



# Dressage Training Journal

SPRING 2018

FOR HARMONY BETWEEN HORSE AND RIDER



## IMPROVING THE SHAPE OF YOUR CIRCLES

Pole Exercises with Karen Whiston

## REALIGNMENT & CORE STRENGTH

The Ideal Position & How to Achieve It

## UNDERSTANDING How Horses Think

With Ali Wakelin...

## GROUNDWORK

The Basics: Stop. Go.

# Dressage Training.tv

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Dressage Training TV is a membership website which provides instructional videos, written articles, live webinars and a new certification programme, all designed to help you develop your relationship with your horse and improve your riding. Membership to Dressage Training TV gives you access to training in subjects such as groundwork, rider biomechanics, dressage test riding, equine & human bodywork, rider fitness and confidence.

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#### LEVEL 3 CERTIFICATION

This level takes the horse & handler from Level 1 and Level 2 and adds in Lateral Work. This includes Renvers, Travers, Shoulder In, Half Pass, Side Pass and Pirouette. We also take everything you have learned and show how to move it into ridden work. You will learn how you can improve your horse's balance and straightness through improved flexibility, suppleness and engagement. All videos are short in duration broken down into step by step, bitesize chunks.

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# Dressage Training Journal

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Six Monthly	£78.00
Yearly	£150.00

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## WELCOME

Welcome to the 2nd Edition of *Dressage Training Journal*. We hope you found the first edition useful and in this edition we carry on some of the themes and training discussions that were started in Issue 1.

We try to think of Dressage Training in a rather holistic manner, though we will never get to cover everything in a single issue. We believe a combination of Rider Biomechanics, Groundwork Training, Gymnastic Exercises and Competition Training helps to produce the best results and a more rounded training system.

In this issue we look at the basics of rider alignment, providing you with some diagnostic tools you can apply on horse and we look at the rider's spine and how that should be aligned. Alignment and core strength is not only about how you physically hold your body, but also about your state of mind and here Confidence Coach Jo Cooper helps you develop mental strength with her article 'Alignment & Core Strength – Involving The Mind'.

In terms of horse training and competition riding we have articles about turns, circles and corners. The basic manoeuvres are so important to get right at the early stages of training. After judging over 15,000 riders I can tell you that a good 90%+ are riding these basic shapes incorrectly, which patterns into the horse a lack of straightness and balance. Correctly ridden and correctly understood circles, corners and turns can be an invaluable tool in developing balance, straightness and suppleness.

Communication is a important part of riding, training and coaching. This implies that we need to be good at explaining ourselves but even more importantly we need to understand what our horses are saying to us. Riding is all about the horse/rider interaction and one cannot have an interaction without communication and understanding. In this edition Mary talks about the miscommunication that can happen between coach and pupil and how it can be improved. Ali Wakelin, our groundwork and Equine Learning Theory expert, goes into detail about the way horses think.

2018 is going to be a very busy year for the team at Dressage Training TV. We have brand new courses planned, and even more events. In June Mary Wanless BHSI begins her five session course on 'Steering, Straightness & Sideways' which covers everything from turning, through to lateral work. We are also starting a series called 'Training the Dressage Horse, The First Year' in which we introduce our new youngster, Eric, and follow his progress as we train him for competitive dressage.

Finally we have a great set of Q&As at the back of the journal. If you have a question that you would like answered the Dressage Training TV forums are also a great source of information. All questions are answered by senior RWYM coach, Ali Wakelin. Ali is an expert in Groundwork, and coaches horses and riders through the levels to Grand Prix – your question could help others improve too. At Dressage Training TV we offer a wide range of training courses which include the option to receive feedback on your videos from our coaches via our private forums.

Peter Dove,  
RWYM coach & author of *Master Dressage*

# REALIGNMENT & CORE STRENGTH

MARY WANLESS BHSI BSC FRSA

It should be easy to sit on a horse with your torso vertical and box-shaped; but it absolutely isn't! Your task is made harder by the fact you have legs, since their position will limit how well your pelvis and torso can be organised above them.

## NEUTRAL SPINE

Ideally your legs are positioned so that in the top-to-toe overview you have a shoulder/hip/heel vertical line, along with a stirrup length that puts your thigh bone at 45 degrees to the ground. (Fig. 1) For 'heel', read the bony knobble on the outside of your ankle, not the back of your heel. This distinction (even though it is only an inch or two) makes a huge difference: in riding, as in standing, you cannot balance with your weight primarily taken on the back edge of your heels (except when you fold forward into jumping position).

For 'hip', read the bony knobble at the top outside of your thigh, right on your pantie line (known as the greater trochanter of the femur (Fig. 2). Your thigh bone makes a turn of about 120-135 degrees here to go into your hip socket, which is deep inside you (Fig. 2). You can probably easily feel the knobble; if not, stand with your legs slightly apart, your fingers on your pantie line, and lean to one side. The knobble should become clear on the side you are leaning towards. (Fig. 3)

Few people know where their hip joints are, (Fig. 2) but they are hugely important hinges from which we angle our torso forward or back. If one or both are stuck too closed, you will tend to lean forward and/or will find your knees coming up. Short muscles are part of this problem, possibly accompanied by the emotional residue of childhood anxiety. This leaves us in a slight 'foetal crouch', and if you sleep on your side curled in a foetal position realise that you are practicing this for about eight hours each night! Gently, and patiently, open your angles to about a riding position every time you realise you have curled up.

In theory the fix is easier if your hip joints are too open, so that you lean back with too big an angle between your thigh and torso. The biggest problem for most of these riders is >>

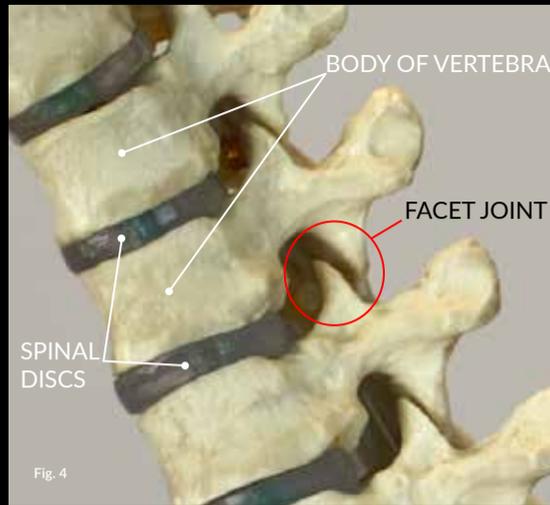


often shock and disbelief, amplified by the fact that they often have their stirrups too long and need to take them up. (The term 'open your hips' can equally well be understood to mean 'open the angle between your thigh and torso' or to mean 'make your thighs wider apart'. I get both responses when I ask people how they have understood the phrase, and often wonder which one was the intended meaning of whoever first said it!)

We rarely only lean forward or back. Usually each of these goes with either rounding or hollowing the back. Most people know that there are discs between adjacent vertebrae, but fewer people realise that they also have two facet joints between them (Fig. 4). In effect these are tiny hinges, allowing a few degrees of movement as we become more round or hollow in that area. (The facet joints also allow a little rotation between each vertebra.) In the waist area they make us more or less hollow backed.

Hardly any new students arrive in my arena already 'stacked up' – whatever level they ride at. The majority have their feet too far forward, and are hollow backed. Most have the additional tendency to lean either forward or back. Some (more often the guys) are round backed. Few riders have their stirrups close to the ideal length which puts their thigh bone at that 45 angle. The biggest problem area varies, and it could be the thigh/torso angle, the waist, or between the shoulder blades.

Within the population of 'average' riders it seems that 'anything goes', and people just sit in the way that comes naturally in their particular body! However, within the population of elite



riders there is much more similarity. There has to be, for if riders are to be successful and effective, they have to replicate the bodily patterns which make this possible!

I wish that more people approached learning to ride as you would approach learning a martial art – realising that it takes time and dedication; knowing that it involves changing your body as you develop body awareness and co-ordination; being in it for incremental improvement over the long haul. The parallels are so profound, but so rarely acknowledged.

Our spine is designed to have curves. However there is a big individual variation in how 'curvy' each of us is. On the whole, women have bigger curves – and in particular a more hollow back – than men, and this goes with a pelvis which is a slightly different shape. There are also ethnic differences – people of Asian origin have the straightest spines, whilst people of African origin have the biggest curves. Whatever kind

of spine you have, your aim is to have its curves (be they more or less deep) in balance. The spine is ten times stronger when it has those curves than it would be if it were straight, so this is not your aim.

After our experience of being curled in the womb, our spine at birth has the single curve of a forward C. As we develop we retain four backward curving areas, called primary curves (Fig. 5). They lie at the back of the head, between our shoulder blades, in the pelvis/buttocks, and in the back of the heel. Secondary (forward) curves develop in the first year of life, beginning as we first lie on our belly and look up. This is the prelude to sitting, crawling, standing, and finally walking.

The secondary (forward) curves develop in the neck, at the waist, behind the knees, and also in the soles of the feet (Fig.5). Keeping both sets of curves in balance limits the likelihood of back pain, both in riding and in life. The ideal balanced configuration (for each individual) makes the spine best able to withstand the forces acting on it – whether you are working on your computer, lifting something heavy, or riding. It is known as 'neutral spine'. Physiotherapists teach this in their classes for people who suffer with back pain.

Inevitably, we bring our spine and our habit patterns to our riding. Fig. 6 illustrates the nine distortions we can come up with, these can also be seen in my *Rider Biomechanics* book. Start with photographs of yourself taken in halt, directly from each side, so you can diagnose your 'default' position. You might add video in walk and rising trot taken from the centre of a 20m circle. >>

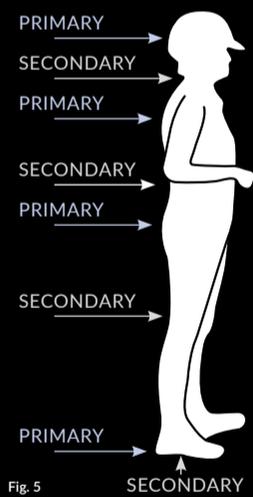


Fig. 5



Fig. 6a



Fig. 6b



Fig. 6c



Fig. 6d



Fig. 6e



Fig. 6f



Fig. 6g



Fig. 6h



Fig. 6i



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

## ASK YOURSELF:

- If the horse were taken out from under me by magic, how would I land on the riding arena? Would I topple forward onto my knees and nose, or backward onto my backside?
- This makes you assess: Are my feet ahead of my backside, behind it, or under it? Are my shoulders above my pelvis, ahead of it, or behind it? Am I vertical, ahead of it, or behind it?
- Is my front (from collar bone to pubic bone) longer than my back (a hollow back) or my back (from the nape of my neck to my tail bone) longer than my front (a round back)?
- Also ask yourself: Is my thigh bone at 45 degrees? Do I need to alter my stirrups?
- If there were flash lights on the bottoms of my seat bones, what direction would they point in – straight down, towards the horse's front feet, or towards his hind feet?
- If my pelvis were a bowl full of liquid, would the liquid stay in the bowl, spill out at the front, or spill out at the back?

The challenge is to rearrange yourself so that:

You would land on the riding arena on your feet, and stay standing over them in a martial arts position. Be sure to adjust your stirrups if necessary – many riders are attempting to ride too long. If you just hack out and/or jump you may be riding too short.

Remaining in balance over your feet is only possible when you have a shoulder/hip/heel vertical line with your front and back the same length, your seat bones pointing down, and

the bowl of your pelvis level, so that the liquid would not spill out. (Fig. 1)

Begin your realignment by lifting your legs over the front of the saddle (Fig. 7). In this position it is easier to find 'neutral spine' and to point your seat bones down. From here you would ideally have someone else (a friend or coach) bring your thighs and lower legs into position, but you can do this for yourself. Look at Fig. 8 to see how she needs to hold your leg as she brings it out away from the saddle (as far as your hip joints allow) and then puts your thigh on the saddle from the back towards the front so that the muscles at the back of your thigh are rotated around to the back, away from the saddle.

Your friend/coach needs to check that your heel is under your hip, with the stirrup on the ball of your foot, and your foot just resting on it and not pressing on it (Fig. 9). She then needs to stand back to get the overview and re-check upper body – you might have hollowed your back as she brought your legs down, so you may need to be rearranged back into the box-shape of neutral. Commonly people need to bring their chest down and their pubic bone up (to stop the liquid from spilling out of the bowl).

