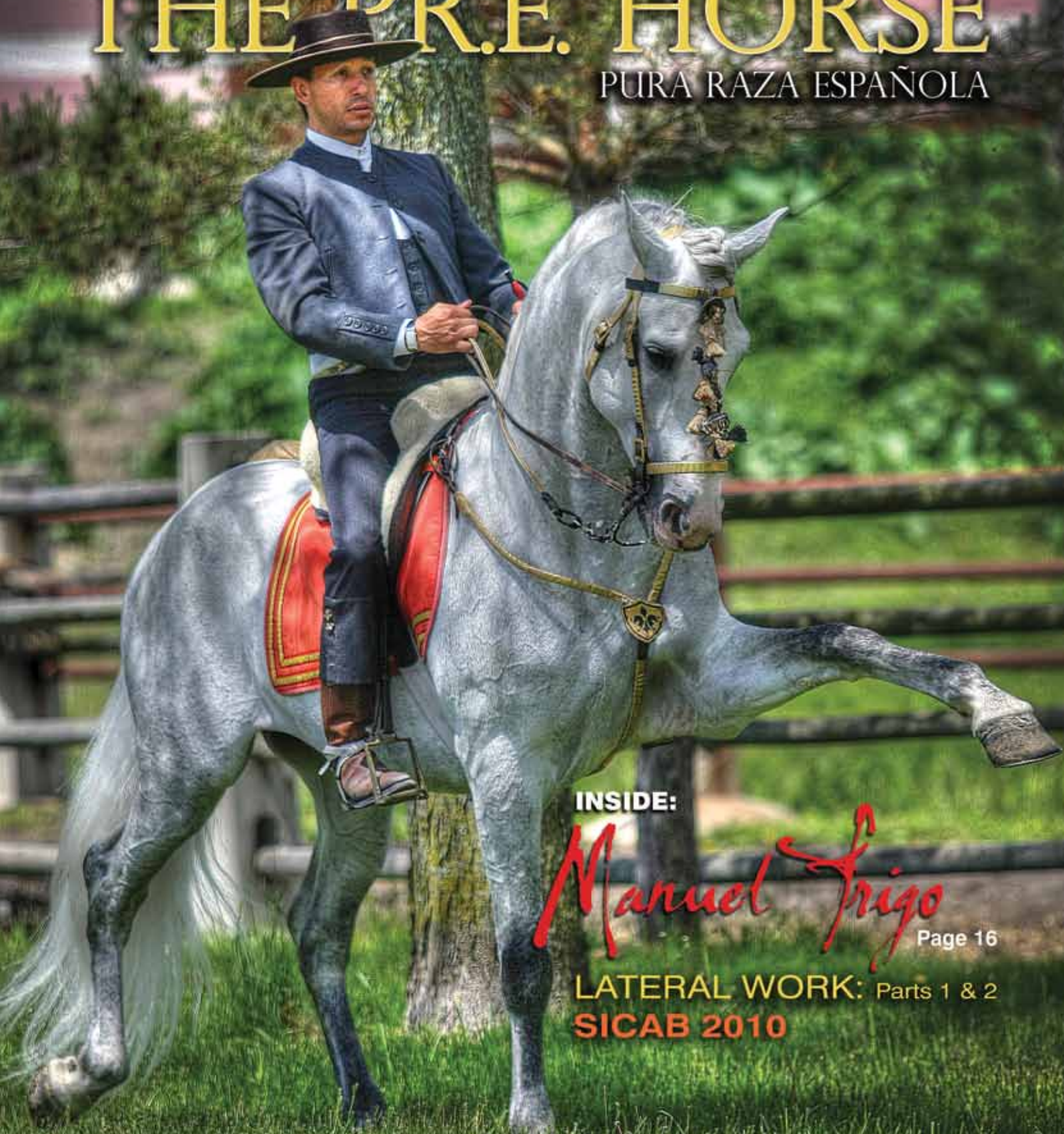


THE INTERNATIONAL VOICE OF THE P.R.E.

THE P.R.E. HORSE

PURA RAZA ESPAÑOLA



INSIDE:

Manuel Frigo

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Light, Lighter, Lightest...

Abstract of Manuel Trigo's Lightness: Proof of Balance Seminar

There is a secret pleasing and cherishing
of the horse with the bridle,
which the rider must accomplish
with so unperceiving a motion
that none but the beast may know it.

