



Dressage is simply the handling and schooling of the horse. In the Bonding Model, we emulate with our own bodies the position we want the horse to find.

ASK, LISTEN, DIRECT, SUPPORT

Always return to the simplicity of the walk.

The Spiral

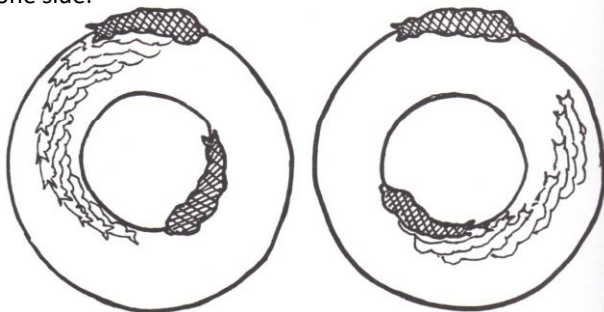
The Spiral exercise can help balance and supple the horse. Done correctly on the longe line or under saddle, it has the potential to teach softness and create better balance in the horse. It must be built up in intensity over a gradual period since the movement itself requires strength and lateral stepping that is both tiring and stretches the musculature deeply.

These exercises (on the longe and when ridden) should be schooled well at the walk before trot and schooled well at the trot before canter.

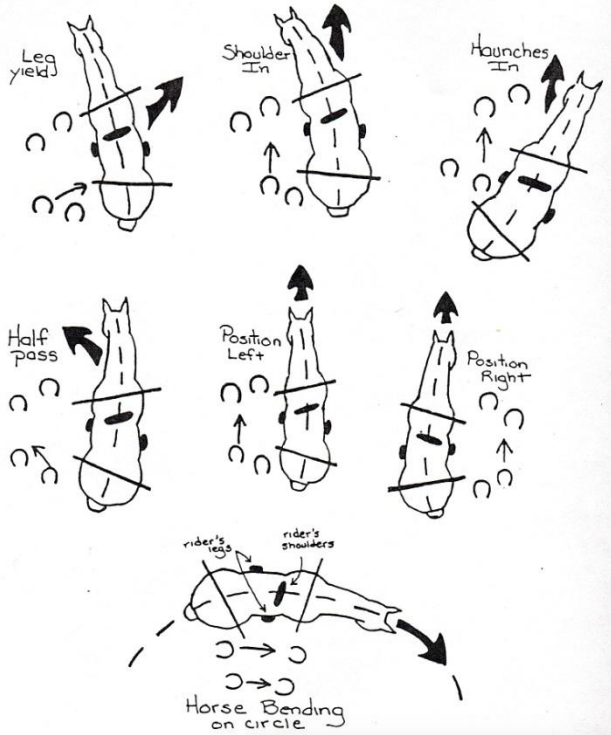
To spiral under saddle, establish your base circle at the walk. Ask the horse to move in gradually with your weight on your inside sitting bone, active outside leg pressure just behind the girth (to maintain bend and keep the haunches from swinging) and an active, spongy inside rein; stretched, supporting outside rein. Your horse should “half-pass” in – maintaining the inside bend that increases as the circle becomes smaller. Driving aids are needed (encouragement!) because the tighter bends require more energy. Think of half his energy going forward, half his energy going sideways. Imagine that a man is standing at the center of your circle with a rope tied around your waist and is slowly pulling you and your horse inward from your center.

Spiral out by shifting your weight to the outside sitting bone, inside leg becomes active, inside rein actively maintains bend and the outside rein is stretched to regulate the horse’s forward motion. You do a “leg yield” out. Imagine the man in the center of your circle now has a pole and he is pushing you and the horse outward from your hip.