Expect to feel weird! If you don't feel weird, be suspicious that the realignment was not effective! Realise that changes like this always feel bigger than they look, in the same way that losing a filling or getting an ulcer in your mouth creates a blemish that feels huge but looks tiny. This is the beginning of learning 'feel'. Take another photograph from each side so you discover what this weirdness looks like. It is probably more elegant than you think. Seeing is believing!

Find a few words that describe how this weirdness feels. They will be the reminders you use as you walk on, and later go to trot. Expect to 'get it' and 'lose it' again and again as you work on reproducing these feelings from moment to moment and day to day. Take photos and videos regularly to check on your progress. Good luck! 🍀

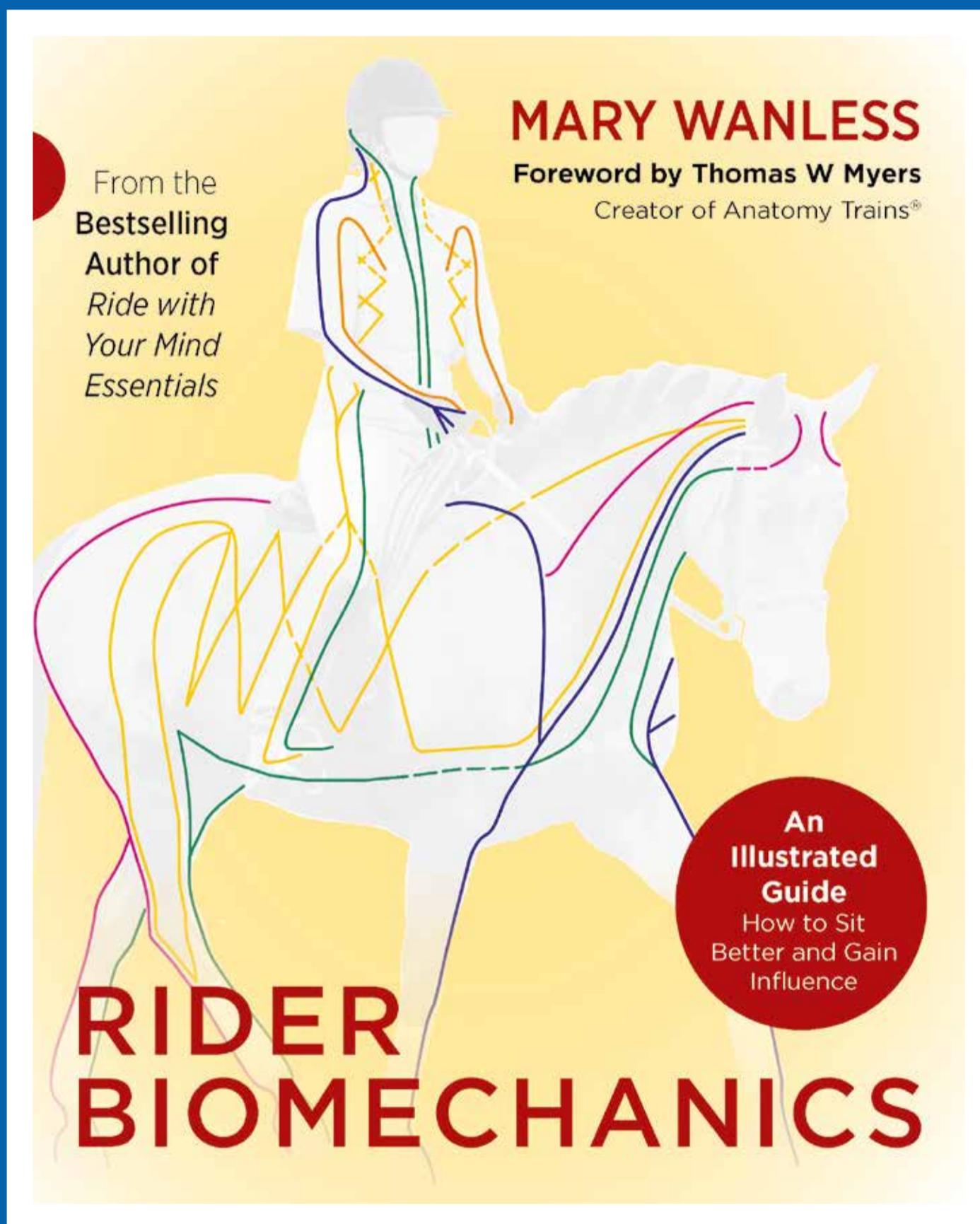
## PRACTICE

Here is an off horse exercise that will also help you find, reproduce, and strengthen your neutral spine. You need another person, and two strong wooden chairs placed one right in front of the other, ideally sideways on to a large mirror. You sit on the one in front, and your friend stands on the chair behind you. She is going to press down on your shoulders, whilst bending forward so that her shoulders are above yours, with her arms straight. This has to be done very carefully (below).



If you are hollow backed you will give way with your waist going forward. If you suspect this, or actively create it, have your friend barely press on you. Otherwise her pressure would be unpleasant and potentially damaging. If you are round backed you will give way with your waist going back. You can test this more actively – but still take care. You are now searching for neutral, and when you find it your friend's pressure will go straight down onto your seat bones, without your torso deforming. At this point, she can put huge pressure on your shoulders without hurting you! 'Neutral spine' is a very distinct feeling for both the tester and you, but it can take a bit of finding, and the corrections you have to make might be very counter-intuitive. If you struggle, book an appointment with a physiotherapist or personal trainer, telling her that 'neutral spine' is what you want to learn. 🍀

A GROUNDBREAKING NEW BOOK BY MARY WANLESS



*Rider Biomechanics* is a highly practical book designed to build your riding skills step-by-step, with numerous photographs, diagrams, and practical exercises to do on and off horse.

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Peter desensitising Kalligraphy to the schooling whip

# THE BASICS

This system of groundwork is designed to teach the horse to respond to clear signals which are then easily transferable to ridden work. The horse is taught to respond to these signals and not to follow the handler's feet. To this end, the horse must always move before you move and must always stop before you stop. This is one of the most important ideas in this system.

## THE TRAINING POSITION

In the training position the handler should be facing the horse, so they can watch his responses. Any forward movement of the horse will require the handler to step backwards. If the horse is slightly to your left as you face him, you hold the reins in your left hand, and the schooling whip in your right. You will need to work from both sides in your training. The way you hold the reins is also very important, as you need to be able to apply pressure and then release it easily. You also need to be able to move out to the end of the reins without losing control.

The buckle of the reins rests in the groove between your thumb and first finger. The bulk of the reins fall into a loop as you also hold the reins under the horse's chin, passing one between the thumb and first finger, and the other between the first and index finger. This allows you to apply pressure in a very controlled manner, then to release it easily as you back away from the horse and switch to just holding the buckle.

## DESENSITISATION

Before any further training work can begin the horse must be desensitised to the schooling whip. This means that the horse must lose any fear of the whip and learn that it is an aid like any other. To start the process of desensitisation, first make sure you are in the training position. Then, starting at the neck and shoulders, stroke the length of the whip against your horse. It may take some while to desensitise both sides of the horse correctly. If you apply the whip during this phase and the horse starts moving away it is important that the whip should only be removed from the horse's body once he stops moving, otherwise you are rewarding the act of moving.

You can eventually progress to stroking the flanks and rump. Be careful not to 'poke' or tickle the horse with the end of the whip. The aim is to have the horse relaxed and standing still as you stroke with the whip. This may take some time and effort, depending on the sensitivity of your horse. Do not rush to get past this crucial stage, and be prepared to spend as many sessions as are needed. >>



Holding the reins



Head lowering

## TRAINING RESPONSES

### HEAD-LOWERING

A horse who has his head raised is in flight mode, and lowering his head lowers his adrenalin levels, making him calmer and more receptive. To lower your horse's head, hold the reins as described earlier and stand close to him, making a consistent downward pressure. 'Snake' your hand a little to left and right if he braces himself against you, but try not to brace your arm against him. The moment he lowers his head a little, release the pressure and, if he raises his head, begin again. Most horses will soon begin to lower their head more easily.

Horses who tend to make transitions by hollowing can be helped with head-lowering. Once your horse walks on from a light touch, without tension, you can work towards stepping forwards from halt whilst maintaining a lowered head and neck. You are attempting to ingrain the habit of reaching over the back through the transition. This can also be taken from the walk

to the halt too. Do not expect this to happen instantly; some horses have very ingrained habits of lengthening their undercarriage during transitions and for them this can be a hard habit to undo.

### STEPPING BACK

Since your primary aim is to reduce or eliminate the horse's flight reflex, you next want to teach him to step back. So far, you have been holding the whip in a forehand grip; think now of this becoming a backhand grip as you place the whip between your body and the horse's forelegs.

Use a little backward pressure from your hand on the reins and tap lightly and quickly on one of the forelegs just below the knee. If the horse is wearing boots tap above the boots. Start by asking for single steps and, as soon as he steps that leg back, stop tapping. Then tap on the other leg. Each step must happen only when asked for, as we do not want the horse shooting backwards. After each good response, step back yourself to hold the reins just with the buckle,



Stepping back

and let him digest the information you have given him. If he sighs, yawns, licks his lips, chews the bit, or blinks rapidly, he is making mental/emotional adjustments. You will soon be able to move your horse back several steps by tapping on each leg in turn, and over time he will begin to step back easily and fluidly.

## ABOUT PRESSURE

Imagine a scale of zero to five, where zero is no pressure and five would be the amount of pressure you would apply to stop the horse from dragging you over the edge of a cliff! Most people spend their life at a three—whether on the ground or riding. We tend to use the same amount of rein or leg pressure even to the point of nagging continuously.

In this form of training it is important to be able to start with the lightest pressure and then escalate evenly until you get the correct response. The system uses 'pressure and release', applying just enough pressure to generate a response, and then releasing when you get the beginnings of that response. From the horse's perspective, he is using trial and error, learning to find the response that will make you release that pressure!

This is the baseline of 'operant conditioning', a term used in behavioural psychology. It describes the use of negative reinforcement applied until the desired response is obtained, then an immediate removal of pressure. Research has shown that using negative reinforcement, along with clicker training to reinforce the release, trains horses in the most deep and efficient way. (Riders too learn best through trial and error as they home in on the most helpful co-ordinations—and pupils like positive reinforcement too!) Over time, you can gradually raise your standards, so instead of releasing for a 'basic attempt' you require a bigger step or more promptness. If we wish to train the horse to go from the lightest aids, then we must always start from those light aids and then escalate them as needed, knowing that our aim is to be able to use light pressure whenever possible. But if our overall repertoire still ranges from zero–five we will be much clearer and more effective in our training.

### 'GO'

From halt, stand in the training position, and ask the horse to move forwards with the reins by moving your hand towards you. Then touch the horse with the whip where you would normally apply your leg aid. See the photo below for a visual explanation of where to use the whip. If the horse does not walk forward immediately, replace the touch with a series of taps, gradually increasing the strength and speed of the taps until your horse walks on. In this way we keep escalating the pressure until the horse walks, at which point we stop tapping. Only ask for a few steps to start with so that you keep control of each step.

It is important to always start from the lightest, even if you know the horse is lazy or slow in his >>



Go: Tapping Kalligraphy with the whip to walk on.



Stop: Kalligraphy has stopped, but Peter continues to walk backwards.



Park: Peter continues to walk backwards to the end of the rein.

response to the whip aid. It is very important not to start walking backwards yourself until the horse has begun to move. He must make the first step, so that he learns to respond to your hand and the touch of the whip, and does not simply to follow your footsteps.

### 'STOP'

Stopping is achieved by making a backward pressure on the reins, moving your hand back under the horse's chin whilst still walking backwards.

Remember to start with the lightest pressure, and to increase this until the horse stops. The tricky part is to co-ordinate moving your hand forward whilst walking backwards. When your horse stops completely, you continue moving backwards until you are just holding the end of the reins.

In the photo you can see that the handler is walking backwards out towards the end of the reins. This is a good example of how holding the reins correctly works. It allows the handler to release the hold under the chin quickly and move out to the end of the reins.

### DELETION

If your horse steps towards you as you do this during stopping, move towards him and use the whip on his forelegs to step him back. Ideally, ask for the same number of steps that he took by mistake. When he halts, step away from him again.

This is an example of deletion, with the handler 'deleting' the extra steps they did not want the horse to take. Very soon the horse learns that the human has personal space and that he must not move into it unless directed. It is important to remain calm and not become irritated if it takes a while for your horse to learn this. Horses who 'barge' may take a little while to understand what is required; but even with this type of horse a lot of progress can be made in a short while.

