulder-in. As long as I'm not

forcing the horse, I might turn down centerline, ride a little shoulder-fore, put my outside leg back and if he offers me a little half-pass, it's like a gift! Anytime a horse's natural reaction toward lateral work is positive, and there is forwardness and fluidity within the work, I integrate it into my training program, because doing things a *little* bit out of order is not against the law! The only thing that IS against the law is kicking or forcing to MAKE a horse do something when he's not physically or mentally ready.

The Third Level Half-Pass

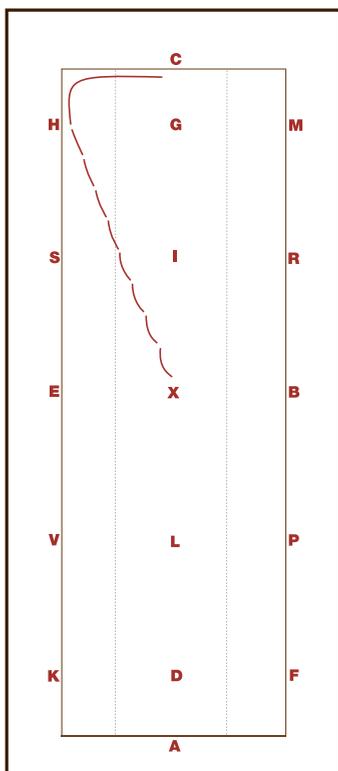
Half-pass isn't introduced until Third Level because, without the support of the wall, your horse has to have a higher degree of collection, cadence, self-carriage and suppleness than at Second Level. Still, the test-writers want to help and encourage you as much as they can, so in Third Level Test 1, you set up the proper positioning with a collected trot 10-meter half-circle to the centerline, then you half-pass back to the rail in a teardrop pattern. In Third Level Test 2, you get set up with a



I've now added a bit more bending, but Asterios is still basically parallel to the long side as he moves forward and sideways. Here you can start to see how well we stay on the imaginary "wall" of the diagonal line—the little bush in the corner is still directly behind Asterios' right shoulder and my right foot. I am so insistent about this point because more than simple accuracy is involved. If I allowed Asterios to deviate from the line, he'd be more likely to lose his balance.



By now Asterios has settled into the half-pass with energy, balance and a clear desire to go forward and sideways. Again, he very much looks as if he's doing it all on his own.



Nearing the centerline, I ask myself, "Do I want to continue all the way across the arena, circle left 10 meters or soften my half-pass aids and go straight down the centerline?" Because Asterios looks and feels perfectly comfortable maintaining the bend, cadence and forward/sideways movement, I will continue to F. If the quality of his trot or bend had changed at all, I would circle to restore the bend and balance or straighten and follow the centerline. I would NOT go straight on the diagonal line. That just teaches a horse that it's OK to "fade" out of half-pass position.

Half-Pass from the Centerline



I've turned left at C onto the centerline and am riding Asterios perfectly straight while, as always, I check for balance, cadence, impulsion and the forward quality of the trot.



Satisfied that all of that is in good order, I half-halt and slightly shift my weight to my left seat bone so I begin to put Asterios in a little bit of a shoulder-fore left position. This establishes a left flexion, places his forehand in advance of his hindquarters and indicates the diagonal line on which he'll be traveling. I don't try to push him sideways. It is difficult for a horse to go directly from shoulder-fore to half-pass because his crossing legs must change from the inside left to the outside right. Instead, I half-halt and ...

collected trot shoulder-in on the rail, then you half-pass to the centerline. And in Third Level Test 3, you circle 10 meters from the centerline to the rail and half-pass from the rail to the centerline.

In all these movements, two points are VERY important to remember. First, if you're going to half-pass left, for example, make sure that your horse's forehand starts and stays slightly in advance of his hindquarters by positioning him in shoulder-fore left for a stride or two. Second, it is very difficult for him to go directly from shoulder-fore or shoulder-in left to half-pass left because his crossing legs must change from the inside left to the outside right. As I demonstrate in the photos above, riding at least one straight diagonal stride improves the fluency, balance and ease of the transition from shoulder-in or shoulder-fore.