~ Gervase Markham 1568-1637

by Kip Mistral

I would have replied that you were dreaming if you had told me the December morning of Manuel Trigo's first Phoenix, Arizona "Lightness" clinic, that before day's end my P.R.E. stallion would be cantering from halt while taking the correct lead with reins dropped, only my seat and legs for aids. But



with Manuel's coaching, all of us horse/rider teams were doing it in short order that afternoon. As we then sat our horses and looked at him in various expressions of amazement, he smilingly told us "Lightness is for every horse and rider." And that means lightness is for you!

Why Lightness?

So rarely is a horse ridden in lightness today that one may well return to history to witness what such a horse looks like.

François Robichon de La Guérinière, 18th century Master écuyer of the great School of Versailles, is depicted in this etching riding a noble stallion with arched neck, head up, large eyes bright and ears pricked as he prances ahead. The horse carries a curb bit, reins gracefully draped from the rider's soft, light hand. The powerful shoulders, hindquarters, and loins of this stallion are coiled for action, every muscle toned and poised. He moves lightly and in balance, with an expression of at-the-ready confidence. In his book *Ecole de Cavalerie* ("School of Horsemanship") published in 1729, La Guérinière describes numerous training methodologies to lighten the horse's forehand and keep his mouth "happy". To make by correct and artful training this light, happy, proud horse was the highest goal of the School of Versailles.

With these values in mind, Manuel Trigo has spent his equestrian career studying the methodologies and pursuing the lightness of the French classicists.

Trigo's eye-opening *Lightness: Proof of Balance* seminar provides foundational theory prerequisite to the subsequent clinic series of three levels, each comprised of three ridden clinics. From this two-day seminar, I've abstracted several of Trigo's many discussions fundamental to understanding the need for balance and lightness in the ridden horse. The topics addressed include:

- ❖ What are Lightness and Balance?
- ❖ The Circle of Lightness

"Lightness is the key! Thank you so much for your concise teaching methods, which have made a huge difference in my personal riding technique and also the attitudes of my horses. Both horses that we sent to you for training came back more forward, more collected, in better balance, and work with more willing attitudes. I spent years training with a different methodology and was quite accomplished in the competitive (dressage) show ring. However, when it came time to train the piaffe and passage, my horses were unwilling. You worked with them, and they are both willingly working in piaffe and passage. Your training methods have proven to me that "Lightness" is the way to achieve the maximum results that I, as a competitive dressage rider, am striving for. Again, thank you."

Christa-Elaine Wood of Colorado, USDF 2011 Gold Medalist in Intermediate and Grand Prix. Wood frequently and successfully campaigns P.R.E. horses at high levels.

- ❖ Biomechanical Impacts on the Natural Balance of the Mounted Horse
 - ❖ Sinking the Withers
 - ❖ Tensing the Lower Jaw
 - ❖ Overloading the Forehand
- ❖ How Can the Horse's Natural Balance be Returned?
 - ❖ Elevating the Withers
- ❖ Collection as Liberation
 - ❖ Defining Collection
- ❖ Lightness of the Aids
 - ❖ Application and Release of the Aids
 - ❖ Separation of the Aids
 - ❖ Reins Held in the French Manner
- ❖ Lightness is for Both Horse and Rider

What are Lightness and Balance?

Two elements of riding that cannot be separated are **lightness** and **balance**, because there is **no lightness without balance** and **no balance without lightness**.

Lightness

One of the first things Trigo tells his students is that when a person strives to ride in lightness, they don't ride to impress people, they strive to impress their horse.

Riding in **lightness** is a way of respecting the horse, and as such it is a philosophy that cannot be approached partially. Learning to be light with the horse requires a total commitment from the rider; more than commitment...it should be a passion.



Light, Lighter, Lightest...

The biggest difficulty lies with the student's acceptance of the philosophy, because invariably it means he or she must unlearn years of prior training and then relearn again, this time being highly aware of what they are doing, and how that affects their horse. Pursuing lightness makes the horse and rider the best that is possible and fulfills the rider through a quest for a minimum use of means and ever-refined aids. And lightness requires respect on the part of the horse for the human... lightness always requires an obedient, prompt response.