### PARK

In the photo you can see the horse is parked. The handler can test the security of the parking by moving left, right and even walking around each side to the horse's shoulder in an arc. A well-trained horse should park, allowing the handler/rider to perform all manner of tasks. This kind of training helps enormously when at competitions, in the lorry parking area and whilst mounting.

These are the real basics of the groundwork system which we use in our Groundwork Certification Programme. By joining our programme you can work yourself through the levels, watching short videos explaining each element, then submit your own videos to us so we can assess and help you make progress with your horse. 🐾



The Well Trained Horse is a three video series which takes you through the basics of the groundwork system we teach at Dressage Training TV with three accompanying videos demonstrating techniques.

Become a Dressage Training TV member to watch this recorded series, join the groundwork certification programme, and many more recorded and live webinars.



CLICK TO LEARN ABOUT THE GROUNDWORK CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME



I AM SO GRATEFUL THAT I HAVE MORE ENERGY AND AS MUCH JOINT MOBILITY AS I HAD IN MY EARLY TWENTIES – AND THAT’S FORTY YEARS AGO!...



...MY SECRET?

# LIQUID BIOCELL

– MARY WANLESS BHSI, BSc –



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# GET TO KNOW YOUR SPINE

WITH KARIN MAJOR

Neutral Spine whilst riding sounds easy, but most of us are not walking around in neutral spine, we are hollow or round, and asymmetrical to some degree or another too. Many of us are 'stuck' in our unique pattern.



Figure 1. Lie down on your back...



Figure 2a. Bend your knees and stand your feet..

Our vertebrae are like links in an old chain that are rusted together, rather than free to move as in a well-oiled and maintained chain. You may have some links that function and others that are jammed. Often the ones that move are over used, are the site of pain or discomfort, overworking to compensate for those that are stuck, these maybe the cause of the pain although it appears elsewhere.

The Feldenkrais Method™ (FM) is a way of exploring your body, your way of thinking, your way of noticing, that in turn will make it easier for you to learn and make changes in your riding. In this lesson you can start to explore your spine, getting to know it, noticing what moves where and what doesn't.

Find a comfortable place to lie down on your back (Figure 1), let your arms lie down by your sides, and observe your contact with the ground.

- How would you describe your contact?
- Are you comfortable? Could you be more comfortable, where, how?
- Which parts of you touch the ground, where do you notice that doesn't?
- Does one side of your body feel heavier than the other?
- Can you trace in your mind where your spine is, where it lifts away from the floor and where it gets closer? Does it feel like a straight line, or does it shift to the left and right of your centre line?
- What else do you notice?
- Bend your knees and stand your feet (Figure 2a). How does that change your contact?
- Start to rock your pelvis (Figure 2b), bringing your waistband forward pushing your belly button forward, tilting your pubic bone down towards the floor, making your back hollow, then the opposite direction (Figure 2c), pushing the back of your waistband back towards the floor, pulling your tummy in, maybe pushing gently with your feet, rounding your back.
- Rock between these two places, go gently, slowly, be kind to yourself. Notice which way is easier for you? >>



Figure 2b. Start to rock your pelvis, bringing your waistband forward...



Figure 2c. ...then the opposite direction, pushing the back of your waistband back towards the floor...



Figure 3. ...Lift and return your pelvis to wherever is neutral for you... until you've lifted as many vertebrae as you can.

### REST REGULARLY

You can rest with your knees bent or legs long. Each time you rest take time to notice if your contact with the floor has changed at all.

- Gradually, as you rock your pelvis backwards start to lift it from the floor, feel can you lift just one vertebra initially? Lift and return your pelvis to wherever is neutral for you, several times, just noticing what you feel. Then another vertebra, lift and return, then another and so on, until you've lifted as many vertebrae as you comfortably and easily can (Fig. 3).
- Can you also return the vertebrae one at a time? Or maybe you feel there are several of them that lift and/or return as a group.

- Notice your breathing, your head, your ribs. How straight is the line of your spine as you lift?
- How far apart are your feet? Try them wider or narrower, does it make a difference? Do you take the weight more to the inside, or outside of each foot, towards the toe or the heel?

When you've done this several times and you feel comfortable holding your pelvis in the air, then:

- Start to move your pelvis from side to side (Figure 4), keeping it as level to the floor as you can. How is that? Which way is easier, left or right? Do you want to tilt the pelvis?

### REST

### REST FREQUENTLY

- How high you go, or how many times you do it are not important. What matters is what you notice, how you pay attention.

### REST

- Repeat circling the pelvis, but in the opposite direction. How does this compare?
- REST – check in on your contact with the floor. Are you more aware of your spine now?

If you want to take this a step further, then come to sit on the edge of a hard chair and imagine doing the same tilting of your pelvis, hollow and round your back, feel the effect on your seat-bones, and your head. Do you have a sense of all your vertebrae, or only some of them? Once you can imagine it, then do it, gently, slowly, feel where moves. You can then repeat this when you next sit on your saddle.

Have fun exploring. Remember there are some videos of other lessons on the DTTV membership site. Don't just watch them, do them. 🌟



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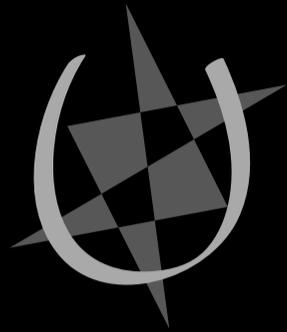
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Figure 4. Move your pelvis from side to side (to the left in this picture)

You can find more information at [www.feldenkrais.co.uk](http://www.feldenkrais.co.uk) or [www.feldenkrais.com](http://www.feldenkrais.com)

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An excerpt from the book *Master Dressage, 2nd Edition* by Peter Dove

A corner at walk



## RIDING CORNERS

In this article we are going to look at correctly riding corners, how you gauge the appropriate corner quarter-circle size for your horse and how that size may change depending on circumstances.

Corners are a great way to build the balance of your horse, but a great many riders make the mistake of 'riding into' corners. Corners do not need riding into, they are quarter circles and the rider should choose the right size of  $\frac{1}{4}$  circle to ride.

It is also easy to think of a corner as a non-event and put little thought into them, but they are a cool challenge to ride well four times around each lap of the arena. Learning to ride corners well sets you up for great turns and great centre lines.

In Diagram 1 you can see four different sizes of circles, placed into the arena ranging from 20m to 6m. What do all of these circles have to do with corners? You can see that the circles are all clearly placed as close to a corner as possible: the 20m circle covers two corners. One way to think about corners would be to simply ride into them as deeply as possible. Another way, one which I believe will give you the highest chance of earning more marks, is to treat a corner as a quarter-circle. The photo above shows Milly riding the corner in walk. You can see that her mare has a bend to the inside and still looks balanced though both shoulders.

Whenever I ride, I know, for each gait, how large a radius of quarter-circle I am going to ride, in each corner. Not having a good idea of this, for your own horse, is to practise your corners inconsistently and risk falling in or falling out on your turns. By being as clear as possible how you are riding the corner, you will be making sure that the horse stays as balanced as possible through his shoulders, through the turn.

The radius of your quarter-circle will change, depending on the gait and possibly depending on whether you are schooling at home, or out competing. At a competition you may want to choose a larger radius than the one you are challenging your horse's balance with at home.

As mentioned already, pushing your horse into the corner is most likely to lead to him falling out through his shoulder and losing balance. Ridden correctly, corners are an excellent way of developing balance and challenging the horse in incremental ways under your control. Teach your horse even balance through both shoulders, gradually decreasing the radius of the quarter-circle. Corners are a 'school movement' that you will use again and again, building up those repetitions of balance on turns.

Remember to use the imagery of the balance beam (mentioned last issue), even for the quarter-circle, to gauge how balanced and accurate you are. Riding accurate corners also helps remove that feeling when you get to competitions, that the corners come up too quickly and you find yourself winging around them. You will see a corner, know the radius of the circle and begin your turn. Have a look at the 10m circle in the AF corner. You would be approaching this, possibly in trot, and treat it as if someone had said 'Just after F, circle right 10m diameter.' Except of course you only do a quarter of it. If you ride all your corners like this, you will never find yourself pulling on the inside rein attempting to make it around the corner.

You may initially find that the corners feel really bad; that the horse comes off the track or that you can't get the correct shape consistently. Stick with it; in my experience it doesn't take many repetitions for both you and your horse to learn the appropriate radius for the gait you are in. Remember, if you have been riding corners by pushing the horse onto the outside shoulder, you will both have developed a habit and that habit may take a little while to change. >>

Keep working at it patiently, remembering that this will be different for the horse too. The main key here is how well can you stay focused. Are you able to ride every corner like this? How often do you zone out and forget to ride the corner properly? Pay attention when you ride movements like changing the rein across the diagonal, as it is easy to slip into the habit of pushing deep into the corner once you make it to the opposite side. If you are at the Intro level then you will probably find corners in canter very difficult, and I think it's the biggest mistake I see in canter even up into the higher levels. Just choose a bigger radius of circle and work on keeping the horse's shoulders level.

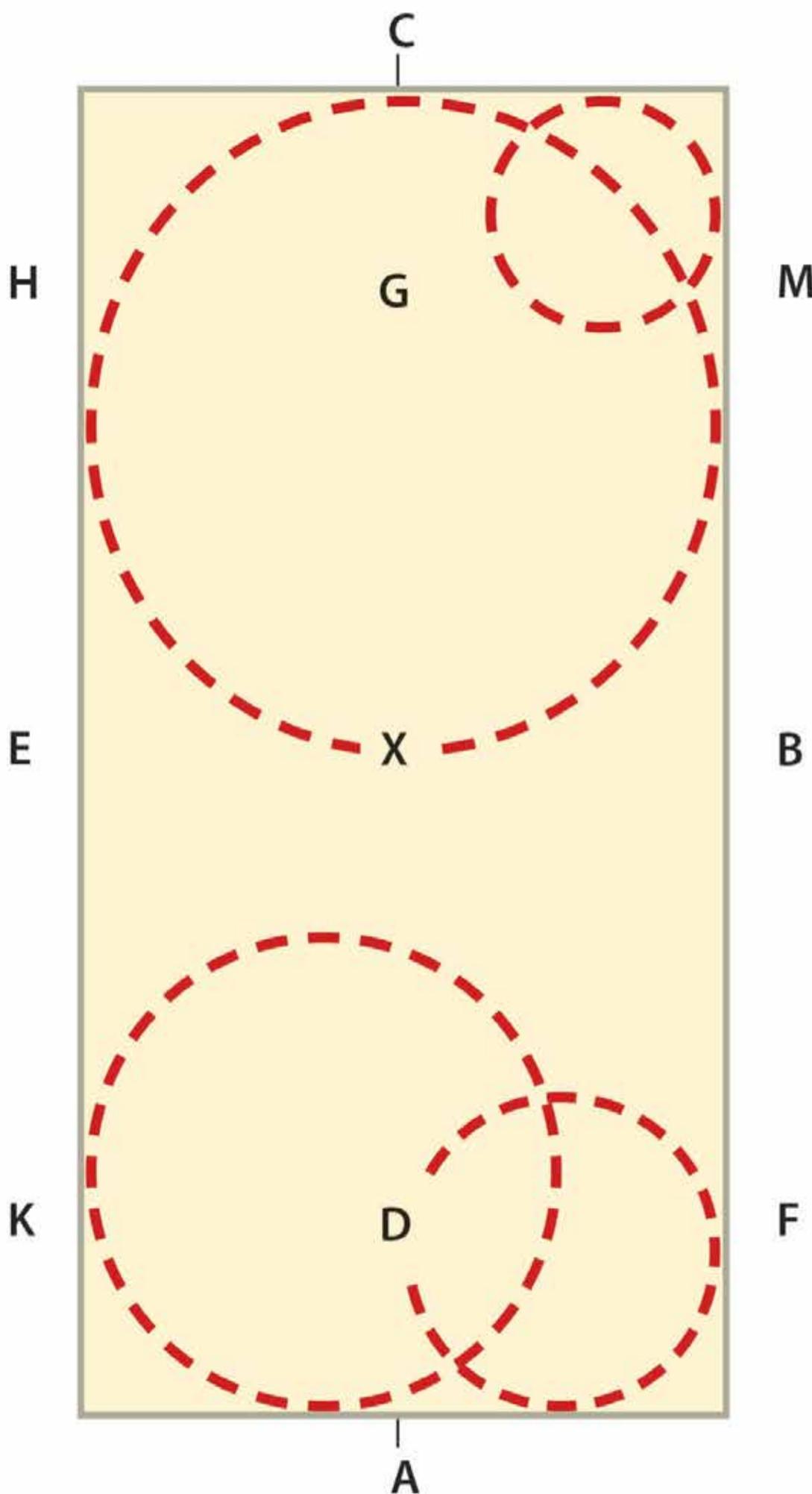
One of things I keep in the top of my mind when riding corners is the tempo of the horse. As you move onto the corner the tempo can change quite easily as it is a sign of loss of balance. Does your horse speed up or slow down?

