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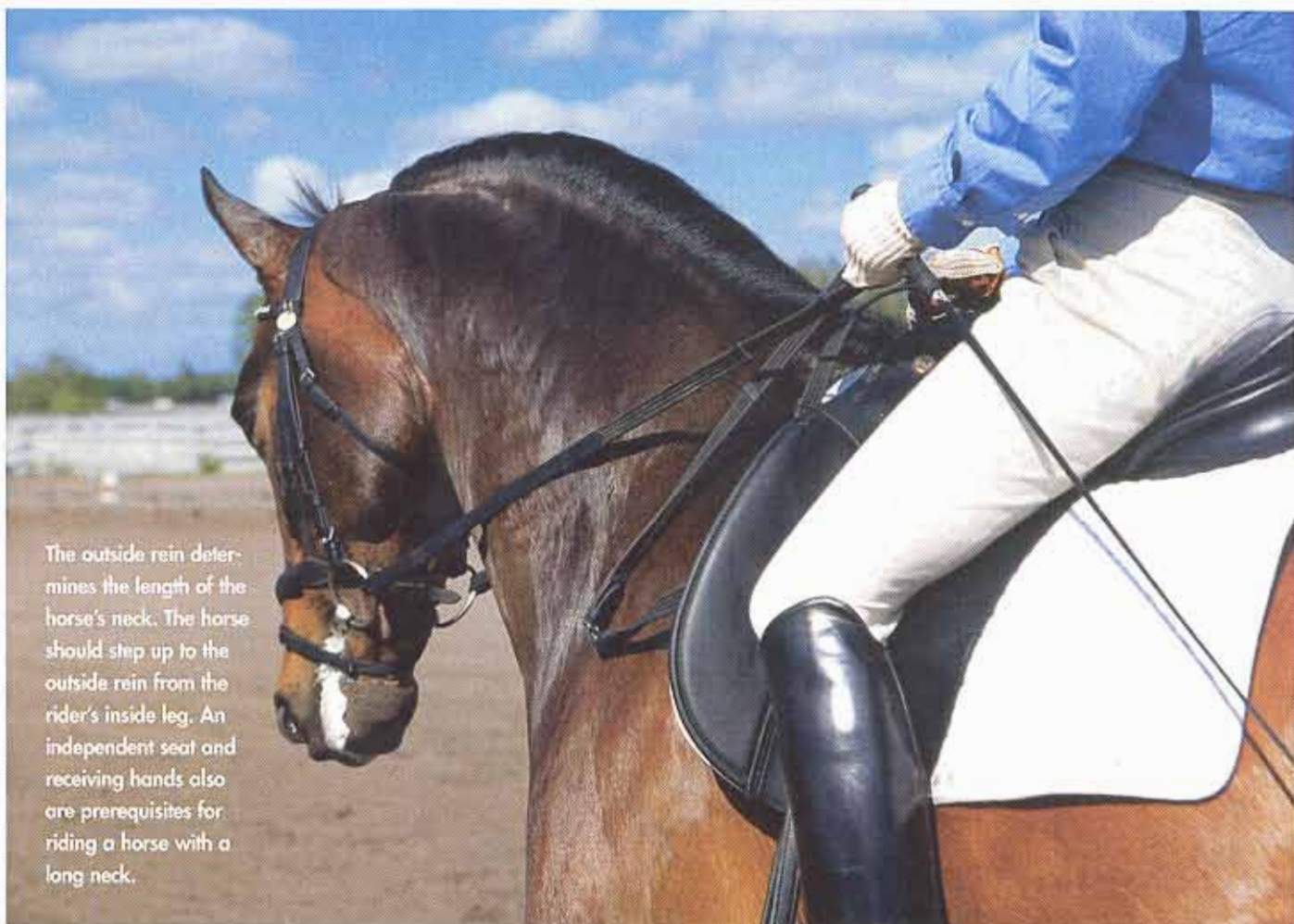


A Long Neck Equals

*Successful riding
at the upper levels begins
with teaching your horse
to come through his back and
go to the hand.*

When I think of history's great dressage horses, such as Anne-Grethe Jensen's Marzog, Margit Otto-Crepin's Corlandus and Dr. Reiner Klimke's Ahlerich, they had one common quality: They were ridden through the back with a long neck. Even a horse such as Isabell Werth's Gigolo, who is unattractive by nature, can perform to greatness because he's ridden with a long neck.