At its highest level, lightness can be defined as self-carriage of the horse, self-impulsion, and self-execution.

- ❖ Self-carriage: the horse carries his own body and the rider by himself.
- ❖ Self-impulsion: the horse keeps the gaits, directions, speed and cadence by himself
- ❖ Self-execution: the horse is so advanced that he performs the gait or exercises almost or by himself, after the initial request of the rider.

Balance

As a prey animal, the horse is naturally compelled to move freely at all times, which makes the act of being ridden a far more delicate **balance** for a horse than most humans understand. A horse's natural biodynamic balance already places him on the forehand, but the ridden horse is thrown unnaturally even more on his forehand by the weight of the rider because his rib cage is then pushed between his shoulder blades. The horse therefore must be actively helped to rebalance himself correctly under this weight. It is a priority to restore, for the mounted horse, the balance he had in liberty.

We should seek the perfect balance of the horse using a light, elastic, "breathing" contact with only the weight of the reins. The horse must have a relaxed mouth, which can never happen with tight nosebands, and a relaxed jaw which is encouraged by jaw flexions. If the jaw is locked, the poll, the neck, and shoulders become stiff.

A horse can **never** be balanced when force or coercive artificial aids are used, such as tight nosebands, martingales, draw reins, etc.

Finally, *the position must precede the action*. First the horse must be placed in the correct position (balance) and only then start the movement. The horse must be stopped if he comes out of correct balance, repositioned and the movement started again. This premise is opposite to modern dressage where the theory is that movement *will* create the balance.

Trigo thinks of lightness as being the source of collection, and the consequence of collection at the same time. He has created an excellent representation of the flow and interplay of the elements of lightness, flexibility, mobility and collection, which he calls the "Circle of Lightness".

Lightness creates more flexibility (see black arrows) which allows for more flexibility, which creates more mobility, which allows collection, which creates more lightness, and then the cycle can begin again.

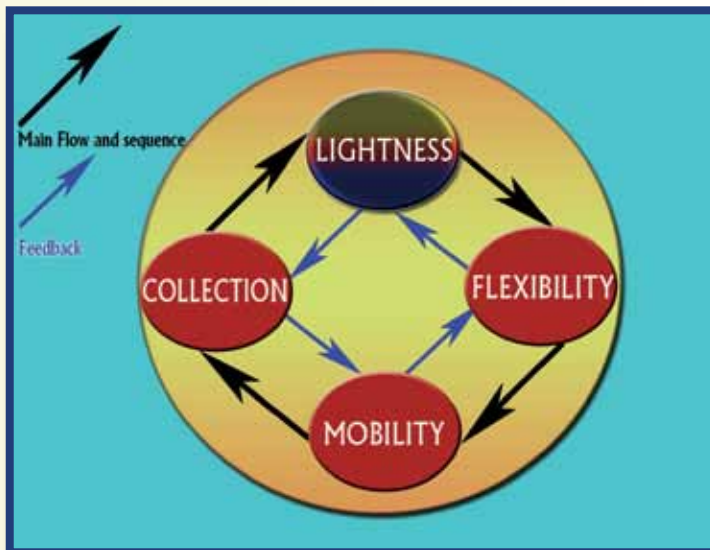
By refining each of these elements over time, the horse and rider can become ever more light, lighter, lightest.

Biomechanical Impacts on the Natural Balance of the Mounted Horse

The major biomechanical impacts on the natural balance of the mounted horse include sinking the withers, tensing the jaw, and overloading the forehand.

Sinking the Withers

At liberty, horses perform all their natural gaits fluidly and gracefully, but once mounted, they can hardly walk in comparison. While it is no secret that the horse has no collarbones to attach his shoulders to his skeleton, it is not



The Circle of Lightness

GRAPHIC BY MANUEL TRIGO

widely understood that there is no bone-to-bone connection from the withers down through the shoulders and forearms. The significance of this is that the withers and front of the rib cage float between the shoulder blades, connected *only* by muscles and ligaments. The burden of the rider pushes the withers down, *up to two inches*. A rider that posts the trot puts the horse even more on the forehand, because 4/5 of the rider's weight now overloads forehand and this is very uncomfortable for the horse. The horse is able to keep his withers up easily at walk and canter, but the trot requires more effort from the horse to keep the withers up under saddle, due to the diagonalization of the gait itself. The masters knew this, and trained in walk first, then canter, and only then in sitting trot, with no posting.

