

## Pressure and Balance Aids ~ Critical Understandings for Every Aspiring Horseman

Over the course of the many years I have been pondering the relationship between balance and pressure in developing effortless communication with my horse. Particularly as I have focused on balance as it has become evident that achieving this state of equilibrium plays a critical role in developing 'feel' *with* the horse. I have had the pleasure of watching true master horsemen and women from many different disciplines. The uniting factor in the picture they create between horse and rider is that of movement in perfect balance. Their posture is one that enables movement in harmony. A world in balance and where pressures applied are with thoughtful results. Let's take a look at how our posture effects balance and how we can apply mindful pressure aids to enhance a great ride.

First, here are some definitions of commonly used terms. They may vary with locality, subtleties of language, and to a small degree, with the types of jobs you may ask to accomplish with your horse.

**Aids** – Aids are reminders to the horse that re-enforce the suggestion or picture you are asking him to accomplish. Natural aids are our seat (as in seat bones and pelvis structure), leg (primarily lower leg and ankles), and hands. Artificial aids or tools which should also be used only as a reminder are the whip, spur, and rommel. **Pressure** – Should be seen as a compression of air, a caress, or a suction of air to move or shape the horse. Pressure is primarily a lower body function, from below the knee, and in some disciplines use of the thigh muscle. **Balance** - Is that state of equilibrium, that is in harmony with gravity and movement, which allows for poise of both horse and rider. Balance is primarily an upper body function, beginning with the seat bones and pelvis, up the rib cage to the shoulders, head, and eyes. However, the leg also acts as a critical balance component in regard to where it is positioned to bring both horse and rider into balance. **Rhythm** – Is the beat of the music you are developing with your horse. **Timing** – Is the measure of when you ask for a specific movement. Timing is greatly influenced by your knowledge of where the feet are, so you can influence where to place them.

With those definitions, let us now go on to discussing use of balance and pressure to accomplish specific maneuvers. We are looking to utilize balance first, and next pressure to work in harmony with our intentions, seat, leg, and hands to develop this symphony called horsemanship.

Combining Pressure & Balance in Leg-Yield Exercises – Leg-Yield postures are movements where the horse moves *away* from the bend, he carries his weight from the inside hind quarter towards the outside shoulder, and he is slightly bending to the inside, while his body moves opposite the bend. If for example we are leg-yielding or moving sideways and forward, to the *right*, then the horse would be shaped laterally slightly to the *right*, and you could see his *right* eyelash. After taking a deep breath and visualizing this leg-yield to the right to left on a diagonal, your body will start to naturally prepare your aids. Your balance will come slightly to the *left*, into your left seat bone, your left elbow will feel a bit heavier, your left leg will relax and get longer, and finally your fruit basket on top of your head will move from center to slightly left of the horse's mane line. Your pressure aids are helping the horse keep the proper bend (to the right), caressing at the girth with the right calve, and sending the energy from the right hind quarter to the left shoulder and rein. The left rein accepts this energy with a slight caress as the supportive rein. There is no need for any gross opening of the left rein, and certainly not a gross opening of the left leg! Simply relax the outside leg, and allow the horse to move sideways and forward in rhythmic balance.

Combining Pressure & Balance in Half-Pass Exercises – Half-Pass postures are movements where the horse moves *into* the bend, generally carries his weight from the outside hind quarter to the inside shoulder, and his lateral bend is maintained in the direction of travel. So, if we are half-passing or moving sideways and forward to the *right*, the horse is shaped like a zucchini to the *right*, and you could see his *right* eyelash. After checking in to make sure you are present, taking that deep breath, and visualizing the movement and pattern you wish to ride, your posture will already start to dictate to your aids. Your focus is slightly to the *right*, your weight moves into the right seat bone, the right elbow is heavy, and your shoulder-blade weight is slightly to the right. The pressure aids are minimal, as you don't want to think of "pushing" your horse sideways in the half-pass posture. Rather, the left or outside leg moves slightly back and holds the haunch, encouraging the movement from the left hind to the right fore, and into the right rein. There your right hand is waiting to receive the energy and flowing with the movement on the diagonal forward to the right. Your right leg relaxes and grows a little longer, and may have to caress slightly to remind the horse that the bend is to be maintained to the right.

As you practice your horsemanship pay particular attention to balance. How does it affect the use of your aids? How little does it take to communicate to your horse? How much fun is it when you find that perfect balance with your horse? See balance, particularly in how it affects your posture, as a critical component in the foundation of creating a horse partnership that is truly "with" you. Next, apply pressure with care. If pressure causes you to become out of balance, it is probably also affecting the movements of the horse.