From the beginning of the young horse's education, I want him to reach



The outside rein determines the length of the horse's neck. The horse should step up to the outside rein from the rider's inside leg. An independent seat and receiving hands also are prerequisites for riding a horse with a long neck.

a More Rideable Horse

By Carole Grant with Beth Baumert

Photos by Trudi Boyd Mitchell

with his neck, his nose in front of the vertical, to receiving hands. With the current concern over roundness and riding deep and low, I think that's been forgotten. Expert riders often can ride a horse deep so he still reaches for the hand, but many riders can't, and they frequently do it wrong. Before we worry about the roundness of the young horse's neck, he needs to be strong and have all the pieces of the puzzle that make an upper-level horse, including balance with weight on the hind legs, suppleness and straightness. He becomes round as a result of these factors.

If you do your homework correctly, a developing horse will want to go forward and he will learn the movements as though he's already been taught them. The movements will be easy for him because he is supple, "through" in the hindquarters to the long neck and straight. On the other hand, if he's been forced into submission early on as a young horse, no matter how much careful work you do, in the end, you'll still have to force him into submission in the Grand Prix.

Judges constantly write "too short in the neck." While many riders strive to ride their horses with long necks, they can't because they lack the fundamental skills necessary to do so. In this article, I'll discuss those skills and give some exercises that will improve your feeling as a rider and the freedom of your horse's neck.

Checklist of the Basics

To make sure that you have the skills needed to ride your horse with a long neck, honestly appraise your riding in the following areas and work on those in which you fall short.

1. Do you sit independently?

A seat that functions independently from the other aids is a prerequisite to riding with a receiving hand. Only with the receiving hand, which allows a horse to reach with a long neck, can you control his neck properly. It's hard to let go and ride with an independent seat instead of holding the horse. Even riders who ride forward often do not have independent seats. Hanging onto the reins is the only way they can keep their seats stable. A rider who is afraid of losing control holds his horse's body instead of training him gymnastically through his back and neck. He trains the horse before the horse has a chance to react to the aids. In contrast, if a horse is allowed to make a mistake and then is corrected, he will be able to carry himself. The rider must swing and allow his horse to swing; he must let the horse

make a mistake and then correct it if necessary. In the end, the horse will have self-carriage. The rider with an independent seat allows freedom of the gaits and does not block his horse's energy.

Training a rider's seat is almost impossible on a young horse. The best way to train a rider is on the longe line and then on an advanced horse of good character, who is confirmed in his training so the rider can feel the connection from the hind legs to the bit. With this type of horse, the rider can learn to feel how to use his seat independently. Try to improve your seat daily (see "Develop an Effective Seat," *DT*, Feb. '00). The reason we respect the world's top riders is because they can let go with their hands and ride with the seat in their own balance.

2. Do you ride transitions well?

Early on, you need to ride good transi-

The Long and Short of Neck Conformation

Don't be confused by long- and short-necked conformation. Review your horse's body. Just because a horse is built with a long neck doesn't mean he's ridden with a long neck. And just because a horse has a short neck doesn't mean he can't be ridden with a long neck.

How long is long enough? Ride the neck of each horse as long as is possible for him. It's helpful to have someone on the ground. If your horse's hind legs are getting behind him instead of under the belly, the neck is too short. Ultimately, you want the ability to put the neck anywhere you want. The nose can be in front of the vertical or a little deeper, higher or lower. Likewise, at any level, the poll must be able to be the highest point if desired. If you can't make the poll the highest point, you have a "broken neck," which is always wrong. You don't want a poll or neck that is stuck. You want the freedom to position his neck anywhere.

Thread the horse's hind legs through the space between the front legs (see page 72) so he can come through the withers and the vertebrae in front of the withers and have freedom of the neck. This will improve the gaits, the transitions and later the piaffe and passage.

Dressage Today thanks Runaway South Boarding and CEM Quarantine Facility in Wellington, Florida, for use of the facility for this photo shoot.

tions without thinking "round in the neck" as the primary goal. If you're thinking about suppleness, straightness, weight-bearing, balance and teaching your horse to half halt, he will come to the correct neck position. Finally, in the Grand Prix your horse will do many transitions within and between gaits, and no one will see the aids.

3. Do you know the meaning of "stop?"

By stop, I don't mean simply when your horse comes to a halt. I mean that as he halts, he puts weight on his hind legs because you have influenced him in the correct way with your body. If your horse doesn't start with the weight on the hind legs, he can't come "through," use his back and half halt. How do you do this? Remember that all young horses want to go on the forehand, so repeat the short half halt many times to shift the weight to his hind legs and then soften and let go to allow him to follow your giving hand and lengthen his neck. (In a bit, I'll give you an exercise to help improve your half halts.) If you practice this, he will

understand and put his weight on the hind legs. Don't block him with a long half halt, which shortens the neck. Remember, the young horse must learn transitions to the walk and halt before he can learn half halts.