The downward pressure on the spinal vertebrae of the horse's withers causes pain and discomfort. Depending on its severity, he may demonstrate pain and in some cases even express it violently.

Tensing the Jaw

Trigo states, logically "The mouth of the horse mirrors the entire methodology used to train and ride him."

Any tension in the mind or body of the horse will result in him blocking and tensing his lower jaw. This tension runs up to the poll, down to the breastbone and shoulder along the bottom of the neck. The horse will resist the rider's hands and can't move freely with good coordination. It is then necessary to release the tongue, poll and sternum by moving the tongue of the horse, inducing him to swallow and allowing him then to relax the jaw, poll, neck and shoulders. Teaching the horse to yield his jaw allows you to keep his body relaxed and erase any resistance from him. Trigo is fond of saying "When a horse does a jaw flexion you have a naked baby in your hands, at your mercy."

Horses are typically trained and ridden with methods that instruct the rider to pull back harshly and powerfully on the horse's mouth and jaw, and therefore the spine from poll to loin could be compressed.

Added to this effect of compression is the constraint on the horse's mouth. Biomechanically, it is impossible for the horse to give a jaw flexion when his jaw and mouth are strapped down on the bit. At the levels of competition dressage where the great majority of horse/rider teams compete, three ways to hold the mouth closed are currently authorized for the bridle: the jaw strap, the cavesson chin strap, and the flash or crank noseband. These three closures prevent the horse from publically demonstrating the distress caused by a strong hand putting severe pressure on the tongue and bars with the bit. Symptoms of pain routinely seen include tossing the head, sticking the tongue over the bit, pushing the tongue out of the mouth, and many others.

Horses that have a relaxed jaw are not constrained by these forces and are therefore light in the mouth, constantly, gently champing the bit(s), but not grinding on the bit. In a double bridle, horses enjoy playing with their tongue to drop the snaffle on the curb and make a little noise. The French say that the horse "savors" the bit. That is why it is important that the bit tastes good to the horse. Pure iron mouth pieces elicit the most favorable response because it tastes the best to the horse. Trigo suggests his students do their own taste test with clean bits!

How do we know if the horse is savoring the bit, other than the gentle champing? A relaxed mouth allows saliva to accumulate in the corners of his mouth or create a "lipstick" of saliva, but a stressed (in pain) horse often slings drool and foam from his mouth.

Overloading the Forehand

The horse in his natural state moves on his forehand. If a horse weighs 900 pounds, 500 pounds, or 5/9 of his weight, is carried on his forelegs and 400 pounds, or 4/9 of his weight, is carried by his hind legs.

If a 150 pound rider is added, 2/3 of the seated rider's weight is distributed on the forelegs, 1/3 on the hind legs. If the rider rises in the stirrups, 4/5 of his weight is distributed on the forelegs, and 1/5 on the hind legs.

This math demonstrates an overload of 150 pounds (1/7 of the total weight of the horse and rider together) on the horse's forelegs.

	Forelegs	Hind Legs
Horse	500	400
Rider	100	50
Horse + Rider	600	450
Differential	150	

Only by making the horse as comfortable as he can be, and improving the horse's weight distribution, can he be used correctly by a rider. Only by lifting the withers, elevating the neck and head, bringing the head back toward the body, lowering the haunches and shortening the horse's base of support on the ground (effectively called *collection*) can this be accomplished.

A horse must never be asked to do something that he is not physically capable of and balanced enough to do. For example, if the horse is unbalanced, on his forehand and rushing forward at the walk, you can't ask for trot or canter because he will be even more unbalanced, on his forehand more and rushing forward more at the faster pace.

How Can the Horse's Natural Balance be Restored?

The goal of equitation is to restore under saddle the balance of the horse in the same proportion that he has with no rider. In order to do this, the rider must raise the withers to put the horse back into the correct biodynamic position to carry his rider. When the rider lowers the neck "long and low", the withers move down one to one and a half inches and forward two to four or more inches. When the rider lifts the horse's head and neck, the withers are raised.

Elevating the Withers

To elevate the neck and withers, the effect of the bradoon bit of the double bridle, of a single loose ring snaffle, or of a serreta is used to teach the horse to lift his neck, lifting at the same time the withers.

