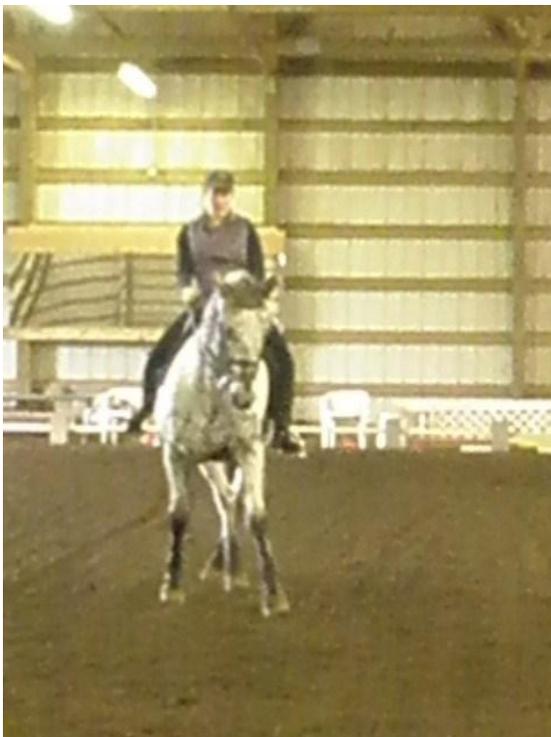


Bend in the Half Pass

By Danica Yates

As horses and riders start to move up the levels of dressage, they will need to develop the lateral movements in their training. Second level introduces shoulder-in and haunches-in (travers). The half pass movement builds off these lateral fundamentals in third level. In all lateral movements, the horse has 'lateral bend' in the direction he is traveling. The half pass moves forwards and sideways with this bend. In the trot and canter half passes, the horse must be balanced with half halts, activated with the leg and bent in the direction of travel.

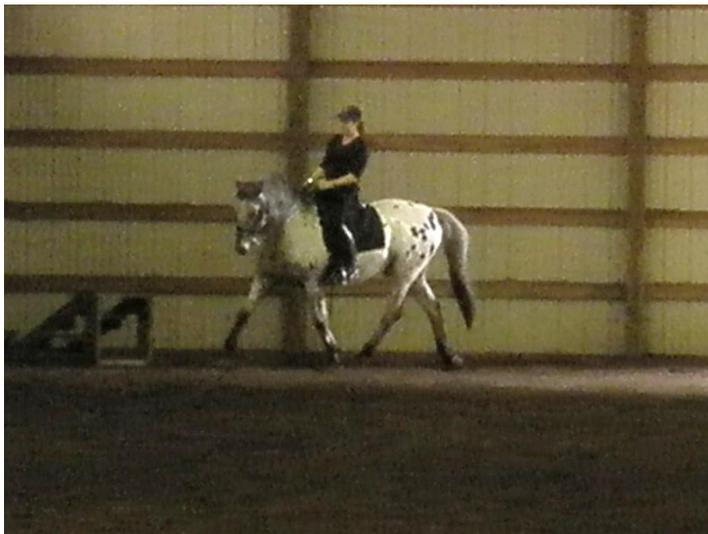
A good way to introduce half pass is to ride haunches-in on a diagonal. This is in fact a shallow half pass. The horse is looking in the direction of travel and is bent around your inside leg. Often it is difficult for riders new to this movement to figure out how to move their horse sideways in the correct positioning. Half pass feels worlds different from leg yield in which the horse is bent away from the direction of travel. It is important that you and your horse are competent at shoulder-in and haunches-in first so that you know how to change the horse's body positioning while still maintaining a lateral bend. Try riding on a regular long diagonal and positioning your horse in haunches-in. It is common to let the horse's body too become straight. Remind yourself of the role your inside leg plays in haunches-in to maintain inside bend. Also take note of what direction your horse's forehead is pointing. If it is squared off with the end of the arena, you know that you are lacking bend. Imagine your horse has a headlight coming out of the swirl on his forehead- that light needs to point at the far letter on the diagonal you are riding.



