

Jane Savoie - Confirming Your Horse's Foundation - part 1

Jane Savoie is a past member of the US Olympic Dressage team. She is an author and well known clinician and motivational speaker.

Guideline and formula for training and problems (the Training Scale):

1. rhythm
2. suppleness
3. connection
4. straightness
5. impulsion
6. collection

Rhythm is the regularity of the spacing between steps in a stride
Rhythm and tempo both related to speed of the rhythm – you need to see a clear ‘V’ formation between front and hind legs at the walk; issues with tension

IMPORTANT: the movements are secondary to the rhythm

When to go slower: use this technique with a tense horse

When to go faster: to improve the rhythm and quality of the canter; piaffe and passage improves

The rider's seat

- controls rhythm, speed, shortening the stride and downward transitions
- teach the horse what back means
- the horse learns from association/linking
- use the seat with a voice command from the longe line
- there are three different seats you can use:
 - o driving seat: go forward. Swing, push with hips, stretch up, contract tummy muscles, say ‘slow’, head to fence, reward.
 - o passive/following seat: go along for the ride
 - o ? (sorry, missed that)

*When you ride, you're not just exercising the horse – **you're training him.** The **half halt** is the most important training tool.*

You must first **educate** the horse to the **correct speed**. Do not be afraid to sacrifice the frame.

If a horse is very tense, go to a slow trot on a small circle. Only trot while the horse can maintain the correct frame; otherwise, revert to walk.

Measure the frame by comparing the measure from behind the ears to the top of the tail, to the measure from under the throatlatch, along the belly to the tail – it should be the same.

Don't be reactive or passive. Be proactive.

Another word for *suppleness is relaxation*. With tension, don't address the mind first – relax the body.

Mental relaxation is a by-product of physical relaxation.

Suppleness = looseness in the muscles and relaxation in the brain.

EXERCISE:

- get the horse straight, on the bit – this is called the zero position
- bend inside 1" – this is called the +1 position
- bend outside 1" – this is called the -1 position
- use your hand when flexing horse as though you are unlocking your door with a key (flex horse in poll, use an indirect rein)
 - o flex the jaw ('fiddle the bit') with one hand, never with two

EXERCISE:

- bend 7" inside then straighten back to +1 position
- repeat 3 times (7/1/7/1/7/1) very quickly
- at same time, give a tiny squeeze with the inside calf.
- There should be no loop in the rein at any time
- Then do nothing for 6-7 strides, but keep very elastic elbows (hands forward in the 'work area', otherwise you steal from the hind legs)
- Aim for 'falling down neck' (Conrad Schumacher) – visualize it
 - o The length of neck will be proportional to the length of stride behind
 - Progression: then go to 4/1/4/1/4/1 – falling down neck)
 - If you get success (the horse does the exercise), reward: the horse will search for that behaviour again

Failing to praise a horse for doing a behaviour we want is the same as punishment.

***Failure to praise* and *punishment* both result in **extinction of that behaviour**.**

Always go back to a slower gait if extra speed compounds the difficulties.

The transition can be no better than the stride right before the transition.

Start rising trot by creating a channel between hands and neck. Rise high to mark the tempo.

Don't be in a hurry to eat the whole pie. Be satisfied with shades of grey.

Don't ride in a reactive state.

STAGE #3 – CONNECTION

- aka round = on the bit

- the aid to put the horse on the bit is the half halt
 - o the half halt is the most important concept in riding because it brings the horse to a more perfect state of balance – this can be physical or mental
 - o generic definition of the half halt: a momentary closure of seat, leg and hand. This will vary in intensity and duration.
- use a ‘connecting’ half halt: it lasts for three full seconds (the length of time it takes you to inhale and exhale – or say, “Add, add, add”).
 - o A half halt should not be done until you soften
 - Close both legs as though you’re asking for a lengthening (*capture – contain – recycle – outside rein-close in a fist*)
 - One aid is left over – the inside rein. It has two minor functions:
 - Keep neck straight
 - Relax the horse’s jaw
 - o (both of the rider’s legs and the outside rein are the heart of riding; an inside rein just wiggles – ‘twinkle, twinkle, twinkle’)
- if you can pat your head at the same time as you rub your tummy, you can do a half halt. You need to be independent.
 - o Order of aids in the half halt:
 - Legs
 - Outside hand
 - Inside hand

Trust the system.

- half halt:
 - o close both legs, make a fist with the outside hand, twinkle-twinkle-twinkle, say Add, Add, Add.
- For a transition:
 - o Do a half halt, while Adding – tighten tummy muscles for a downward transition

Jane Savoie – Attitude Determines Altitude

(lecture rather than riding lesson)

- Jane talked about how she was an unlikely person to be doing what she is doing now: she decided to go to the Olympics, but at that time only had \$500 in the bank, no horse, was a three-pack-a-day smoker and 20 lbs over weight. She bought a run-away thoroughbred and started to work toward her goal. She ended up at the Barcelona Olympics. She is also now a motivational speaker, who in college would avoid course when she had to speak in front of groups larger than 10. Now she speaks to large groups all over the continent and you can’t tear the microphone off of her head...