If your horse speeds up it is important that you have good stability and control over the speed of the horse's legs. Your job is to rebalance the horse and maintain a consistent tempo around the corner. This falls into the realms of rider skill and rider biomechanics. Are you toned enough to set an exact tempo, and maintain awareness of that tempo each step.

If your horse slows down, it may be it is finding the exertion of pushing with the inside hind leg too much, you'll need to decide if you want to do a larger  $\frac{1}{4}$  circle or encourage the horse to provide a little more effort. Watch what is happening to your own seat as you go around the corner. Is your own rising trot slowing down? Are you landing heavier in the saddle around the turn? As the horse's hingleg gets stuck on the ground, so can your seat as both you and the horse lose 'ping'. Careful that you don't contribute to it by letting yourself land heavier—make sure you maintain the same amount of ping as normal.

Hopefully that has given you a lot to think about and the next stage is to get out there, ride some corners and video yourself. You can then look to see how your horse moves around the corners and potentially how you are riding them yourself. Check out your habits and body position to make sure you are not causing unbalance. Check that your horse equally balanced through both shoulders, or is your horse falling out/in around the corner. Good luck and get lots of practice in... four of them each lap! 🐾

Diagram 1: Circles and corners



**IMPROVE YOUR DRESSAGE SCORES**

If you're interested in discovering more about Accuracy and other ways to get better scores, why not take a look at the Improve Your Dressage Scores course on Dressage Training TV.



Photo: Lottie Elizabeth Photography

# Alignment & Core Strength Involving the Mind

BY JO COOPER

**ALIGNMENT AND CORE STRENGTH:** that's all about the body, isn't it? It's about doing things like toning the muscles, exercising, how you hold yourself... how can the mind help with that?

**CONFIDENCE:** that's all about the mind, isn't it? It's about positive thinking and things like that... how can confidence coaching have an effect on the body and on alignment and core strength – it doesn't make sense...

Well, that's one way of thinking of it, but if we take a holistic view and think of the 'bodymind' – or 'mindbody' – as one system, it follows that we cannot change one without there being changes in the other. In the same way, when we think systemically of rider and horse, it follows that when the rider changes the horse will have to reorganise itself too (or reorganise the rider).

Think for a moment of going to ride a horse that is safe, within your competence as a rider, and that you feel neutral about riding. In your mind lead the horse to the mounting block and get on. Notice how you are using your body. Now, do the same thing but this time with a horse that you are anxious about riding. Again notice your body.

- Are you holding the horse and walking in the same way?
- What are the differences when you get on (if you do)?
- Lastly, repeat the exercise in your mind but this time with your favourite horse in which you have total confidence and that you love to ride.

Again, notice the differences. Think of alignment and core strength... did you notice

any changes in your body as you thought through the three scenarios?

You will have had three different experiences. You only consciously changed what was in your mind, but your body and your behaviour also changed significantly. This happens all the time and especially with anxious riders whose minds may not only be on what they are doing in the moment but on all the possible 'what ifs'.

“CHANGES IN THE BODY ALSO AFFECT WHAT IS IN THE MIND”

This process of change also works the other way round – changes in the body also affect what is in the mind. When a rider feels biomechanically more secure they will also feel safer. A focus on biomechanics can help the nervous rider to worry less, by keeping their mind on what they are doing with their body. At its simplest, for example, an instruction to increase the bear down when they are nervous is much more likely to help them than, for example, the old and often misused 'just relax'.

When you were thinking of the three different horses you probably also noticed that you felt a better connection with one than another. The degree of connectedness you feel with

your horse, especially when you are riding, will almost certainly affect your body. The idea of 'personal space' is well-known but less so is the idea of personal boundaries that can change to include or exclude both inanimate objects and other living beings. Think for a moment of when you are driving a car (if you are a confident driver): where are your boundaries? Are your boundaries around you or are they around you and the car as one unit? Do you have to think about the width of your car every time you go into a parking place or through a gateway or do you 'just know' how much space you need? When you are using a tool, for example, a pen, a yard brush or your grooming kit, do you have to think about the connection with your hand, or does it just become an extension of you? It's likely that in each of these examples your answer is that you incorporate the pen, the tool or your car into your 'space.' Your boundary extends around them.

This makes intuitive sense when talking about inanimate objects but what about other people and, of course, what about your horse. Take a moment and think again about a horse that you love riding, and that you ride confidently. In your mind put yourself on this horse. Are your boundaries around you or around you and your horse? It's most likely that you will say that of course they are around you both. Now think of riding a horse that you are anxious about, perhaps about riding this horse at all, or >>

perhaps about a specific activity. It's very likely that you will now say that your boundaries are around you, meaning that the horse is excluded—you are sitting 'on' the horse rather than being 'plugged in'. This automatically leads you to feel less secure. A horse will feel a significant difference between the rider who is plugged in and the rider who is sitting on top, focusing on their own body to the exclusion of the horse. When you are conscious of the way in which your boundaries change you can explore the effects of shrinking and extending them intentionally. Do be aware that when you mentally exclude a person or animal they can often perceive the change, even if you are not in physical contact with them, and being excluded can feel uncomfortable.

You might think that this is all in the mind but there is evidence that it is more than that. Advances in neuroscience have led to the discovery of peripersonal neurons that, put simplistically, monitor the space around us. The area of space that is monitored can extend and contract and if there is a perceived threat the neurons participate in triggering our defensive reactions — which take us away from alignment.

Another scenario in which boundaries are significant is in one way we learn from other people. Have you been to a clinic as a spectator and found that even though you weren't riding in the clinic, your own riding has already changed? Have you wondered how this could happen?

One of the ways in which we learn most effectively is by modelling the behaviour of someone who is an expert in the field we are aspiring to. Think of how a child learns by copying other children and adults and by pretending to be their favourite heroes, whether real people or characters from TV, films or books. Adults can learn in the same way—the change in your riding after being a spectator at a clinic is likely to be at least partly from the way in which you unconsciously adopted the position of the riders as you watched.

We can also make this process conscious. You can do this whilst thinking of the person you want to model, whilst watching video of them or by actually watching them. The first step is, as far as you can, to put aside your preconceptions about your own skill level

and abilities and your beliefs about what the person is doing, and to have as your goal purely to model the behaviour you are interested in. Be specific about what it is that you want to learn and, in some cases, what you don't want to include.

Begin by watching the person or by picturing them clearly in your mind. When you are ready, imagine that you can become them for a moment. It is important, as far as possible, to see what they are seeing, hear what they are hearing and to feel what they are feeling—including the feel of the horse, the feel of how they are using their body and their emotions about what they are doing.

The more powerfully you can immerse yourself in 'their' experience the more your body will also respond and make the micro muscle movements that help your body to learn. Modelling and mimicry have been around for centuries but it is only in recent years that discoveries in neuroscience have begun to explain and validate this way of learning.

So far we have been thinking of the boundaries outside the body. The third area in which the mind can help with alignment, and with core strength, is in its perception of the body itself, both externally and internally. Neuroscience tells us that the brain maps the body, not just around the periphery, but the external surface and internally too. It also tells us that where there is an established behaviour pattern, or when there has been a traumatic injury or illness, the map changes. I've come across a number of riders who have said that they feel insecure in the saddle who, when they try to picture their core muscles, say that they look very thin and weak, or even that their core muscles are not there at all. Sometimes there is a similar issue with seat bones. They can see one much more clearly than the other, or they talk as though they can control one of them but the other has a mind of its own. If a seat bone or core muscles, for example, are totally or partially missing from a rider's body map, or are seen as being out of control, alignment and core strength are naturally affected.

It is possible to help the rider to change their body map in various ways. Different methods of body work can do this but it is perhaps

surprising to know that it is possible to make changes through the mind. This can lead to significant change, not only in reorganising the body, but in speeding up recovery from injuries and sometimes bringing about physical change such as recovering feeling where there has been numbness following an injury. This is an exciting area and one in which there is much more to discover, whilst enhancing alignment and core strength in the process. 🧘



Jo Cooper is a qualified and experienced practitioner who specialises in working with equestrians and other sports people to enhance their performance. She has worked with hundreds of riders and her clients include every level of rider from experienced riders looking for competitive edge to beginners who need to boost their confidence.

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# YOGA WITH DEMELZA HAWES

Demelza Hawes is a Yoga instructor, dressage rider/trainer. She has trained her two horses Diva and Fry who are working at Inter 1 and GP respectively. Demelza is the host of Dressage Yoga on Dressage Training TV and can be seen in many of the online series.

## WARRIOR I

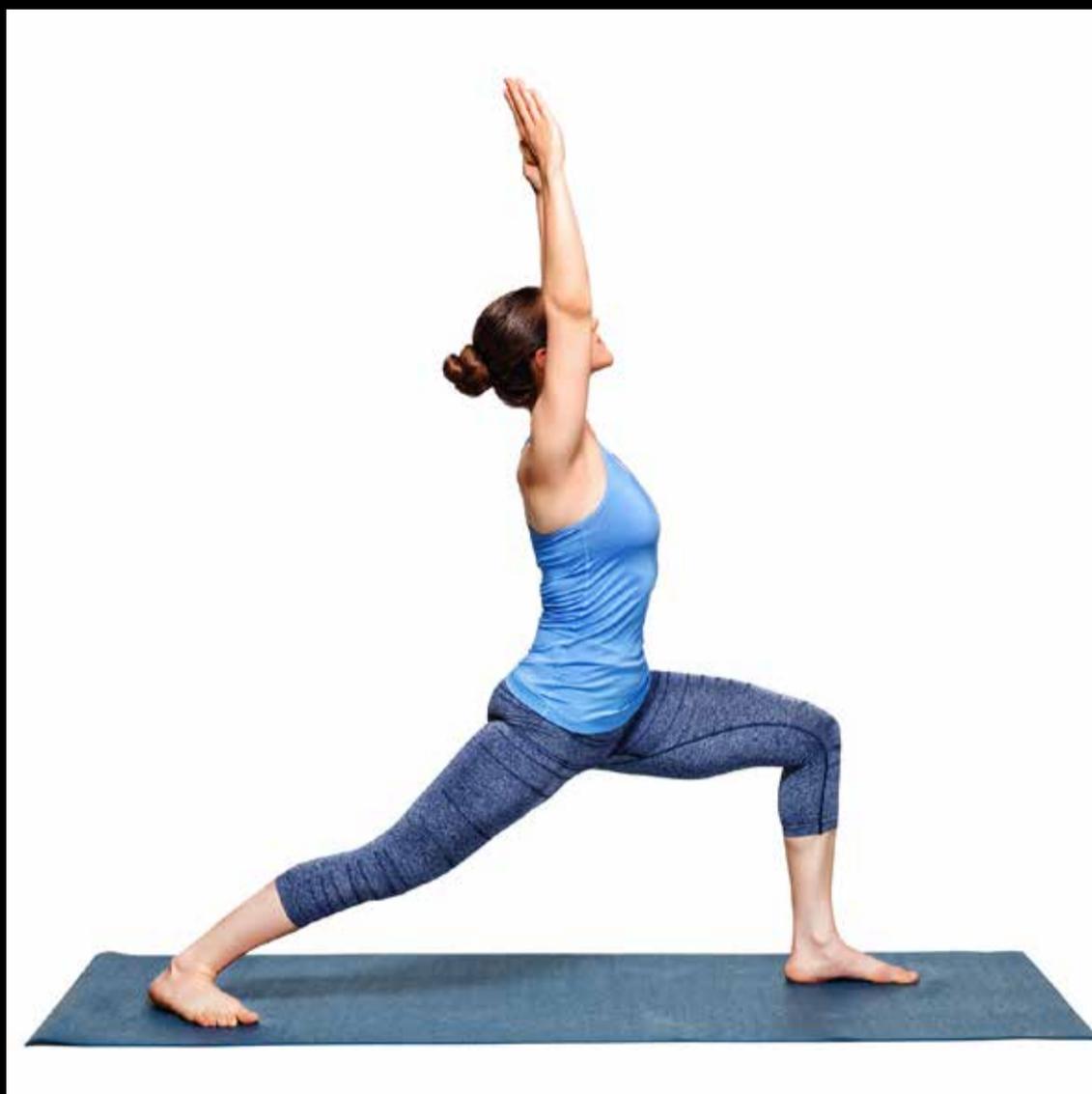
### WHAT IS WARRIOR I POSE?

