



Tim Lewthwaite Riding Instruction: Lesson #1

TURN ON THE FOREHAND

JENNY HUGHES RIDING EARS

The turn on the forehand is a basic lateral exercise that you use to introduce to the horse the concept that pressure from your right or left leg is a request by the rider to engage the horse's hind leg on the same side under his body. Many young horses will react to pressure from one of the rider's legs by moving forwards. It is an important lesson for the horse to learn that pressure from one leg is not a forward aid, but a lateral aid.

As he learns to engage his hind legs under his body, he will become stronger in his haunches. He will lower his croup, flex his stifle and hocks more, and move his hind legs more under his center of balance. Over time and with more advanced exercises, this will allow him to shift his weight back, lift up through his back and free his forehand - the result will be a more athletic horse. The turn on the forehand is step one in that process!



WHAT THE HORSE DOES

The horse's body remains straight with a slight flexion at the poll in the opposite direction than the turn on the forehand (i.e.: if you are doing a turn on the forehand to the right (quarters swing to the right, the horse is flexed left). As the aids are applied, the horse will move his quarters in and arc around his forehand. His front legs will make a small circle, but stay in roughly the same place. If you do a 180-degree turn on the forehand, the horse "turns" on his forehand by swinging his hindquarters around until he is facing in the opposite direction.

WHAT THE RIDER DOES

1. Sit with more weight in the outside seat bone (the side of the saddle in which direction you will move the horse). Your seat should stay quiet and still - do not try and push the horse around by moving the seat.
2. With your inside hand, flex the horse away from the direction of movement, but keep a contact with the outside rein to make sure you do not over bend the neck.
3. Inside leg slightly behind the girth asks the horse to engage his hind leg on that side under his body and then step out with his outside hind leg. If necessary, reinforce the leg aid with the dressage whip.



4. Outside hand gives half halts in case the horse moves forward.

HOW TO RIDE THE TURN ON THE FOREHAND

When you first do this exercise it is helpful to do it along the fence line around a ring. Place your horse parallel to the fence line and about a half stride away. You will then flex your horse towards the outside of the ring. Apply the aids to swing his hindquarters towards the center of the ring while not allowing him to walk forwards. Do a $\frac{1}{4}$ turn on the forehand to start, as the fence will provide a visual barrier to the horse that will help you stop him from walking forward. Then do a second $\frac{1}{4}$ turn on the forehand. Be careful here, as the horse starts the second $\frac{1}{4}$ turn, his head will swing away from the fence line and this will then seem like an invitation for him to walk off. Be prepared with a firm half halt on the outside rein. The horse's front legs should be in roughly the same place along the fence line as when you started the exercise, but you should be facing in the opposite direction.



Jenny has ridden Ears along the rail. She is now half halting with her left hand to stop the forward movement, and applying her right leg to request Ears begin to engage his right leg further under his body.



Ears then steps out with his left hind prior to stepping over again with the right. Note how far underneath his body he has stepped. Jenny is also keeping his neck straight, avoiding the impulse to pull Ears around the turn with her right hand. Remember, this is an exercise about engaging the hind leg, not bending the neck!



SOME COMMON FAULTS

1. Horse (or rider) over bends the neck to the inside. This allows the horse to escape through the outside shoulder and walk around in a small circle instead of engaging the hind leg under the body. This is an exercise to teach the horse to engage his hind leg in response to your leg aid slightly behind the girth. If the horse doesn't respond to your leg, reinforce the leg with the dressage whip, do not pull him around with the inside rein.
2. The horse steps backwards when he swings his quarters. This is an evasion on his part. He is trying to avoid engaging the hind leg forwards and under his body. If this occurs, stop the horse and make him step forwards before proceeding.

IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT WHEN I SAY "INSIDE" OR "OUTSIDE" IT IS IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE FLEXION OF THE HORSE AND NOT A COMMENT ON WHERE THE HORSE IS IN THE RING. IF HE IS FLEXED RIGHT, HIS RIGHT LEGS ARE "INSIDE" AND HIS LEFT LEGS ARE "OUTSIDE."



Stop when you have done the first 1/4 turn. You will know this has happened, because you will be facing the fence! Take a moment to think how things have gone and then proceed with the second 1/4 turn trying to correct any mistakes that may have occurred. You should now be facing in the opposite direction than when you started!

Written by: Tim Lewthwaite

Click on "Lessons" tab to download more lesson pdfs from this website.