- Develop an **admiration of excellence**
- Have a **love of horse/country/competition**
- Be aware that **dressage is a process**; you have to be patient and go through the steps
- Have a **burning desire**; have a passion for your goal
- If your attitude is right, the facts don't matter
 - o studies show that if you passively listen, you'll retain 10% in 2 weeks
 - o if you put pen to paper, you'll remember 50% in 2 weeks
 - o if you actively involve your physiology, you'll remember 90% in two weeks

How far can you go with riding or other aspects of your life?

- it has very little to do with intelligence and talent
- 15% is in technical skill – the rest is attitude
- you need to pay more attention to the mental part of training
- **control is an illusion: *don't be a control freak***
 - o you can't control anything – except one thing: your dominant thought
 - o G-I-G-O – garbage in/garbage out
 - o 'Stinkin' thinkin'' is a contagious disease
 - o be around positive people
 - o no situation is inherently good or bad – use all situations to your advantage
 - o you create your own reality
 - angrier – tighter – worse – angrier – tighter – worse yet
 - o get in a **cocoon of concentration**; block out the extraneous
 - o *look at things as great opportunities*
 - o *you have a choice of how you're going to react*

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collect coping techniques

- debris in the river: think of sitting on a bank of a polluted river. Your mantra becomes: debris in the river (repeat). Don't obsess about EACH piece of garbage and take it home with you. Picture people you don't like as debris in the river. Let it all float past you...
- Ipana toothpaste: invisible glass shield, words deflect off of it.
- Dilute negativity: listen to CDs, watch uplifting movies
- From the neck down, you're only worth about \$100 – but we feed and clothe that part of our body, sparing no expense. The part of you that's most important (from the neck up) – do you feed that part?

How to Change Your Attitude:

1. Change Your Physiology
 - a. Dilute the negative
 - b. Be around positive thinkers
 - c. Come up with coping strategies

- d. create positive anchors – do something UNIQUE – that, then, becomes the emotion
- 2. Change Your Focus:
 - a. You don't get emotions – you 'do' emotions
 - b. If you don't like how you're feeling, do something different, do something else.
 - c. The key: movement, energy, lighten up, deep breathing, facial muscles up, volume loud
 - d. Energy is contagious
 - e. An anchor is a creative association between stimulation and emotional state. Like songs being anchors to certain feelings (from the past).
 - f. *Educate – create associations*
 - g. Anchors form in deeply emotional states
 - h. Every thought that goes into your head affects you immediately
 - i. Like taking garbage and dumping it in someone's home
 - ii. Don't let people dump negative thinking in your brain
 - i. Changing your focus has to do with questions – ask high quality questions
 - j. We cannot go more than 11 seconds without talking to ourselves (self talk); most self talk is in the form of questions that are usually benign
 - k. Learn how to ask high quality questions:
 - i. don't ask why...? or how...? questions
 - ii. better: what are relaxation exercises I can do...?
 - l. (*An audience member asked about when to know if it's time to give up/quit your sport/quit riding...*) if you are seriously thinking about quitting what you are doing:
 - i. Are you learning something about yourself and your horse every time you ride?
 - ii. Do you have fun?
 - iii. What are you grateful for?
 - m. Ritual:
 - i. It takes 21 days to develop a habit
 - ii. Visualize the perfect ride – **practice doesn't make perfect** – *perfect practice makes perfect*. Experience, emotion, in visualization (calmness, poise, gratitude)
 - iii. What could I be grateful for?
 - Tips for people who feel fear:
 - o **emotional freedom technique**: the cause of all negative emotions is an imbalance in the body's energy. When there's an imbalance, you feel negative pain and emotion
 - o **progressive relaxation** – difference between extreme muscles tension and extreme relaxation.

Now, back to riding:

MOVING UP TO COLLECTED WORK – part 1

3rd level dressage = medium level dressage

You must break the cycle of tension in the horse:

- inhale, exhale = get heavier; exhale and dissolve into the horse's back
- have heavy elbows
- to slow down: use a full down (transition into the lower gait), then progress to a ½ down, and then to a ½ halt
- if the tempo is too slow, you will lack suspension
- if the hindquarters are to the inside, ride a baby shoulder in to first position (or shoulder fore)
- work done in tension is a waste of time; be prepared to drop down in the training scale
- *“the slow way ends up being the fast way”*
- Kyra Kierkegaard (Finland): imagine that there are arrows pointed straight down from your seat bones; whichever way your arrows are pointing, that's the direction that you are driving the hind legs
- Point arrows forward for a passive driving seat

Straightness:

Axis = spine of horse

- if the axis is straight, your horse's shoulders are directly in front of your hips
- shoulder fore is ½ of a shoulder in = straightening exercise
- to ride your horse straight, ride your horse in a position called 'first position'
- definition of straightness: spine directly overlaps the line of travel with the hind legs following the fore. Anatomically difficult to be straight due to horses' hips being wider behind than shoulders are. Viewed from above, the horse has a triangular shape with the hindquarters being the widest part of the triangle.
- Engagement means the bending of joints of the hind leg.
- To achieve straightness, ride the hind foot ½ a hoof's width to the inside of the forefoot.
- Ride all corners in first position

EXERCISE:

- walk 3 strides/trot 3 strides
- progression: trot/canter transitions in rapid succession
- The hollow side of the horse (as opposed to the stiff side) feels easier to ride but that's an illusion.
- ride a horse in first position
 - axis straightness and leg straightness = laying a foundation

3 Criteria to evaluate true collection:

1. in inches – frame shorter
2. shift centre of gravity and load hind legs – progressively change
3. look at relative height of the withers; croup goes down and withers come up

Leg Yield:

- lateral exercise
- loosening, stretching, toe touching exercise
- BUT leg yield cannot be used to collect horse because the spine stays straight

Other advanced movements encourage collection

- bend + sideways = engagement

Shoulder-in is the ‘father of collection’

- how do you know if your horse is ready for shoulder-in?
 - o if your horse can go onto a 10 m. circle, you can do shoulder in.
 - o shoulder-in is the first step of a 10 metre circle that is then continued on down a straight line
 - o the hind quarters need to be parallel to the rail
 - exercise: shoulder-in/straighten/shoulder in/straighten/shoulder-in/straighten
 - do the hindquarters feel as though they are shifting, or not?

Haunches in (an advanced lateral exercise)

- go on a 10 meter circle, then halt just before rail: the last step of the 10 m. circle is haunches in – continue with this down the rail
- don't push the hindquarters past three tracks
- you should feel the shoulders point out – need to point straight ahead
- criterion: what's the forehead doing?
 - o If you can do haunches in, you can also do half pass
 - o Half pass = haunches in across the diagonal
 - Walk across the diagonal, shift the quarters without letting the shoulders swivel

The point of doing advanced lateral exercises is to load the croup.

Shoulder in: ½ of the horse should be on the original line of travel

Haunches in: the front end of the horse should be on the original line of travel

Half pass: the front end should be on the original line of travel.

EXERCISE:

10 m. circle, straighten, haunches in, straighten, haunches in...

- for canter pirouette: as above

There are different aspects of being forward.

- direction
- through body: horse is built like a parallelogram, hindquarters are out behind. Shift the hindquarters under by going towards lengthening, then back, then forward, then back...

Canter pirouette:

Start with a 10 m. circle.

Close hand

Haunches in

MOVING UP TO COLLECTION – part 2

Yesterday: we looked at riders at 3rd level. This is the first time horses are asked for ‘true’ collection.

Multitasking: *you hear about 7% of what someone is saying.* This is why **repetition** is **so important** to you.

Arrows extending from the seatbones: arrows push hindquarters in whatever direction the seatbones are sitting.

Parallelogram: change it. Forward over the ground, repeat, repeat, repeat, then forward. It takes 10000 repetitions of positional corrections for something to become a habit. To the degree a horse is too low, putting the bit out in front of him (by raising the hands forward over horse neck toward ears), putting the bit where it should be. The degree you raise your hands = the degree you (go forward with your body?).

EXERCISE:

Lift hands up and toward ears, then right back down for 1-2 strides.

Stay attached to the rings of the bit. Not on a loose rein. Like long release to short release.

Bend + sideways = engagement

Half pass aids; inside leg/outside rein have priority/predominance

- use all aids, but (see above)

Traditional leg yield = +1 flexion

EXERCISE

2 steps ½ pass, 4 steps leg yield

The benefits of lateral work are many, BUT... it takes away the desire to go forward; renew that desire with lengthened stride.

After a ½ pass, always ride a correct corner – protect/prevent the horse from falling in. Go through the corner in first position.

EXERCISE

At the canter

Flying change – quality of canter and balance will determine quality of change. Flying change is just a canter bound. Do exercises for a purpose – in this case, to load the hind legs. It is part of collection.

1. package: bring horse in shorter – length of neck and body
2. height of withers vs. top of croup. Redistribute balance
3. weighting of forelegs

Another category of exercises

EXERCISE: frequent transitions skipping a gait

Trot (6 strides)/halt/trot (6 strides)

Canter (5 strides)/walk/canter (5 strides) then just ride forward in canter and see if you've adjusted the balance

Length of rein determines the length of neck.

3 Different canters:

canter pirouette – the least ground covering stride

½ pass, counter canter – middle

flying change – most ground covering

You need to be able to put the horse into any frame within two strides

Adjustability is the name of the game.

What you visualize makes your muse fire in a correct way?

Be happy with progress in increments

Two different ways to collect a horse:

1. advances lateral exercises (exercises with bend)
2. frequent transitions skipping a gait.
3. ½ halts