In this pose you will be facing the short end of your mat with your hips and shoulders square. Legs are separated to about 3-4 feet depending on your strength, in a lunge like frame. Arms are stretched up past your ears and if you are well balanced, your gaze is up to your thumbs.

### WHY WARRIOR I POSE?

Not only is this pose itself important for strengthening, but how you get into and out of it fires the correct muscle sequencing to enable correct alignment within your functioning atop the horse. It mimics the muscle contractions required, in a slower more concise motion, for your walk, trot and canter functioning. Stabilising the pelvis so enabling and maintaining postural integrity. It also....

- Stabilises the ankle
- Strengthens the thighs
- Engages and strengthens the core
- Aids in balance (mentally and physically)
- Builds correct muscle sequence firing
- Contributes to a stable pelvis
- Activates and strengthens shoulder control
- Improves spatial awareness
- Emotionally strengthening and power building



### HOW?

#### WARM-UP

1. Standing, feet hip width apart, tailbone tidy (imagine a dog tucking its tail between its legs) with pelvic floor engaged, gently draw navel to spine. Draw kneecaps towards hips, soft in the knee.
2. Inhale and bring arms up in front of you over head, exhale and bring arms down behind you. Repeat 5-10 times.
3. Hands on waist, thumbs at your back, slide them to touching. Squeeze elbows towards each other and lift your chest and heart space. Gently extending the crown of your head up and back into a slight backbend. Breathe into your front chest 3-5 breaths
4. Counter pose this by sliding fingertips towards each other on your front waist and roll forward, rounding your spine and shortening your whole front body, bending your knees and bringing elbows towards each other. Breathe into your back 3-5 breaths. Repeat 3 and 4 a couple of times.
5. Hands on hips, from a standing position in neutral spine, take a small step forward (2 - 3 feet), bending into the knee, keeping big toe on inside of knee, then slowly step back pushing into the ground with front foot, and place feet back into start position. Do this VERY slowly on both sides as many times as you wish. Exhale as you lunge, inhale as you step back.

b.



## THE POSE

Ideally start from kneeling but it can also be done from standing if you have a problem with your knees. You can also pad under your knees with a blanket.

1. If kneeling, be up on your knees, tailbone tucked tidy and gently pushing hips forward. Hands at your heart, palms together. Shift your weight into your left side and step your right foot forward towards right side of mat.
2. Toes on inside of knee, gently lean into lunge pushing knee forward, body upright, dropping the groin. Gently pull back to putting knee over ankle, repeat a few times exhaling as you lean away, inhaling as you come back to neutral.
3. When in neutral with right knee over ankle, tuck the toes of the back foot under, engage your pelvic and inhale, SLOWLY pushing yourself to standing, both feet facing forwards, heels anchored. \*\*if you feel wobbly take your left foot closer to the left side of your mat widening your stance to aid balance. Straighten both legs, not locking the knees, squaring the hips.
4. Now bend your right knee, keep toes to inside of knee, rotating thigh out, rebounding from the earth, feel both feet ground down. Keep hips square, pulling left hip forward and tailbone reaching down, keep navel drawn in away from thigh crease.
5. Inhale as you bring arms up in line with ears separating palms. Slide shoulder blades down your back and ribs, shoulder joint into sockets.
6. Breathe into your belly, focussing on the breath and your inner stability, feeling the heat building. 3-5 breaths.
7. If you feel well balanced take your gaze up to your thumbs, bringing palms together but continue to feel extension through the spine tail to crown of head, not collapsing in lower spine.
8. To come out of the pose, bring hands to heart space, and VERY slowly squeeze down engaging all your leg and buttock muscles, bringing left knee to floor. If your need to put your hands down to stabilise, do so. Bring your right knee back so you are kneeling once more and bring your bottom to your heels, resting into child's pose.
9. Repeat on the other side.

## COUNTER POSE

1. Come to child's pose (a. Below) with bottom on heels, forehead to the floor and arms resting alongside body.
2. Completely release and relax, breathing into the lower back, LETTING GO.
3. Roll on to your back, draw knees into chest (b. Left) and gently roll side to side and forward and back, massaging the whole back line.
4. If things feel sore give them a gentle massage, softly connecting with your quads and releasing manually the fascia and muscle fibres.

a.



## TOP TIPS

- Move into and out of pose very slowly and with focussed effort
- If you feel too wobbly, have a wall or strong table close by to use as a prop, but not to do all the work for you.
- Go to your edge. Feel the challenge, then come out before fatigue destroys the quality of movement. You can always do more repetitions rather than staying in pose until your thighs crumble!
- When you feel your edge, breath deeper into it.
- Tuck your solar plexus (navel area) towards spine.
- Keep your knee integrity. Always keep big toe visible on inside of knee. 🙏

\*Please consult your doctor before starting any regime if you are concerned for elements of your health\*

Follow Demelza Hawes on [Facebook](#) or take a look at her website: <http://www.demelzahawes.com/>



Photos: Chloe Burke

## IMPROVING THE SHAPE OF YOUR CIRCLES

Just like us humans, horses learn through visual stimuli. Poles can give both the rider and horse more focus, which can help with precision, accuracy, clarity, confidence and refinement of the dressage movements. With repetition poles can also help your horses suppleness, strength and power.

BY KAREN WHISTON

This issue I would like to share with you a very simple exercise that you can do with just four poles, to help improve the accuracy of your circles and suppleness of your horse.

Place four poles in half the arena, one at 12 o'clock, one at three o'clock, one at six o'clock and one at nine o'clock, ideally, aim to have the middle of each pole 10 meters from the centre of the clock if your arena size allows otherwise just in from the track will be sufficient.

### FOUR 'POINTS' OF THE CIRCLE

Ride around the outside of the Poles, the Poles will be positioned on four 'points' of the circle, by riding around the outer edge of each pole, this will help to improve the accuracy of your 20m circle.

Keep your eyes looking ahead for the outer edge of the next pole all the time.

### KEEP LOOKING AHEAD!

Starting in walk, ride over the centre of each pole. Be sure to look for the centre of the next pole all the way around the circle, it is tempting to look at the pole that you are riding over but it is more productive to look ahead. It is the >>



Photos: Chloe Burke



## KAREN WHISTON



Karen and Piet, now rising 6yo, competing last year.

Karen is a BHSI, UKCC Level 3 coach and an approved R.W.Y.M. Biomechanics Coach.

As a successful competitor Karen has had many wins in dressage, show jumping and eventing including being placed at Blenheim CCI\*\*\* International Horse Trial. Her unique experience attained over 35 years includes working with many different types of horses whilst teaching, schooling and competing. Karen is very experienced with young stock and horses with behavioural issues. She loves to help clients improve their skills to help their horses.

When coaching the rider she spends time focusing on the rider's core stability and position in the saddle. This provides clarity for the horse, improving both communication and understanding. When training the horse Karen aims to keep the cues/aids as simple as possible, this helps the horses understanding and enables the building of trust creating a good partnership with the rider quickly and effectively.

Karen is available for private and shared lessons in the south west of England and for clinics throughout the UK and abroad.

Visit <http://www.karenwhiston.co.uk> for more information

horses job to walk over and avoid the pole and your job to give clear intentions of where you want to go next, firstly by looking head.

By looking ahead to the next pole you will also start to feel when the horse jackknifes or falls in on the circle, therefore you will react quicker with your body to improve the circle shape.

### CLEAR INTENTIONS

Now make the circle smaller by riding over the pole closer to the centre of the circle, if your poles have coloured stripes aim for the next colour in from middle of the pole, then aim for the next stripe in to make your circle smaller again. Gradually make the circle smaller, finish by using the inside tip of each pole to ride a small circle in the centre. You can then spiral in and out, keeping your focus and aim to give the horse a clear understanding of which part of the pole you want him to walk over.

### STEER THE WITHER!

Try to use your narrow thighs and bear down to steer the wither of the horse, using as little hand as possible, aim to have the horses nose and the withers on a tram line that goes over each pole at the spot you intend and makes the gentle curve of the circle between each pole.

To increase the challenge, this exercise can be ridden in trot and then canter. You can also raise the Poles off the ground to help increase the athletic challenge for the horse.

I use this exercise a lot to train both riders and horses, it takes a lot of concentration and focus to do the exercise really well!

There are other exercises that can be done with this simple layout of four poles, which we will cover another time. 🐾





# RIDE WITH YOUR MIND DEMO DAY

## HARTPURY 2018



Sam Turner  
and Billy Whiz



Karen Whiston  
and Mr T



Mary Wanless with  
Sarah and Pablo

The Ride With Your Mind Demo Day at Hartpury was another full and informative day.

Mary Wanless and Ali Wakelin were joined by Danish Vet, Osteopath and Acupuncture Practitioner, Rikke Schultz. Together Mary and Rikke described the fascial lines of the horse and human, and how one can influence the other. Mary's latest book, *Rider Biomechanics*, explores the fascia in detail.

Mary and Rikke discussed the fascial nets of the horse and rider, and the impact that unequal fascial lines in the rider can have on the way the horse is able to move. Mary modelled specially made suits showing the fascial lines in the human. In the horse the fascial lines were illustrated with chalk lines. The audience were given some useful exercises to work through in their chairs, some positional, some to do with breathing, many to do with fascial nets and core strength which helped to illustrate the theories that had been outlined. The RWYM demo days are audience participation events, these exercises can help the audience to feel something new or slightly different that they are able to take away and try at home.

The atmosphere at Hartpury was quite exciting, and some of our demo horses found it a little unsettling to be in front of so many people. This gave the hosts an opportunity to demonstrate how groundwork can be used when the horse isn't 100% focused on the handler and is in

a new environment. It did take some of the horses a while, but by the end of the demos they were able to produce some nice work and had settled in to the environment. The consistent, clam groundwork helping them to feel more settled.

The first ridden demonstration involved two riders who were completely new to RWYM. Jess rode Tilly and Mimi rode Ramario. They allowed Mary, with input from the audience, to critique their positions and then undergo a realignment with the help of RWYM coaches Ali Wakelin and Karin Major. The riders did a fantastic job, and it was wonderful to see the changes they made, along with the responses from their horses.

Chantal and her lovely coloured cob, Mia—who have feature in 'On the Bit' and 'Rider Biomechanics' courses hosted by Mary Wanless—joined us to demonstrate some of the ways a rider's position can go wrong, and the transformations that can happen with consistent training. Chantal and Mia were joined in this demo by Sarah and Pablo, who are one of the combinations featured in the 'Retraining the Horse and Rider' series on *Dressage Training TV*. It was the first time either Sarah or Pablo had been to such a large venue and the first time Pablo has ever seen such a large crowd. Pablo was a little excited by his admiring crowd and also seemed to take quite a liking to Mia! With Ali's

assistance, Sarah was able to settle him and show some nice work. Sarah and Pablo have shown fantastic progress since the start of their journey with *Dressage Training TV*.

We also had Karen Whiston and her five year old gelding, Mr T, with us who behaved beautifully and was expertly ridden in the advanced demo. He even assisted a rather alert Pablo by being his companion during Rikke's assessment. Rikke could see that there was a difference in the way Pablo used his quarters from one side to the other. She talked through how she would assess him before treatment, and the sort of treatment he would benefit from when back at home.

The superstar Cob, *Billy Whiz* and his owner/trainer Sam Turner (*Sam Turner Dressage*) gave us a fabulous demonstration of more advanced movements. Sam is sponsored by Aviform, who she says have been instrumental in keeping her and Billy in good shape with the help of their supplements. If you would like to help Sam and Billy progress in competition and get great coverage for your company through sponsorship, do get in touch with her using the links above.

Once again, the day could not have run without the army of RWYM coaches, willing demonstration riders and their horses (some of whom had driven multiple counties to be with us) and, of course, the fabulous audience. 🐾



Rikke Schultz and Mary Wanless discuss human fascia



Rikke Schultz and Mary Wanless show equine fascial lines



Chantal and Mia



Chantal demonstrates collapse left...



... and collapse right



Mary shows a correction



Sam Turner and Billy Whiz

RIDERS NEW TO RWYM ▼



Mimi and Ramario at the start of the demo



Karin Major works with Mimi



Mimi and Ramario after some adjustment



Jess and Tilly at the start of the demo



Ali Wakelin works with Jess



Jess and Tilly after some adjustment

# SARAH JAMES & GWAR

Sarah and Gwar are stars in the Retraining the Horse & Rider series. You can follow their training journey with Ali Wakelin and Peter Dove now on Dressage Training TV.

