

Training For Courage

By Paul Dufresne



Ljibbe shoulder-in cordeo

SIMPLICITIES AND COMPLEXITIES OF THE SHOULDER-IN

The shoulder-in or haunches out is one of the most useful moves that any rider or horse person can learn -- what we often forget is to how to apply it to practical situations.

they are receptive to whatever suggestions we might have. The easiest way to set up the shoulder-in or leg yield is from a circle. Bending properly on a circle and releasing the poll was covered in previous articles, so it will be briefly reviewed.

Circling or bending a horse properly releases negative tension, but also allows the horse to better use its ring of muscles -- effectively increasing athletic ability by decreasing emotional, mental and physical tension.

On the ground we can ask our horse to go ahead of us by driving it forward in a circle. When the horse starts to understand going forward on a circle with you travelling near it, you can begin to slowly tap it with your hand, elbow, or lead line at the ribcage, where your leg would be if you were riding. Through repetition, the horse will start to shift its weight to the outside shoulder on the circle. Gentle pressure on the lead line or rein will ask it to bring its head down softly.

Some horses may need a stronger nudge or an energetic tap on the ribs to understand moving away from the pressure to initiate a proper bend. Expect some resistance if they have been worked regularly in a state of negative contraction by moving in circles counterflexed or inverted.

With repetition, the horse will begin to respond to lighter pressure. When the horse begins to move away laterally, a small nudge on the lead line or the bit by opening the rein to the inside will further relax the horse and facilitate the bend. Once the horse has acquired a consistent bend in its entire top line from nose to tail we need to pursue the finish.

When lateral flexion is achieved, we can ask for vertical flexion. This is where we start to change the angle of pressure with the rein hand. When the horse is responding to us on the circle with a nice bend, we can move the rein or line closer to the shoulder of the horse and give it a slight tinkle or a momentary hold back -- until the horse yields a bit at the poll. This vibration, on only one rein or the lead line, will start to encourage the horse to release the poll. As you repeat this exercise, eventually the horse's head will appear to dangle on the vertical -- just balancing on the end of its neck -- and the neck will have that soft looking, elegant arch. The pressure on

the ribcage combined with the slight pressure on the lead line or rein causes a reflexive relaxation in the horse it cannot control or ignore. Repetition increases the state of well-being.

We have a powerful tool to build the well-being of our horse when we can do a shoulder-in or leg yield. The release of the poll facilitates the lateral movements and the lateral movements facilitate the release of the poll -- this creates a more balanced and flexible horse and brings the horse to that rewarding, feel-good zone. Once in this zone, anything you ask of the horse will be received with more compliance, lightness and softness. This is the starting point of training for physical performance.

Anxious or resistive horses can be persuaded to try more positively by doing a leg yield or a shoulder-in because of the combined relaxing effects of the aids. This will cause the horse to feel good whether it wants to or not! By repeating from one bend to the other with a differential rein or lead line pressure, never bracing the horse, often a very anxious horse will start to dribble from the mouth the second you stop and rest. This technique can even be used on the trail where you might have less space to work with, or in a show situation if your horse becomes anxious.

Take it a step further by dragging a scary object inside of the circle while moving your horse bent around it. The horse may want to leave and escape but by circling around the prop it will often go into a shoulder-in or leg yield just because of the position. While riding I do the very same thing but have the prop at a further distance and am always ready to release it if my horse gets too concerned or get back on the ground and prepare further. Again, start from the ground and then try it in the saddle.

The physiological changes from being in this positive shape will vary somewhat from horse to horse, but all will start to relax more than before. If you get good at this you will wonder what happened to your chicken on a string.

Why is the shoulder-in important?

- 1) Taps into the natural relaxation reflexes of the horse.
- 2) Improves engagement and use of the hindquarters.
- 3) Makes it difficult for a horse to get sassy and buck.
- 4) Improves flexibility and balance when practiced from both sides, removing tension on both sides of the spine.
- 5) Lateral flexion precedes vertical flexion. When we set the lateral bend with our leg and touch the head or mouth of the horse, the horse loosens tension at the poll, allowing vertical flexion.
- 6) Control of the poll decreases anxiety in novel situations (trail, jumping and show ring).

Training For Courage, cont'd

7) Foundation movement leading to leg yield, half-pass and lead changes.



Ljibbe bend/shoulder-in with extra props



Ljibbe ride cordeo, So-She along for the ride



Padrino at all out canter accepting flying prop

8) In competition, a movement enhancer in flat classes, steal it down the rail or in corners.

Please check the website for a slide show demonstrating the application of the shoulder-in in practical situations.

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Paul Dufresne is a writer, performer, trainer and clinician in Kelowna, BC, who educates in Natural Horsemanship; Classical Arts; Liberty and Circensic Dressage. He teaches people to understand horses, but more importantly how to tap into their relaxation reflexes in ways seldom seen in North America. In doing so, he is able to guide people in creative experiences where the human learns to be an effective, safe leader. The horse learns to be more emotionally secure and will respectfully follow while developing athleticism in a mutually courageous manner by having a deeper understanding of how they affect each other.



Padrino showing trail application of shoulder-in road/traffic/prop