4. Do you know the meaning of "go?"
A horse can go forward and be running on his forehand or he can go forward by putting weight on his hind legs and then pushing off and carrying his body forward. The latter is what we want. When you use your legs or whip, your horse must carry himself by covering more ground with his hind legs, not pulling himself forward with his front legs.

The turn on the forehand teaches a horse—young or old—to move his hind legs without running through the bridle. The horse begins by coming to a halt. The rider keeps the horse's neck lined up with the middle of his chest and asks him to step away from the leg. The front legs remain in place but step up and down—without wandering—with the inside front leg acting as the pivot leg. If the front legs

stay still, the horse is on the forehand. This exercise can be done with flexion toward the rider's active leg or with counter flexion, which is more difficult. Common mistakes are that the horse steps back or runs through the bridle. In the beginning, one step is enough. Then halt, and walk forward. Done correctly, this exercise is hard, but it is great for both horse and rider.

5. Are your turning aids clear?

Your horse needs to be supple enough to position and bend both left and right. He must learn to follow the inside or outside rein (as in a broken-line exercise) before flexion makes sense to him. He needs to step up to the flexion and go right when flexed right or vice versa. This is a prerequisite to what I call "threading" to make the neck long.

Threading for a Long Neck

The creation of a long neck is achieved by threading the hind legs. By this, I mean we narrow the hind legs one at a time under the horse's belly toward the space

CHECKLIST OF THE BASICS



To make sure you have the skills needed to ride your horse with a long neck, honestly appraise yourself on the following basic skills, which are prerequisites.

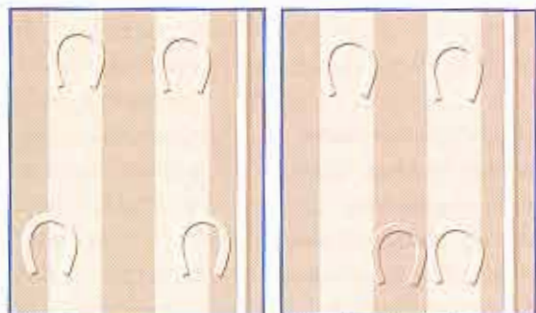
Do you sit independently?

An independent seat, shown by my daughter Mary Ann Grant, is necessary to riding with a receiving hand. This allows Epigram to reach with a long neck. You can control the neck properly with a receiving hand. We are not primarily concerned with the roundness of the neck.



Do you ride transitions well?

As Mary Ann transitions from canter to trot, she thinks about keeping Epigram supple, straight and balanced so he can renegotiate his ability to go forward in balance. As she half halts, he comes from behind with narrow hind legs and goes through the withers to her hand. We can see that he bends his back, sits down and carries with the hind legs. The result always will be a long neck.



A horse's natural balance Threading the hindleg

between the two front legs (see above right diagram). Why? The hind legs are naturally wider than the front legs (see above left diagram), and if we leave them alone, they'll pass the front legs, putting the horse on the forehand. So we are continually straightening the horse by putting the outside and then the inside hind leg through that narrow place between the front legs. Without this "threading," the horse's neck will be short and the rider won't have the connection required to prevent him from going on the forehand, where even the most talented horses want to go. By "threading" in lateral exercises, such as leg yield, shoulder-in,

travers and renvers, we train horses to stay off the forehand.

Short Half Halts for a Long Neck

In the late 1970s, Melle van Bruggen, coach of the American dressage team, taught me an exercise that gives the feeling of a horse with a long neck. This exercise also contains the basic ingredients

of the half halt—the process of going forward and coming back and going forward again. This teaches a rider and his horse how to half halt and, as a result, how to lengthen the neck.

Step 1: Establish a working trot on a 20-meter circle.

Step 2: At A (or C), do a canter depart.

Step 3: As you approach the next centerline, do a downward transition to trot again. You'll feel his weight more on the hind legs now.

Step 4: Immediately lengthen the stride and allow him to go forward into receiving hands. It is common for the horse to start cantering instead of doing the

lengthening. If this happens, quietly correct him and ask him to lengthen again. **Step 5:** Once he offers the lengthening, go back to working trot, where he again will shift more weight to his hind legs. Immediately canter again.

Since he has pushed through his body to lengthen in the trot, he will push over his back in the same way when you ask him to canter. This will give you a long neck. The downward transitions renegotiate the pushing-off place by helping him carry the weight behind. Try to feel that moment of engagement and then offer to let your horse follow the giving hand to make a longer neck. Without those transitions, you could just keep pushing and pushing and the horse's hind legs would get farther and farther back. Repeat this exercise until your horse can do the transitions at the correct places.