**Name:** Sarah James

**Age:** 34

**Where are you based?** Chilton Foliat / Aldbourne / Wilts

**Why did you start riding?** When I was three I sat on a Shetland in Eastbourne and went for a little toddle – I think it was at a little fair? I was hooked!

**How long have you been riding?** I think since I was about seven, My first lessons were at Wellington riding in Hook. It was not as fancy as it is now but still a little intimidating for a little person!

**What/ who was your first horse?** My first horse was Sam, a TB, large ginger beastie who I had on loan to teach me the ropes of general horsemanship, It was quite a while ago now! But he had a kind soul and tried his heart out!

**Which was your favourite horse?** My favourite is King, my 17hh ISH. I still have him, at 23 he is enjoying casual retirement. King saved my bacon in every possible way! I had completely lost my confidence and didn't even want to ride, let alone a huge ex-eventer! I was promised he was the perfect gentleman and he absolutely is. Without him I wouldn't be riding today. King completely restored my confidence and got me through some tough times. He is a funny old bean, pulls faces on the ground, and knows exactly when he needs his human, and when he is fine to be left. My friend has nicknamed him 'Barry' after Barry White, as he has such a deep voice... you can always tell when he is calling for dinner!

**Who is your current horse?** My Current horse is Gwar.

**How long have you been riding/training Gwar?** I began riding Gwar late summer 2014, I was helping out a friend who later offered him to me on loan. I have officially owned him from January 2016. Gwar had only ever been used as a casual hacking horse, but by just watching him move you could tell he had some snazzy dance moves lurking!



Photo: <http://jennifergillamphotography.co.uk>

**Who most influenced you from a training perspective?** I think most recently Charlotte Du Jardin – which might seem like an obvious answer – but just seeing her ride, and how she treats her horses is amazing, I get quite emotional watching her and her equine partners dance. I have seen some of demos and how she approaches a young/green horses training and it is inspiring – and clearly works!

**What is your usual routine at your yard?** We are up there early every day, most horses are fed early between 6-7am and turned out for the day, to be ridden in the afternoon. A couple are groomed and ridden in the mornings. I try and ride Gwar in the afternoons after work. He will be turned out for the day and brought in overnight. I try and get all the mucking out done in the morning so that I have more time to spend on the horses in the evening.

**Who is your favourite horse to compete?** It's tricky. King loves to show off and he would go in to a dressage arena and love the attention, toes flicking out and he would dance his heart out. Competing Gwar is completely different, but massively rewarding – he gets his game face on and we are off. He is still learning and he surprises me every time we go out with his attitude and effort.

**Best horse you've ever ridden?** Every horse I have ridden has had some brilliant qualities and funny traits, I couldn't pick a favourite! I have had one that would seem to look up at birds in the sky, Gwar will randomly stick his face through a bush to see what's going on the other side or decide that his shadow is following him and he must escape! King could run like the wind with no fear of a random spook, he looks after anyone sat up there... I am lucky that I have built up strong bonds with my horses, I love to spend time with them even if just on the ground to watch their funny little quirks and behaviours.

**Who is your key support person & what is it that they do that helps you?** I have two good

friends that are my key support. I always try and coax one of them to come with me competing. They keep me calm and put up with the hangry ranting when I have forgotten to eat breakfast on days with hideously early starts. They both offer ground support, advice and a good kick up the bum when needed! I'm very lucky to be on a lovely livery yard where everyone helps each other and provides encouragement (and coffee & cake on the days I think I'm ready to throw in the towel!)

**Do you have sponsors?** Not at the moment, but hoping as we progress it is something we might attract.

**What is the most vital bit of kit in...**

**Your yard:** My Le Chateau wellies, I bought some new wool lined ones for winter. There's nothing worse than a leaky boot and a wet sock—my boots have lasted me well!

**Your grooming kit:** Haas Brushes—they are truly brilliant. I always carry one to give Gwar a quick brush before we go into the arena, and baby wipes... good for eye goo!

**Your lorry/trailer:** GIN! I have a very small sneaky celebratory gin and tonic in the lorry to celebrate general survival after a competition! (Don't worry – not when I'm driving!)

**Your training 'toolkit':** Patience, perseverance and a kind hand. Gwar is not an easy horse, we both have bad habits. There have been tears and tantrums on both sides, our journey is long, but it won't be rushed.

**What couldn't you live without?** Other than the horses, Coffee and the fingerless gloves my friends mum knitted me – both are lifesavers! >>



**Horse's Name:** Gwarcoed Black Jack 'Gwar'

**Owner:** Sarah James

**Breed:** Welsh D

**What's Gwar's favourite treat?** EVERYTHING! Mostly mints – does enjoy the odd hobnob.

**How long has he been with you?** Gwar has been with me for about two years.

**What's he like to handle/ride?** He is quirky, sharp and strong! But an absolute people pleaser. He tries his heart out for me. Gwar's soul is completely innocent and he doesn't have a bad bone in his body. I have never seen his ears go back in anger. He pulls the funniest faces, LOVES a selfie! He will spook at the silliest things, have temper tantrums, little squeals of excitement when he sees his friends (or dinner!). He has been known to 'sing' through a dressage test to his buddy standing outside the arena. Gwar has recently discovered his 'game face' and is learning the white boards mean time to get down to business!

Gwar likes a good scratch and will often turn his bum to you and start swaying, asking for a good itch!

**What is Gwar's training routine?** We school three times a week, and hack out twice. He will have two days off, the days will be mixed up and will change now and then. I like to take him out to play on a XC course when I can, I think it just gives him something completely different to do for a day and he loves it. Gwar likes to be kept busy, if left for a week or more we will have a few days of turbulence before we can get down to some proper beneficial work.

As he is learning a new way of working he has physio often to ensure we are building muscle correctly and no areas of tightness are forming.

**What do you feed?** He is currently two feeds a day containing Pure Working and Speedi beet, with a scoop of gut balancer and Maxaflex once a day.

**What's he like to handle, clip, shoe?** Gwar is a lamb to handle, he is a bit nervous hot shoeing because of the smoke. I need to take him to more BBQ parties ;)

**What did Gwar do before he came to you?** He hacked around a local village. 🐾

 **RETRAINING THE HORSE & RIDER**

Sarah and Gwar are part of the Retraining the Horse & Rider series on [Dressage Training TV](#). To watch their journey [click here](#).

 **RETRAINING THE HORSE & RIDER**



Photo: Alex Grimm. Getty Images

# (MIS)COMMUNICATION

BY MARY WANLESS, WRITTEN FOR DRESSAGE MAGAZINE.

As I see it, communication within the horse world between trainers/instructors and their pupils is permeated by a schism, which causes immense frustration and misunderstanding on both sides of the divide.

The elite rider (who is naturally talented) may or may not realise that she suffers from the fact that she does not know what she does. Meanwhile, the average rider suffers from the limitation of not being able to do what she knows (she should do).

She knows that her hands, her legs, and her horse should be a certain way — she has read it in books, seen it in demonstrations and on DVDs, and had it said to her, probably countless times. Yet none of this input can make her practical skills a match for her theoretical knowledge.

Natural, instinctive skills cannot be put into words; in fact sport psychologists describe them as being 'cognitively impenetrable' i.e. they cannot be taken apart and known by the conscious mind. They come as a package that functions out of awareness, on 'autopilot', and beyond the reach of language. The shocking result of this is that if you ask an elite rider to explain how she (for instance) gets a horse 'on the bit', her verbal answer may well bear very little resemblance to what she actually does!

At best, the elite rider is only able to tell you about the tip of a very big iceberg — the small part of her skill that functions in consciousness. If you ask her how she does it, her answer (if she is honest) will be the equivalent of, 'I do X'. Perhaps her talent spared her from having to learn the basics of A to J, as they 'just came naturally', and it was probably many years ago that she began her learning at 'K'. To use a term from the research on expertise, she will have 'expertise induced amnesia' for most of the learnings that have happened since then!

If a trainer says 'Do X' to a pupil who lacks the skills that lead up to 'X', the pupil will not be able to utilise that input: she cannot cross such a large skill-gap. 'Do X' will only work for the rider who can presuppose the same basic skills and co-ordinations that the trainer herself can presuppose (i.e. from ABC to UVW). This is only likely to happen at the elite end of our sport. (Think, for instance, of Carl Hester and Charlotte Dujardin.) When it doesn't, how do the trainer and/or the rider explain the origins of their joint problem?

All too often the rider decides that she must be stupid and incapable, and I suspect that many trainers are also tempted to put her into this camp. (I even wonder if some think there's a race of normal people — like themselves — and also a race of incapable cretins!)

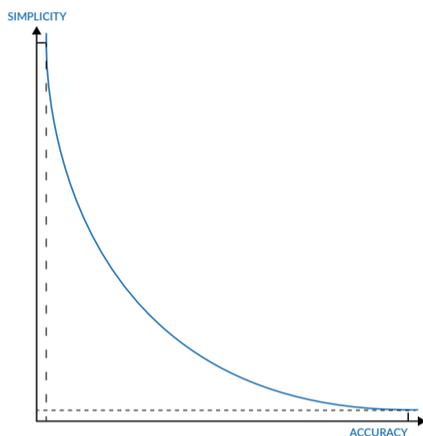
If you ask someone to explain the feeling of a horse on the bit, or the feeling of a good half pass, your question is logically equivalent to asking 'How do you explain the taste of strawberry jam?' Whilst we can all recognise strawberry jam, and will not confuse it with apricot, we would all be stuck for words! It would be tempting to say 'Strawberry jam is red and it has lumps in.' The riding equivalent of this is to say 'The horse's poll should be the highest point, and his hind feet should track into the hoof prints left by the forefeet...'. This answer is supposed to satisfy us; but the astute listener is left thinking, 'Yes, but what does it taste/feel like?'. She might also ask, 'How do you make it?'

We are dealing here with two types of knowledge. Declarative knowledge answers >>

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIMPLICITY AND ACCURACY IN A THEORY OR MAP OF RIDING

#### KEY

- - - - - The very simple explanation is not very accurate.
- The very accurate explanation is not very simple.



(After Peter Coltrane, *Uncommon Sense*, Capstone 2004)



Photo: Lottie Elizabeth Photography

the question 'WHAT should it look like?'. We have reams of this knowledge in the horse world, and it is not difficult to become an arm chair expert!

However we are extremely short on procedural knowledge which answers the question 'HOW?'. 'How do you do that?' is a question that bears asking, and bears answering, even if the honest answer has to be 'I wish I could tell you!' The more traditional answer of 'this hand here and that leg there' is supposed to be sufficient; but if it really were, there would be many more skilled riders on planet Earth than there actually are!

The relationship between the simplicity and the accuracy of the knowledge in any field follows the graph (see below). If we make things very simple we sacrifice accuracy—to the point where our simplification could become a pack of lies. Great accuracy (as one finds in scientific papers) has to sacrifice simplicity, and this depth of knowledge becomes inaccessible to the layman.

Between the complex reality of what good riders actually do, and the traditional, simple description of 'this hand here and that leg there', lie many possible explanations. They are like maps that help us navigate the territory of riding, homing in (we hope) on the right level of detail at the right stage in someone's learning. Our traditional map was simplified to help 'stupid' people 'get it'; but the paradox is that following such an inaccurate map makes people who are potentially capable appear stupid!

Understanding and explaining the 'how' of riding requires us to delve into its biomechanics.

We are regularly told of the importance of seat and position. Yet few people really consider questions like:

- Does it matter to the horse how the rider distributes her body weight?
- Does it matter to him how long her stirrups are i.e the angle in her hip and knee joints?
- Does it matter to him if she is asymmetrical?
- Does it matter to him if she is a firm or a floppy rider?

And if it does matter, and it affects his performance, how do we get the rider from her starting point to the ideal in each of these parameters? Are there ideals? If so, how are they best described?

Progress in this field requires our culture as a whole to take more seriously the schism between not knowing what you do and not doing what you know. The bottom line is that the parts of the brain that 'house' well-practiced, automated skills do not utilise language, and cannot communicate with the parts of the brain that do.

The resulting problem has been described as 'the curse of expertise'. Skilled riders may well be winning competitors, and we think of them as blessed rather than cursed. But they are cursed by the inability to describe their skills in language. Let us acknowledge both their

genius, and their limitation, realising that one does not negate the other.

