



EQUINE LEARNING - RIDDEN TRAINING (STOP/GO)

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In the last article we explored building the horse's ABCs, training the basic responses through groundwork; Stop, Go, Turn front legs and Turn hind legs. Developing horses into successful athletes requires the seamless connection between groundwork and ridden work. Elite trainers, coaches and riders have the same signature quality; they spend the majority of their time focusing on the basics. World renowned multi-olympian dressage trainer Carl Hester FBHS is renowned for his attention to detail and focusing on the core training; "Great scores come from quality movements and riders who are willing to take a risk". Reflexes are trained through consistent focused practice, as these basic responses become entrained they become reliable. So many riders tell me they trust their horse however a more stoic thought is to trust your training. It is incumbent on us as riders, coaches and trainers are to reduce confusion and frustration in the horse by keeping signals clear, consistent and transferable.

TURNING WORDS INTO SENTENCES

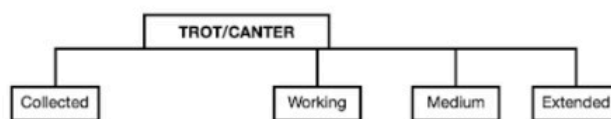
If you have the basic responses well trained on the ground you can then start to show the horse the roadmap to joining the words into sentences. These sentences are formed by associating signals from the groundwork. This can be achieved by using the same tactile cue sites and vocal cues that you trained from the ground. To start honing these responses it is much easier to train with an assistant on the ground who can support the ground trained signals.

Stop - including the responses; Stop, step back and slowing down. Developing full control of the slowing response is honed first by establishing the stop response. One of the key issues to notice is which is the horse's dominant stopping leg. Nearly every horse will stop with the same leg in front, just like us horses have a sidedness in their forelegs. It will always be more difficult to train that leg to be under stimulus control. Once you ride your halt transition, if one leg is in front apply pressure on that rein to ask the horse to step back that leg, if the horse does not respond have your assistant tap that leg. If the horse takes an extra step after halt, step them back the same amount of steps. Every horse should practice standing until the rider asks them to move off. Over time the horse's dominant leg will become more reliable.

Go - Including the responses; Go, faster steps and longer steps. Developing "volume control" in all three paces and particularly developing move offs into a consistent framework will lead to success regardless of the discipline. A logical sequence for developing pace variability is employing the percentage rule. Understanding how each of the

paces fits into the dressage framework can help with this. The variance in the paces is not linear, the graphic below shows how they fit into the framework. To map your go signal squeeze your legs and if the horse does not respond use the reliably trained whip tap site. Remember that reliability is dependent on consistent repetition and the recognition that **practice makes permanent**

To develop onwards you need to build the percentage by plus or minus 10-20 percent, this will start to build the reliability of the signals.



BUILDING THE VOCABULARY

As the basic responses under saddle become more reliable and entrained you need to shape the horse's responses to give you "volume control" in your stop and go responses. Many training paradigms miss an understanding of one of the most important cornerstones of equine training; **pressure motivates and RELEASE** trains. Here are some exercises you can use to building your horses responses:

EXERCISE 1: THE PERCENTAGE GAME

Start your horse in their natural trot. Decrease their pace by ten percent and see how well they can hold the trot in "cruise control". Then increase the trot by twenty five percent and assess how well the horse can hold in "cruise control". Play around with the pace variability to see how much up and down the scale the horse can do.

EXERCISE 2: CHANGE THE GEARS

After tuning up using the percentage game, start putting down and picking up a specific walk, trot and canter. The key is the power of intention. Make sure you are clear in your head about which walk trot or canter you are looking to pick up. Many riders do not prioritise downwards transitions. The intention has to be clear, for example riding from trot to walk you need to; ride the walk you are landing into rather than riding "stop trotting".

Training to the core values of FEI dressage "the happy athlete" takes time, commitment and most importantly, a horse centred training programme. Over time as a rider you can develop your horse's athletic performance with minimal conflict behaviour and minimal stress. This is the evolution we need in our sport to guarantee our future.