

Progressions For Collection Without Tack

Part 3 by Paul Dufresne

Photos by Laurie Munsell

In the September issue I discussed how we begin to teach a horse to offer roundness and control of the poll. We started this with a verbal cue, touch of the lead line and halter, whip, bat, cordeo, hand, or a combination of these. To better understand this you should get familiar with the first installment to get the most out of this approach.

In the October issue we reviewed how we start from a stationary position to a moving position and finally, to riding. Let's review the guidelines for success:

- Smaller training area.
- Teach in microsessions three to seven minutes long.
- Progressions in hand from a stand to movement, then to riding.
- If the horse is getting confused, step back to a point where they were responding well.
- If using multiple finishing cues such as a word, or a touch at the base of neck or girth, start with the one they respond to best, then transfer to the cue you want to finish with.
- If the horse has good control of the poll with a lead line and halter, this is a good back-up to reinforce the other cues.
- Use small treats, offer when the horse is patiently waiting, not being demanding, close hand/open hand nicely.

Teaching the horse to round without traditional tack allows and facilitates proper posture to start all kinds of collected movements.

In the Stand on a Dime exercises (which is a progressive posture exercise where I teach the horse to reduce its base of support without developing negative tension in the topline), I have been able to round the horse in this position then drive out of it, progressing to a powerful catlike Gateado movement. When teaching the horse to do a Pesade or Levade, this technique allows me to raise the horse from the base of the neck and maintaining that roundness as it tries to sit on its hind legs. This rounding, combined with the Dime, and playing with a trot on a circle can allow us to move the horse's forward energy from forward to upward in either a Piaffe or Passage. Combining the Dime with the rounding tends to facilitate the horse holding itself softly in collection rather than stiffening the horse which is so often seen in more typical Dressage. By stalling forward movement while raising the upward energy with a whip, in a gentle but energetic upward sweep, we change forward energy into upward suspension.

Also mentioned in the last article is the need to practice lateral movements such as a shoulder-in and leg yields which are best stolen by moving the horse in a circle and then using the cordeo to gently press-push the neck (like a neck rein or an indirect rein) while maintaining the bend we had in the circle. This is then easily moved into a leg yield by adding more pressure on the ribcage with a whip or hand and walking through the horse's ribcage. Again don't get greedy. Steal a few steps then continue on the circle, then steal a few more. Most people get stuck on these lateral movements because they stay on them too long and the horse loses its posture and then tightens -- reducing the fluidity of the stride.

A more difficult lateral move is the half-pass. Begin by setting up the horse for a turn on the haunches in a rounded frame. This is very much like the position of a roll-back. As the horse is rounded and bent away from us now push the horse gently with a neck aid to move away but then also push the horse slightly back with the cordeo to put its weight on the hindquarter. As the horse begins to

move its front limbs crossing over, pick up the hindquarter with your whip and get the horse to make a step under and across.

If the horse attempts a try, stop and reward. If you keep repeating this and add one step or a partial step with the horse, then before you know it you will have a good start to a half-pass. The half-pass is fundamental to improving the canter leads. Once you can start a horse into a half-pass from a stand still, now it is better to steal it out of figure 8 at a walk. As we come to the intersection of the circles while maintaining the roundness, we use our second hand to push the horse's head gently away from us, changing the bend in the other direction. As the horse changes the bend we then pick up the hindquarters with a whip and steal a step or two of half-pass. Sounds pretty easy but requires some finesse and repetition to get it right.

In the last issue, we had progressed to the start of riding and now we are back on the ground. The reason for this is that we should mix it up. Get the horse to accept basics in very short sessions with you on its back, then get off and practice some of the more advanced progressions from the ground. Stop and take short breaks, making sure you have taken all the pressure away from your horse -- relax and breathe.

As we become more focused on the task we tend to let negative tension or energy creep up in our bodies and our posture tends to get the horse more anxious. Every time the horse makes a try for us we have to think of relaxing and taking pressure off otherwise the horse will find it difficult to understand it has made a good guess.

Playing with your horse in a less restrictive manner like this tends to allow the horse to give you a freer expression of all its movements. Yes it is more challenging but it is so worth it. Tread slowly and enjoy the journey. Playing with your horse and developing your lead is never boring.

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Ljibbe rounding in Dime



Ljibbe setting up for Piaffe

Progressions For Collection, cont'd

courageous manner by having a deeper understanding of how they affect each other.



Ljibbe in Pesade



Ljibbe starting to round in canter