Automated skills are inaccessible to language — unless a rider takes deliberate care to remember various stages of her learning process, along with the words that describe them. Then she can teach from memory. All too often a new breakthrough replaces what she had been most aware of (Q gives way to R), but — following philosopher Ken Wilbur — we want new learnings to 'transcend and include' prior learnings, not replace them.

In order to become able to 'do what you know' you have to step outside the limitations of declarative knowledge, and gain access to procedural knowledge.

New ways of understanding and coaching the biomechanics of riding make its secrets much more accessible, but the irony is that you cannot learn 'how' from someone who has no memory of her learning process. In tennis and golf players understand this, and even at the very top of these sports, coaches are often not top class competitors; they are the people who can analyse a shot or a swing and find language that helps the player re-learn and improve it.

To state the obvious, coaches in those sports cannot train the racket or the golf club to perform better, but a good rider can ride a horse so it performs better (as long as it continues to be ridden as well as she herself rides it). Perhaps one day we will not just hear about elite golfers who are working on their swing, or riders who are training their horse to do X; we will also hear about riders who are working on the biomechanics of how they ride half pass! 🐾

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UNDERSTANDING

# HOW HORSES THINK

WITH ALI WAKELIN



Meet Fizz, a long term livery at my yard in Suffolk. He is a 22 year old Arab x New Forest. He retired after developing hock issues and his owner still keeps him in the lap of luxury with me. He has been with me for around 10 years so we are very familiar with each other!

During the cold, snowy snap this winter in the UK I have been on the yard much more, so have had a lot of close up dealings with Fizz. An incident which occurred when leading from the field reminded me of one of the most frequent misunderstandings that I come across between horses and their owners.

Fizz has been going to and from the same field for several months. He is obedient to lead and well trained in the basic responses of stop and go etc. He is also clicker trained.

One afternoon I went to bring him in and noticed that a bale of hay had been left a short distance from his field gate. As Fizz approached the field gate he also noticed the hay bale and immediately stopped, stared and thought it was the scariest thing he had ever seen! Fizz has been trained to stop when scared to avoid triggering the flight response and to allow time to process the scary object. So we parked and looked at it for a bit and did some head-lowering to help keep him calm. We eventually managed to walk past it and over the next few days the object became less scary as he learnt it was 'allowed to be there' – the expected response.

It struck me that many people would have been exasperated by their horses reaction to

such a common object. I have heard phrases like 'he knows what a hay bale is so is doing it on purpose' and 'he likes to annoy me' or even 'he hates me and has been planning this all day'.

In fact Fizz was just exhibiting normal horse behaviour. Horses brains are quite different to ours and it can be easy to overlook how horses process their environment differently to humans.

The human brain has evolved an elaborate prefrontal cortex which has given us abilities to recall previous memories of situations and awesome reasoning abilities. We can use our highly developed reasoning abilities to relate previous memories to present situations. We constantly trawl back through our memories of events and situations, relieving our memories both in our heads and also through storytelling. Every time we do this we alter and corrupt (or maybe enhance) the memory. Just think how often you have a completely different memory of an event to that of a friend who was also there!

Horses have a much less elaborate prefrontal cortex and because of this they lack the ability to reflect on past memories. This can be an advantage as it means they have precise, almost photographic, memories. This is why Fizz immediately noticed the hay bale had arrived.

Horses are also very context specific learners which means they don't generalise easily. So you can train your horse that a hay bale in the stable yard is okay but he won't then necessarily think that a hay bale in other

places is okay. Research has shown that, on average, horses need to see an object in five to 12 different contexts before they accept it being anywhere. This means they have generalised their understanding of the object. Fizz has always struggled with generalisation which caused various training issues over the years! Understanding the problem has allowed his owner to both have the patience and the training tools to deal with him.

So, for Fizz, the combination of his excellent memory of the environment around his field gate and his struggle to generalise led him to be wary of the bale. Understanding this and having the training tools to deal with his behaviour meant that I understood his reaction and could reshape his behaviour safely and effectively which lead to a happy, confident horse.

A basic understanding of how horses think and how to ethically reshape their behaviour is, to me, a vital piece of the journey to harmony with our horses. 🐾

ALI HOSTS THE  
GROUNDWORK CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME  
ON DRESSAGE TRAINING TV



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EDITOR'S  
PICK



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# JUDITH CHESTNUT

**Age:** Rather not say, however, I do have a 25 year old son.

**Where are you based?** New South Wales, Australia

**When did you start riding?** I started being serious about dressage training in the 1970's when I had my first riding lesson with Tina Wommelsdorf, who was the first Grand Prix rider in Australia.

**Who was your first horse?** The first horse I rode a dressage test on was Danny. He would buck every time he was asked to canter a 20 metre circle, so I had to work hard on the other parts of the test to get some redeeming comments.

**Who is your current horse?** My current horse is a mare and her name is Montana, affectionately or otherwise called Monty.

**How long have you been riding/training Montana?** I leased Montana for 12 months because her owner, who was also the person who bred her, did not want to sell her. In January last year, the owner's circumstances changed, so my husband Gary and son Rowan bought Monty for me for my birthday. So long story short, I have been riding Monty for two years.

**What is your usual routine at your yard?** I try to ride Monty at least three times a week. Usually I do. I ride in the afternoon and am fortunate to have the use of a covered arena. The yard is only fifteen minutes from home, so it is not much different from stepping out into my own yard. I like to arrive at the yard an hour before riding so that I can groom and tack Monty and most times we do five to 10 minutes of groundwork before our flatwork riding.

**What is the most vital bit of kit in...**

**Your yard:** The water tub particularly in the hot, dry weather we can experience in Australia.

**Your grooming kit:** I have this wonderful new coconut fibre body brush. As Monty is grey, she often has a few stains on her coat. This brush removes them like magic and leaves her coat with a beautiful luster.

**Your lorry/trailer:** When I had a float (trailer) the most vital bit of kit was a hay net.



Photos: Judith Chestnut

## MONTANA

**Montana's Age:** 15 years

**Montana's Breed:** Arab x Quarter Horse

**What is the horse's character like to handle/ride?** Monty has quite a gentle temperament with a tendency to being lazy. However, when everything is going well, she is quite delightful to ride.

**What is the horse's favourite treat?** Banana

**What did the horse do before it came to you?** Monty did trail riding with her owner in mountainous country and then she was used solely as a riding school horse. >>

### GROUNDWORK CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME



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LEVEL 4 COMING SOON!



## GROUNDWORK CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME

**When did you start the programme?** I started the programme when it was first released.

**What Level/ Module are you now at?** I have completed all the modules at Level 2, however, I have not submitted a final video for assessment.

**How long has it taken you to get to this stage?** I have been making consistent progress. Not sure how long.

**What have you found easy?** Understanding the concepts and accessing the lesson material.

**What has been the most challenging?** The actual videoing.

**How has the programme affected your relationship with you horse both on the ground and ridden?** Monty is by nature calm, however, if there is something unusual happening in the yard, or like yesterday, a large tree branch falls right beside both of us, then, the groundwork has been invaluable. The head lowering is

brilliant. Also, I think Monty's go response has improved as has her participation in lateral work.

**How many videos have you submitted?** I have submitted several small snippets of this and that, however, so far, only one video that was a final video for Level 1 of the groundwork programme.

**Any comments on Ali's feedback?** Ali's comments are always helpful and I like how Ali has a positive and encouraging attitude with it all. I'm always interested in Ali's comments with the training videos that are on the site and the Sarah and Pablo series has been particularly interesting.

**Any other comments?** My goal with riding is to actually choreograph and perform a freestyle with Monty. I am a member of the International Dance Council and it is interesting researching the relationship of dance to dressage. I often ride with a metronome and, when there is no one else on the arena I ride to music. I am very interested to find out more about riding freestyles.

## ALI'S FEEDBACK...

Judith is an active member of the groundwork certification programme and has used the resource of being able to ask as many questions as needed via the forums very effectively. She has worked hard to achieve her level one groundwork certification and I am looking forward to working with her on level two. 🐾



Teaching children can be challenging, especially when they are your own! But with the right attitude, and a few helpful hints, it can be a recipe for success.

I am a dad, with two children Milly (16 years old) and Edward (eight years old), and I coach both of them. It has been an interesting learning experience spending so many hours coaching both children, and in this article I hope to share with you a couple of key points. These points refer to one-on-one coaching, in which the main aim is improving skill and stability in the child. There are lessons in which simple fun is the aim of the game.

## TYPICAL TRAPS

### LOW EXPECTATIONS

When teaching children it is very easy to set yourself low expectations of performance, skill enhancement and critical thinking. Even children as young as six or seven can understand well explained biomechanical terms, execute and develop resilience of position under instruction. I think it is essential that we start to create thinking riders early on who develop a feel a feel for interactions between horse and rider.

### BECOMING THE PUPPET MASTER

One of the consequences of low expectations is that we can easily become a puppet master

operating the pupils actions from a distance. The teacher issues a stream of instructions to the pupil for the duration of the lesson intended to correct faults which repeat themselves. I think this is a very easy trap to fall into and I have been guilty of it myself. The outcome of such a strategy is that the pupil does not learn to think for themselves and has no real incentive to maintain the corrections for themselves.

“THE MESSAGE FOR ANY COMPETITIONS BECAME ‘SIMPLY DO YOUR BEST!’...”

What happened to me on a several occasions, when I had fallen into this trap, is that I would become frustrated that I was repeating myself so often. I would begin to think Milly was not putting in any effort! The realisation that it was ME that had switched off the pupil's brain was quite a wakeup call.

### ARTIFICIAL GOALS AND DEADLINE

One last trap I want to talk about can affect the quality of your teaching and your levels

of patience! In the early days of teaching the children, we would book to go to a competition/show and the message became “You need to be ready for X” where X was some standard or type of competition. This artificial goal raised expectations too high, and created too much pressure on both the coach and the pupil! The lesson I learnt from this was to simply simply ignore these artificial goals, except if some of the advice needed was easily implemented. The message for any competitions became ‘Simply do your best’, and what ever happened was an inevitable outcome of previous training. All competitions were treated as learning experiences which tested what needed to be worked on at home. This allowed the children to enjoy the competitions without the pressure but with some level of focus.

## A FEW GOOD STRATEGIES

### LISTS

Very early on in coaching I introduce the idea of keeping a correction list. This list contains the top five things that the pupil needs to correct in their position. I often ask the child to name what is on their list. I also ask them to cycle >>



through the list to see what corrections they have lost. This allows them to discover on their own what mistakes they are making and then to fix it.

## QUESTIONS

Rather than give the pupil information repeatedly, risking become a puppet master, I would rather ask a question. Here is a list of typical questions I would ask to give you some sense of the type of questions:

- What have you got on your list today?
- What are you forgetting to do that is on your list?
- What do you need to think about when you ask your pony to trot?
- What was good about that halt?
- What went wrong into the halt?
- What happened to your upper body in that transition?
- How do you think you could do that better?

Questions of this type teach the child to notice what is happening to them. It also teaches them to correlate their actions with certain consequences on the pony.

## PRAISE

What you praise a child for becomes what they seek to do to in order to earn more praise. I try to be clear what I am praising a child for and what earns a 'good'. Here is a list of some of the things that get a 'good', encouragement and praise...

- Correctly noticing what went wrong during a transition or movement.
- Making a good correction without prompting.
- Asking a good question.
- Improved performance, especially with a recognition of what they did better.
- Remembering lists, remembering corrections and lists from previous lessons.
- Answering questions correctly.

This may, to some, seem like a little bit of a cold list, but it praises engagement with the coach, it praises the rider's ability to notice and it emphasises the importance of understanding the horse/rider interaction. If the rider does X then the horse does Y, "Did you notice what happened to your pony when you landed a little heavy?"

My approach to coaching is based on teaching really good basics, really good noticing skills and building an excitement for improved skill. You can turn your children into determined improvers who want to perfect skill when in lessons.

I have been lucky that in my own family relationship I do the serious teaching and then they get to do fun stuff with mum like drag hunting, fun showing competitions and rides in the countryside. Just make sure that you mix and match as best you can for variety sake. Not every day needs to be a classroom day! 🐾



Peter Dove coaches Edward on Phyllis in Coaching Kids on Dressage Training TV.  
Become a member to follow their progress.

# RIDER ANALYSIS

In this section of *Dressage Training Journal* we look at one of Dressage Training TV's members and their horse, and give some helpful analysis of their position and their horse's way of going. This issue we welcome Maxine Williams and Missy. Maxine has been a Dressage Training TV member for some time, and has watched many of the online webinar series and is progressing successfully through the Groundwork Certification Programme.