When learning to ride the half pass, think of it as haunches-in on a diagonal. The horse points his forehead at the end letter on the diagonal and bends his whole body around your inside leg.

Bend is essential for a half pass to be functional. If your horse is too straight in his body, he will not be looking the direction of travel nor crossing over with his legs in a true half pass. A bend or arch in your horse's body creates a hollowness on the inside that enables your horse to step across with his front and hind legs. If your horse is straight and stiff, it will be difficult for him to step across with much reach, and the sideways steps will be more of a shuffle. 'Side pass' is a non-dressage movement in which the horse moves directly sideways with his body fairly straight. In all dressage lateral movement, forward engagement and bend is essential. The amount of bend works in conjunction with the degree of steepness of your half pass. With a very shallow half pass your horse is slightly bent, with a steep half pass, you will need a greater amount of bend.

Try this exercise to help create proper bend in your half pass: Circle 10 meters in the corner before a diagonal line. Really emphasize the inside bend to your horse- working him off the inside leg into the outside rein and slightly opening your inside hand. Turn onto the diagonal line and maintain the same bend you developed on your circle. If you feel that you are losing the bend, with balance from your inside leg, turn into another 10 meter circle starting and ending at that point on the diagonal line. Again, as you come out of your second 10meter circle, hold the bend that you created in the circle and carry it across the diagonal in haunches- in (half pass).



Ride 10 meter circles in the corners to establish the correct bend around your inside leg, then carry that bend right into a half pass.

Also extremely important in training the half pass, are balancing half halts and sensitivity to the leg. Horses that tend to get heavy will likely try to fall forward on their forehead when you go into a lateral movement. Tell yourself to ride conservatively and master the balance back on the haunches before adding big forward steps. Use half halts to keep the horse from leaning and running as you teach him to position his body in the bend and step sideways. Ride very collected out of the corner, and don't let the step get away from you- bigger or strung out- as you proceed sideways. You can even do downward transitions during your half pass to school the sensitivity to the half halt and bend. Try a couple steps half pass in trot, then clearly bring your horse back to the walk. Soften your hands, take a

couple steps sideways schooling the bend around your inside leg, then trot on holding the positioning. As your horse learns the positioning for the half pass and becomes balanced on your aids, you will be able to encourage more expression and ride the movement a little bigger.

As well as balance on the hindquarters, horses must maintain the quality of the trot and maintain an even tempo in the movement. To achieve this, especially with lazier horses, you must have good sensitivity to your leg. You do not want to feel that you are pushing your horse over with your outside leg every step, rather that when you position him correctly he carries you across. Make very sure that you set yourself up and your horse is in front of your leg going into the movement. The last thing you want is a horse that shuts down in the ring when you go into your lateral movements. Teach your horse that the outside leg in the half pass activates and keeps the trot. A useful exercise when you feel your horse shutting down, losing the quality of the trot, is to turn your half pass into a leg yield. Say you are half passing to the left and his tempo starts to slow, change the bend to the right and move him quick off your right leg. This gives riders the tool to increase the engagement again in the movement. But remember, the quality of the gaits is more important than the 'tricks' of dressage. Spend more time developing a good canter than drilling the movements and the half pass will come more easily.

The half pass movement is incorporated into tests all the way through grand prix. Something to watch out for with the half pass movement- the shoulders should always slightly lead. Starting in 4th level, half passes right and left are combined into a 'zigzag.' The judges look very closely to see that the haunches do not initiate or lead in the new direction. As you progress with your skills in the lateral movements, remember to keep your horse balanced with the half halts, activated with the leg and bending around the inside leg.

Danica Yates is a sporthorse trainer in the Portland, Oregon area. FEI and European experience, four years private training with Olympian Debbie McDonald. Training, lessons and board are available. Call (503)278-1112 or visit www.danicayates.com for more information.