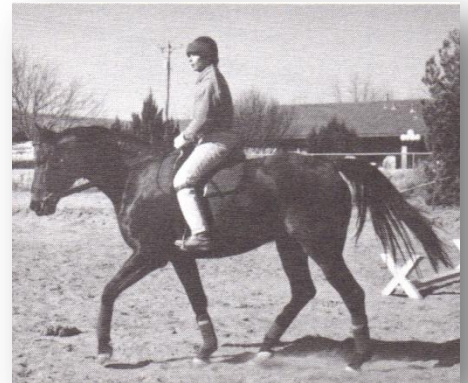
Do these exercises equally in each direction (to the left and to the right on the circle), even if your horse is stiff to one side.



Dressage Module



The laterally gaited horse (above) uses right legs in unison; left legs in unison.



The horse that trots uses diagonal legs: right front with left hind and left front with right hind.

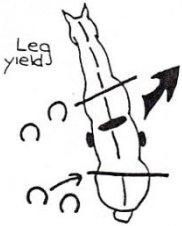


Dressage Module

You use the movements in Dressage to shape and improve your horse – *not* use your horse to perform a movement!

Extension (lengthening the stride) and collection (elevating the stride) are called **Longitudinal Flexion**. These are valuable to you as a rider because you can influence the horse to improve his balance and dexterity under saddle. The impulsion (energy) required for each is the same..

The **leg yield** is the first of your **Lateral Flexion** exercises, helping your horse to step further underneath his body. This stepping across will actually increase his ability to step forward – the ligaments that hold joints in place can become rigid and limit his stride.



Your leg aid to move the horse sideways is always active. You always slightly weight the sitting bone in the direction you want to go. You keep flexion with an active, spongy inside rein and stretch the outside rein, using it as a regulator. The outside leg keeps the impulsion (desire to move forward).

When the leg yield is mastered; first at the walk, then trot, you begin **shoulder in**. The movements that go away from the horse's flexion and bend are easier for him than the movements that step *into* the flexion/bend.



You must look into the direction of travel. Lateral movements are done in collection and are used to help develop that ability to collect the stride. Teach your horse to lengthen stride first so that he does not become tight in his body. Alternate between extension and collection constantly during a ride and refresh him often by letting him stretch naturally through the body.



You cannot force the lateral exercises. If he gets confused or tight, straighten his body and start over. Ask for only 2 or 3 strides of lateral at first, rewarding every effort with much praise.



Canter



Trot



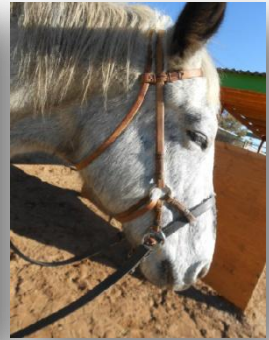
Trot



Dressage Module Equipment

Equipment for working with horses can run the gamut from ineffective to inhumane. Your goal must be comfort and communication, allowing the horse to respond to your requests.

Bitless Bridles come in many styles and can be as mild or as severe as the rider's hands make them. They work on the nerves in the face and nose and many horses find them much more comfortable than carrying a bit in their mouth. They should sit upon the bone, not the cartilage. The rider influences the ridden horse with leg and seat as well as with the reins.



The minimal amount of equipment and mildest of tack with the maximum amount of clarity in its use will communicate with your horse rather than forcing him into submission.

Schooling

Starting the inexperienced horse in-hand – first on the longe line, then ground driving and side walking – will give him the basics of verbal and body language, making it easy for him to understand you when he is ridden. With all you do with your horse, you are marking behavior when you praise, release and support him. Set him up for success.



Saddles spread the weight of the rider over a larger area than just riding bareback. Be certain that the saddle fits the horse. Check sweat marks when you unsaddle; dry spots indicate pressure points. Use gel, memory foam, fleece pads; whatever is necessary for his comfort.



Bits are used in the horse's mouth and if that is all he has known, it is wise to start with what is familiar. You can change things as he gets to know you personally. The bit should fit him comfortably being wide enough to not pinch the corners of his mouth and shaped to give room for his tongue.

Brideless riding relinquishes the idea of control. When you have bonded with your horse and communication flows between you, the trust allows you to set aside notions of dominance.