## MAXINE WILLIAMS & MISSY

I've been riding for 30 years – where does the time go?! I've had Missy for three and a half years. Missy is now 14. She had mostly jumped when we had her – we bought her to give us confidence in jumping, and for me to school and train in dressage. She will take me over 1'9" courses now (it'd be higher, but I've not entered any) and will do a lovely Novice dressage test (though not lengthened strides!).

I first read a RWYM book before university, I really wish I'd pursued it then, as I'd be a good rider by now! Then, when I was learning Equitation Science last year, I was advised to have Biomechanics lessons. I did as recommended and also found Dressage Training TV through a Google search. I watched several of the video series, rediscovered Mary Wanless and as a result have a course booked in September, which I'm very excited about.

I've watched lots of the Dressage Training TV programmes. I started with 'The How of Riding', then have enjoyed the 'Rider Biomechanics' (and the book). My favourite so far has been the 'Groundwork Certification Course' and Missy and I are poised for Level 3. I really enjoyed Sarah and Pablo, and already have written loads of notes about Emma and Jenny. At last, a pony who's as laid back as Missy! I struggle as I lose my position trying to get her going! I will be going back to my groundwork with my new notes to help us improve!

It's really helpful to see errors a rider has on the videos, be able to recognise them in myself, and see the corrections. Sarah used to move her lower leg and hands too much – so I have been writing notes and practising what she's been told! And Emma uses her heel for the spur and takes her thigh off – guilty!! >>



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### FROM THE FRONT AND THE BACK

There looks to be a tendency to collapse to the inside on turns. The riders chin should remain over the centerline of the horse.

Questions the rider could ask are:

- Is one seat bone heavier than the other, or do they carry equal weight? If the weight on them is not 50/50 what is it?
- Is one seat bone forward/back?
- Is one seat bone closer to the spine than the other?
- If the riders torso were a cardboard box, would both sides be straight, or would one panel be crumpled in and one panel be bulging out?

The rider's weight should stay 50/50 on each seatbones, even through turns and it is often mistaken understanding of weight aids which get rider's making unnecessary contortions during the turn.

## COACH ANALYSIS

Peter Dove

In the first picture (*Pic.1 on previous page*) Maxine looks well stacked up with the horse nicely reaching out to the reins. Ideally we would like to see a little more working over the back behind the loins with the hindlegs less out behind.

Maxine is showing a good straight line from elbow to wrist/hand through to the bit, and a good shoulder, hip heel line up. There is a slight suspicion about the toe turning out and I think Maxine would benefit from doing the exercise which involves pulling the back of the thigh muscle out of the way from the saddle and rotating the thigh in a little more.

In the 2nd photo (*Pic.2*) on the longer rein she is looking a little behind the vertical. Usually, when faced with this pattern, it is useful to provide a resistance to the rider just below the collar bone for them to push forward against, or ask them to imagine that they are riding into a stiff wind and they have to provide a push forwards to keep them upright.



### IN TROT

In the rising trot photos the rider looks close to the top of the rise in photo 1 which is correct, though the leg looks a little straightened with perhaps too much push on the stirrup to assist in the rise. In the 2nd photo the rider is half way down and you can see the lower leg has come back. This may be to apply a leg aid, or be part of a pattern in which extra weight is placed in the stirrup on the way up, with too little weight in it on the way down. I would also be interested in seeing the sit phase of the trot, as I feel here the rider may be too upright with the potential to be either a little too heavy on the sit, or a little behind the movement. On the sit phase of rising trot the rider can be expected to be very slightly in-front of the vertical.

This horse and rider do seem to have a lovely partnership together and the rider's mechanics and balance look pretty good. A few tweaks will help the horse develop a little more energy and engagement of the back (working over the back). 🐾

Click the logos to see more about the courses, and online membership...



## Q&amp;A

**Q:** Help, I can't seem to get rid of my chair seat. I do my best to move my inner thighs in and back, point my knees down, and open my hips, but nothing works. What can the over 50, re-rider, who suffers from being tight (and really, I've done yoga until I'm blue in the face) do to help obtain a better position. Maybe it will just take years, but I'm not getting any younger. Thoughts on how to not weight one side of my saddle more than the other would also be great. I've had more than one saddle fitter ask me if I lean to the left. I'm aware of these issues and am trying to create new muscle memory, but it really has been a challenge.

*Jen*

**A:** I have been coaching riders of all ages, shapes, fitness levels for many years and everyone can succeed with this logical clear system so do not despair!

To answer your question fully I really need to see a video of you riding but I think you are struggling to keep your thighs and legs in the correct place, because you need to adjust your weight distribution. Try the following:

Think of sitting more towards the front of your seatbones and more on the front of your underneath. This will put your weight more down the front of your thighs (like kneeling) and will help you to keep your lower leg back.

To keep your body central in the saddle notice where your chin and the zip of your jacket are in relation to your horses mane. Also look down at your knees and see if they are level.

**Q:** I try to avoid the chair position putting my legs backwards and in doing this my toes go down and my heels go up.

*N Moller*

**A:** In this system we talk about the alphabet of learning to ride. Getting your lower leg back underneath you and your thighs snugly on the saddle is very early on in the alphabet and being able to have your heel lower than your toes is further along the alphabet. A lot of people believe that they have mastered the technique of having their heels down when in fact their heel should only appear down because they have their lower leg too far forward.

To get your heels down correctly you need to think of stretching down the back of your leg (your hamstring and calf). This will get your heel either level with your toes or slightly lower. Be careful not to allow your lower leg to go forward when doing this.

## STAR LETTER

**Q:** My horses seem to be getting an error message when I ask for canter. It must be my position, when I finally get a sloppy canter off I have difficulty not "pumping" my upper body. Help! How do I fix this?

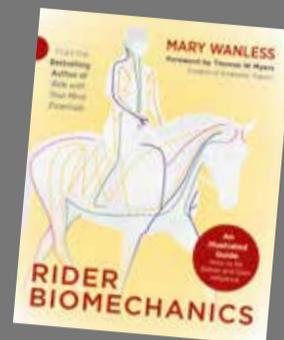
*C Cossens*

**A:** It is hard to answer this question without seeing a video as there could be multiple reasons for your horses not picking up canter when asked.

Keeping an organised position when asking for canter is important as you can only give clear aids to the horse when in a balanced

position. But if the horse ignores your aids either because he doesn't understand them or because he has learnt to ignore them then it is hard for you to keep your position when he does an unbalanced running trot.

To fix this you need to check that you have the correct position when asking for canter and then you need to make sure your horse responds to a light 'go' ask with you leg and backed up with a whip tap if needed. You will find details of this in the groundwork certification course and in many of the course videos.



## Q&amp;A

**Q:** Legs. I've been told all of the following: "wrap your legs around the horse", "keep your calves off the horse", "keep your calves on the horse and squeeze with every stride", "think of kneeling when you post", "keep your legs forward when you trot", "create an arch by posting from your knees" and I find myself confusing myself and my horse as I try all of the above. I know to ride in a position where, if the horse disappeared, I'd be standing. I know feet forward. It seems my knees dig into the saddle if I straighten my toes, and if I huff with my calves I pop up out of the saddle. What's your advice?

*J Kaggan*

**A:** In the riding world there is a tremendous amount of conflicting advice and if you try to adhere to all of it you will go round in circles for ever!

The best way to decide what is correct is to look at the very top riders. They all have the same basic position in common. They all have a shoulder, hip, heel line that would cause them to land on their feet if the horse disappeared. They all have their thighs on the saddle (more at the top than the bottom) and their lower leg off the horse unless they are giving a leg aid. They all have a strong core so that they can stay in balance with the horse.

If you follow the RWYM system of rider biomechanics you start to be able to recognise the above patterns in all the riders in the system.

**Q:** I am strongly left sided. My horse tends to over bend to the left. I have to always think about holding onto the right rein, being stronger with the right leg, and being softer with the left hand. If I remember and can consistently apply all this, I can ride him straight! (And in nearly correct circles). Do you have any tips, suggestions, or exercises – other than keep trying to practice correctly? Thanks.

*A Litts*

**A:** The really important thing to do, and the quickest way to make any correction is to get really good at noticing when you are riding. If you can get to the stage where you notice every time you lose your correct position then you will quickly start to notice the difference.

Instead of just focusing mainly on your hands, you need to also notice your body. It is hard to know exactly what is happening without seeing a video, but I think you are probably over rotating to the left. This would lead to your right seat bone falling away from your horses midline and also lead to you pulling back with your left hand and giving too much forward with your right hand. To correct this make sure your chin and zip of your jacket are lined up with your horse's mane. You will probably notice that they are off to the left. Also think of aiming your left hip and shoulder (so your whole left side) at your horses right ear. This will correct your over rotation left. It may feel very weird to start with but notice how much more even your hands become, and hopefully how much straighter your horse becomes. >>

**Q** When you are mounted in the saddle how do you know from looking at your thigh that you have the approx 45° angle? If it isn't at 45° angle can that prevent from having a stable lower leg position.

*B Clark*

**A** Yes if your thigh is not at the correct 45° angle then it will affect your ability to keep a stable lower leg.

You need to look in a mirror or get someone to take a short video or photo in order to check. If you hack out then you can also look at your reflection in windows of houses as you pass!

**Q** I have been having RWYM lessons from Ali for some time and have never had my own horse. On riding school horses (when I'm not riding with Ali) I still find it difficult to keep my lower leg still in rising trot. I think it must be something to do with not sending the weight into my legs. Can you help? Thank you.

*E Salmon*

**A** I think the reason you struggle on horses other than my advanced schoolmaster, Oriente, is because many riding school horses have a bigger hollow in their backs because they are not trained to the same level as Oriente. On Oriente you have a level surface to sit on so don't have to put so much weight into the front of your thighs etc. On the riding school horses you need to make sure you keep your lower leg underneath you and concentrate on keeping your weight forward onto the front of your thighs.

**Q** When in rising trot my feet swing around and want to kick the horse each stride, how do I stop this from happening?

*Tammy*

**A** Your legs will be moving in rising trot because you have too much weight in your stirrups, so every time you rise your legs go forward and as you sit they go backwards.

To fix this you need to check that your lower leg is far enough back underneath you so that you have the correct alignment. This will help you put your weight down the front of your thighs (kneeling) rather than your weight going down the back of your thigh and down into your heel and stirrup.



## Q&A

**Q** I understand the importance of the knee angle for balance & maintaining seat contact with the saddle. I have a 14.3hh pony & due to her choppy canter, my instructor has recommended I go down one hole in my stirrup length due to bouncing out of the saddle too much in canter. I am short (5 ft) and when I lengthen my stirrup, I feel I am grabbing for my stirrup more which is pitching me forward in canter. Any suggestions to correct this, perhaps core strengthening training would help? Also your thoughts on no stirrup work in canter on the lunge line as an exercise. I am currently in USA Training Level 3. Thanks.

*J Bryant*

**A** In canter the way a horse moves tends to pitch riders forward causing them to bounce and if the horse is bouncy then that problem can become worse. You definitely shouldn't lengthen your stirrups as this will make the issue worse. Instead you need to think of sitting further back on your underneath. Be careful not to lean back though as that will actually put your weight forward. Notice that you bounce more from the back of your seat so trying to have more weight back there will fix the bounce.

**Q** I have been told to turn my head towards the direction I wish to go; however, when moving from the short side of the arena to turn diagonally across the long side, I feel very unbalanced. Would this be too much head position movement until the horse moves onto the diagonal?

Also, I have been told to position my shoulders with the horses shoulders, and that my hips should line up more with the horses' hips, for shoulder in and other lateral movements. Does this help my balance and help the horses' movement? Thank you!

*D Sanderson*

**A** Both questions are about your straightness and how to stay in balance with your horse on the straight, through turns and during lateral work. This is a complex subject and you will find more detailed explanations on this subject in many of the courses.

When you are riding you always want to keep your shoulders lined up with the horses shoulders. We talk about this as lining up your midline with the horses midline. To do this notice if your chin and the zip of your jacket are over your horses mane. This needs to happen all the time. You need to look through your horses ears at all times and look where he is next going to put his feet not across the arena or circle. 🐾

Do you have a question you would like answered by Mary Wanless, Ali Wakelin, Peter Dove, or one of the extended team members? Please email [support@dressagetraining.tv](mailto:support@dressagetraining.tv) using the subject header 'DTJ Question' with your question and photographs or video link to help the team see the issue.



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NEXT TIME IN



# Dressage Training Journal



- Core Strength with Mary Wanless
- Training the Dressage Horse— The First Year
- Yoga
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- Training Tips from Karen Whiston
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