(NOTE: Those using a snaffle bit must understand that this is not a mild bit, as it is commonly assumed to be. Trigo made all of us undergo a carefully executed experiment where he pulled the bit against the inside of each of our elbows, which pinched our skin painfully (giving me a blood blister). In reality, a snaffle bit can do real damage to horses' tongues.)

The horse then learns to follow the rider's upward-outward lifting aid, to develop the muscles which lift and hold the withers in position, and lift his head up at the upward lifting aid to rebalance himself. Lifting the head doesn't hollow the back; this is an optical illusion due to the fact that the withers move up and backward.

The desired verticality of the head comes automatically when the horse becomes more collected. The horse finds the best place to put his head according to his conformation and his training. The so-called *hyperflexion* currently used in training

does not result in the horse being "light". When the plane of his face is behind the vertical, the horse will compensate for being held in this position by bringing backward the verticality of his foreleg to support himself on the ground, and shifting weight to the forehead. Therefore, if the horse is being physically, forcibly held with his chin to his chest by the rider, or is behind the bit and evading the hand to avoid pain, in either case he is by definition on the forehead.

Collection as Liberation

Collection is liberating to the ridden horse and not a constraint, because it restores his weight distribution to the natural balance of 5/9, allowing him to decrease the overload on the forehead, keeping him balanced and mobile.

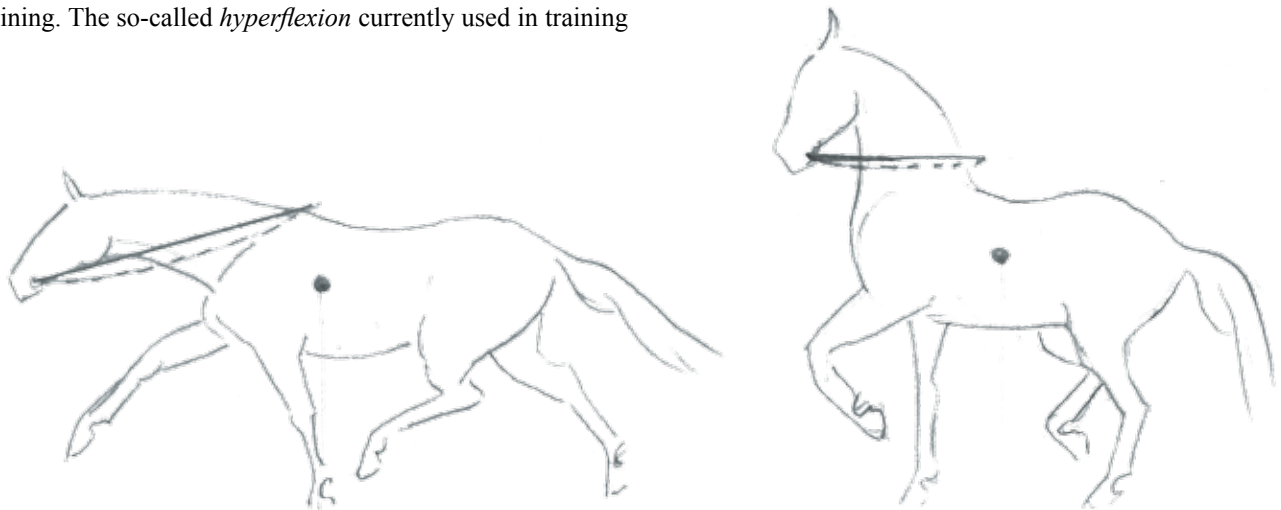
Defining Collection

The term *collection* is often confused with the term *engagement*.

Engagement = Forward movement of the hind legs. Example: A race trotter produces a great deal of engagement, but has almost no collection.

Collection = Tucking in (forward) of the pelvis and shortening in the horizontal plane of the whole horse, and shifting of weight behind. Example: Piaffe produces very little engagement; the horse has a maximum of collection.

In collection, the horse raises his withers so he can tip his pelvis under. True collection decreases the length in the



Long and low = on the forehead; withers raised and haunches lowered = collection.