Half-Pass Problem Solving

■ Your horse tilts his head and drops his inside ear. Check first that you aren't inadvertently crossing your inside hand over the withers and creating an uneven con-

nection. If your aids are OK, your horse may not be accepting the bend very well. Use a bit more inside leg to ride him more "forward" toward your outside rein as you simultaneously, carefully and momentarily raise your inside hand a tiny bit, almost as if to "invite" him to pick up his head, then return your hand to the normal position.

■ Your horse leans on his inside shoulder, which reduces the freedom and mobility in his forehand and the impulsion and engagement of his inside hind leg. Interestingly enough, he often leans on his inside shoulder because he's not using his inside hind leg enough! He may also be overbent in his neck. So encourage more inside hind activity with your inside leg at the girth, and half-halt on the outside rein to straighten his neck. You may even need to ride a circle to reinforce his poll-to-tail bend and rebalance him with your inside leg to your outside half-halting rein so his shoulders are little more upright. Do *not* ask him to half-pass again until you feel that he is completely rebalanced.

■ Your horse loses cadence, rhythm and activity and starts to "shuffle." Quite often,

this happens when you push him into a steeper angle with more crossing than he's able to handle because he's not yet agile or strong enough to carry the weight with his inside hind. A steeper angle is not necessarily better! A better half-pass is balanced and cadenced with a beautiful trot that makes your horse MORE brilliant, not less. The solution: Ride him more forward on a shallower line—from M to A, for example—until he gets stronger.

■ Your horse's haunches trail. Make the angle less steep and think for three or four strides as if you're leg-yielding in the same direction. Quite often, the crossing of his leg-yielding "inside" legs will loosen that side of his body enough that when you go back to the half-pass, his "outside" legs will be more able to cross over and keep his haunches from trailing.

■ You sit to the outside. This often happens when your horse doesn't bend so well and you begin to so overuse your outside leg that you almost end up pulling yourself to the outside. The way to restore the bend and get your seat in proper balance again is to ride a 10-meter circle. ■



... with the diagonal line clear in both our minds and Asterios really well established between my rein and leg aids, I ride at least one straight diagonal stride. This facilitates the switch in crossing his legs, which improves the fluency, balance and ease of the transition from shoulder-fore. It's nothing that's apparent to an observer because I half-halt and add my half-passing aids and ...

... in the next step, Asterios is moving sideways and forward in a balanced, fluent half-pass. It all has happened relatively quickly but not in a hurry. I've taken my time and thought about what I wanted, and Asterios has had a chance to say, "Oh, hello! Something new is happening! Let's do it." I tell my students, "Preparing is a lot better than repairing, as long as you don't *over-prepare* to where you're wasting time." Asterios is actively crossing his hind legs and he's evenly bent. It's not a Grand Prix half-pass but it's great for a beginner and very correct.

Half-Pass Mistakes



This is terrible. Anytime a horse's nose is farther to the inside than his hip, a half-pass will be harder. Asterios is on his forehand and very overbent in his neck with almost no bend in his body. I'm sitting far to the outside and instead of supporting him with my outside rein, I'm taking too much inside rein as if to "pull" him into the half-pass. He's lost his fluidity AND his balance. I should sit level with a bit more weight on my inside left seat bone, straighten Asterios with less left rein and many more half-halts on the right rein and ride a diagonal line for several strides. I should establish a "flexion" only before beginning to ask for the half-pass with the outside leg.

In this half-pass to the right, Asterios is haunches-fore, a common error that diminishes the quality of the trot and keeps him from crossing his front legs as well as he should. I used far too much outside left leg before indicating the direction in which we should travel. To fix the problem, I should ride straight down the centerline, then create a diagonal line from the centerline to the track before I apply my outside leg. Alternatively, I could straighten Asterios, circle 10 meters to the right to establish the proper bending, then half-pass out of the circle, but ensure that Asterios' forehand leads by waiting a little longer before using my outside left leg aid.