Common Problems

- Some 3- or 4-year-olds have problems stopping. They may root the head down or throw it up. Notice that the horse is



Do you know the true meaning of stop?

To halt, Mary Ann has done a series of short half halts, which puts weight on Epigram's hind legs. After each half halt, she softens to allow Epigram, an 11-year-old Swedish Warmblood owned by Milo Mott, to follow the giving hand and lengthen his neck.



Do you and your horse know the true meaning of go? Your horse needs to go forward by putting weight on his hind legs and then push off and carry his body forward. The turn on the forehand teaches a horse to move from the leg without running through the bridle.

making his neck long when he does this, which we want. But most riders don't see it that way. They forget about the halt and fix the neck to make it round. However, the neck would fix itself if the horse learned to stop. Some riders are afraid to disrupt the horse to make him stop because they don't want to upset the frame and the peace, but if you're clear about what you want, you won't upset the horse.

Continue to make the short half halts, not thinking about where you want your horse's neck to be—just keep the neck as straight in front of you as possible. Then reward with a giving hand when he stops, and your horse will make his neck long. If he learns to gain ground with the hind legs and follow the giving hand, he'll be

THREADING FOR A LONG NECK



Horses' hind legs are naturally wider than their front legs. Unless we ride them otherwise, the horses' hind legs always will pass the front legs, putting them on the forehand. To correct that, Mary Ann straightens Epigram by riding shoulder-fore and putting a hind leg in the narrow place between his front legs. I call this "threading," and we need to do it to the left as well as to the right.

easy in the neck. But if you hold him, he'll never learn to follow the giving hand. The correct long neck isn't a result of giving to a horse that falls on the forehand or drops behind the vertical. The long neck comes from short half halts and threading in lateral work.

- The most common problem with threading is when the horse's outside hind legs fall out. The rider asks him to

again. When that happens, fix it again.

Finally, one time you will ask your horse to step narrow with the inside leg to the outside rein, and he won't step out. Then he will understand the concept of your outside leg. Because you have not held him, he accepts the elastic outside rein and leg. Threading in lateral work, with the outside hind, then the inside hind and then the outside again, is the

step with his inside leg to the outside rein, but the horse doesn't step up to it. Instead, he falls out. Correct this with haunches-in or head-to-the-wall leg yield to teach him to keep his outside hind leg stepping forward and narrow instead of sideways. Your horse may make the same mistake

SHORT HALF HALTS FOR A LONG NECK



The following exercise will give you the feeling of a horse with a long neck. From it, you teach the horse the half halt.

Step 1: Mary Ann and Epigram go forward in a working trot on a 20-meter circle.



Step 2: On the centerline, they go forward into canter.




Step 3: As they approach the next centerline, they transition to trot and Mary Ann tries to feel the moment when Epigram puts more weight on the hind legs, and she immediately ...

foundation for almost all other work.

- Many people teach the horse an upper-level half halt, which asks for collection. Actually the basic half halt is really as simple as a trot-walk-trot exercise. You teach the horse to go forward in trot, come back to put weight on the hind legs and reengage in walk and push into trot again. That is the essence of half halt.
- Sometimes the horse doesn't lengthen his neck correctly when the rider gives both reins. If this happens, the hind legs probably have stopped stepping toward the bit and/or the horse has stopped following the giving hand. Repeat your forward driving aids until he goes to the bit. Teach him what forward means, perhaps with a lengthening.
- If the horse twists his neck, then the outside rein isn't elastic enough or the horse hasn't moved up to it. He needs to be more forward or straight.

If you are one of the many riders with a medium-talented horse, he can rise above his ability if you improve his gaits by training him to go with a long neck. If you are one of the lucky ones with a talented horse, his long neck will make the

difference between scores in the 60s and scores in the 70s. In the end, if you can ride him with a long neck, you will have a more rideable horse. He needs to be able to carry himself—reaching for the bridle—for 10 or 12 minutes. That is real and honest work, without tension, using the entire body. 

Carole Grant (below left) rode in the 1982 World Championships, won Pan-American team and individual gold medals in 1983 and has competed in the Can-Am Challenge and five Olympic Festivals. Currently, she trains upper-level riders, including her daughter, Mary Ann (below right), and Betsy Rebar Sell, who helped win a U.S. Pan-Am team gold medal last year.



Step 4: ... lengthens the stride in trot allowing him to go forward into receiving hands.



Step 5: Once Epigram offers the lengthening, Mary Ann brings him back to working trot. When she feels him weight his hind legs, she'll immediately ask him to canter, inviting him to lengthen his neck. Then they'll repeat the exercise.


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