DRAWING ANONYMOUS

Light, Lighter, Lightest...

horizontal plane of the whole horse, increases the height of the horse at the withers (the horse becoming taller), allowing the horse to lower his haunches and tuck under his pelvis, shifting weight behind on his hind legs, compressing the spring of his hind legs. Collection improves his balance. The test of true collection in piaffe, for instance, is if the hind legs are stepping actively under the hindquarters, associated with the horse placing his front legs vertically (perpendicular to the ground) as he moves. If his foreleg is placed under his body, he is on the forehand. A horse in hyperflexion is always on the forehand, as noted earlier.

Lightness of the Aids

The phrase *mise en main* is widely (and tragically) mistranslated and misinterpreted as being “on the bit”. The correct translation: the horse is “in your hand”. It is a matter of communication and not weight or force!

The term *fixed hand* is also widely misinterpreted as being rigid. The correct meaning of fixed hand is one which moves

with the horse’s mouth. It is a hand which can resist with a force equivalent to the pull of the horse, but not stronger, and it is a hand which never pulls back, which is the first sin of riding in lightness, according to Trigo.

Application and Release of the Aids

A good hand is soft, firm and light. A musician plays the instrument with his fingers. Like a musician, a rider with good hands has to play with his wrist and fingers on the reins, and doesn’t use the biceps to pull.

The leg must be kept light, as well. Aid the horse not with the heel (no spurs allowed), but with the part of the leg that naturally first touches the horse (usually the calf). If necessary to get a more prompt response, if the horse doesn’t respond immediately to the light request of the leg, it will be necessary then to reinforce the second request with the whip, precisely synchronized with the leg. The rider should never aid stronger with the leg, but aid stronger with the whip, if necessary. Gradually the influence of the whip is removed and the horse will have transferred his obedience to the leg.

The aids should be used only for transitions from...

- ❖ one speed to another
- ❖ one gait to another
- ❖ one balance to another
- ❖ one movement to another.

Otherwise the aids and the rider’s body should be quiet. The aids must immediately be released once the horse responds; this is his reward.



Trigo and seminar participant Paula Patton demonstrate the difference between a “holding” hand and the soft contact of the “fixed” hand.

PHOTOS BY KIP MISTRAL

Separation of the Aids

Hands must aid with no legs, and legs must aid with no hands; this is the commandment “Legs without hands, and hands without legs” of legendary French trainer François Baucher. Used together, these aids constrain and compress the horse. The legs “drive” the horse into the bit (hands), which then stops the horse from any natural forward movement. There are other aids, such as seat, whip and voice, for example, and only one aid at a time must be used.

Reins Held in the French Manner

The four reins of the double bridle produce opposite effects. The bradoon lifts the head, and the curb lowers the head and the forehead, bringing the head and nose toward the chest. The typical style (German style) of holding the two pairs of reins crosses the snaffle rein over the curb rein, limiting the possibilities of effects of the snaffle and curb. Trigo sees this as a waste of the functionalities of the double bridle.



The French manner uses the width of the rider’s hand to separate top and bottom reins, resulting in a clear aid. A small rotation backward with the wrist raises the snaffle bit and a small rotation forward puts pressure on the curb bit. The French system is not only extremely powerful in the use of the double bridle, but used with any combination of tools on the nose and mouth of the horse, like serreta and curb or four reins on a single curb bit (for example, a Pelham).

Ten hours are required for the rider to physically and mentally coordinate this method, but it pays off in clarity for your horse.

Lightness is for Both Horse and Rider

Changing old habits and practicing tact and softness is a **big** challenge. However, schooling your horse in lightness will make your horse a better horse and you a more intelligent rider, Trigo concludes.

”Horsemanship issued from a fashion or drifting away from the horse’s nature cannot last long, even with noble goals. Sooner or later equitation will have to go back to classicism and lightness. What horses have taught me is that lightness is the source of collection and the consequence...without lightness there is no respect for the horse, no art, no feeling. There is no intimate relationship with the horse...nothing is beautiful. It is never too late to take the right way, so start whispering to yourself, and to your horse...“Light...Lighter...Lightest!”

Look for our second article in the series in the next issue of The P.R.E. Horse, in which we will discuss training methods to create lightness in your horse...

For more information, see www.trigomanuel.com or contact Manuel Trigo at info@equisa.biz. Contact Kip Mistral at newhorsearts@hotmail.com.

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