Many of our mentors to which we aspire to understand within the readership of EH have discussed the need to develop "feel" in communicating with horses. As you progress on your horsemanship journey take time to contemplate the over-riding importance of understanding "balance" in your posture and in your attitude. To that foundation mix in use of pressure aids to shape and refine the movement. Whether on the dressage court or out chasing cattle, I think you will find that a mindfulness to balance and pressure will pay off in a new level of communication between horse and rider.

**Useful Reading & Materials:** Riding Essentials by Francous Lemaire de Ruffieu

Advanced Dressage by Anthony Crossley

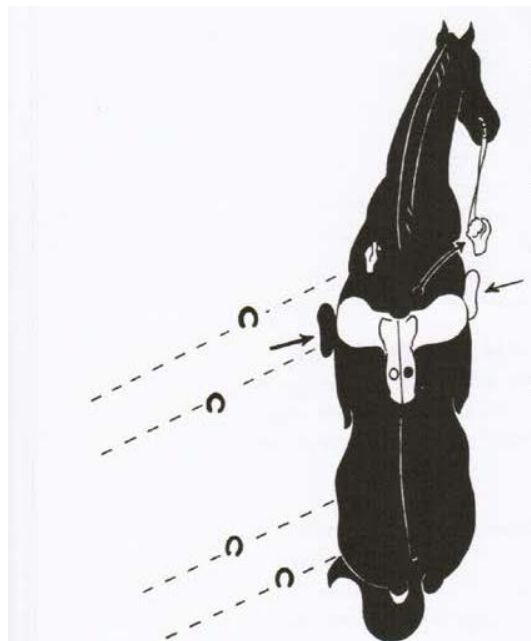
Fundamentals of Dressage by Alfred Knopfhart

Articles and Videos by Alice Trindle at: [www.tnthorsemanship.com](http://www.tnthorsemanship.com)

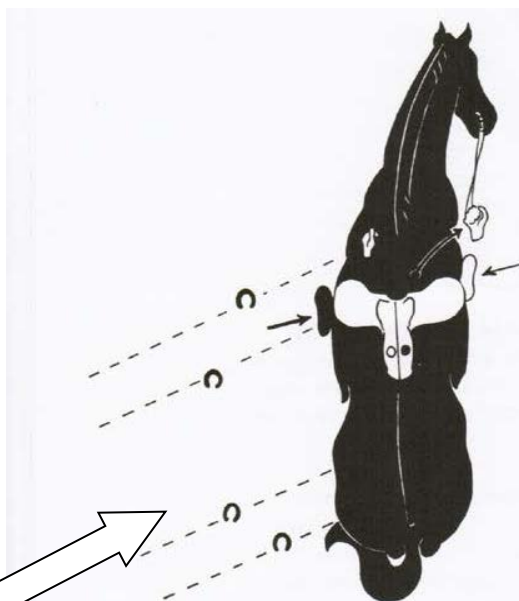
### Balance and Pressure Aids for Half-pass or “Into the Bend” Postures

**What:** A movement with lateral flexion that carries the energy from the outside hind to the inside shoulder, or moving into the bend.

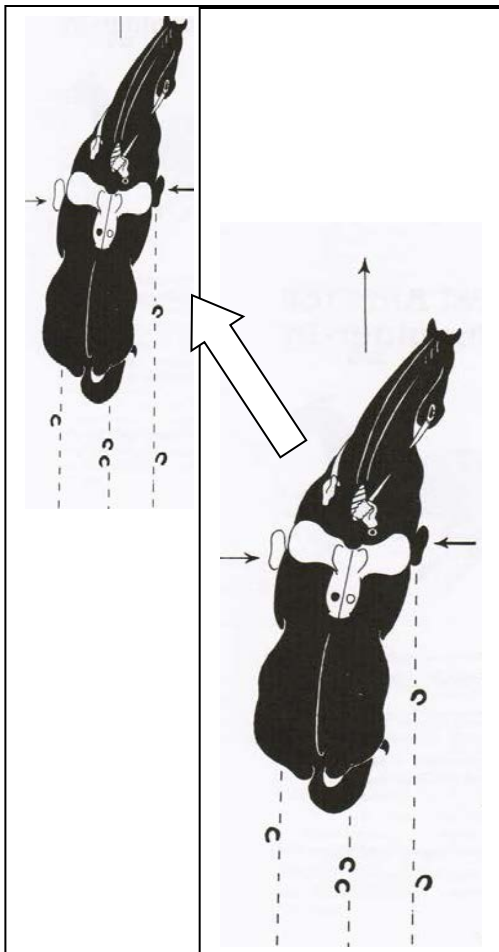
**Why:** Supple back and hind quarters; Prepare for movements that engage hindquarters; Educate horse & rider in effects of subtle changes in aids to enable balanced movements such as working cows, turn on the haunch, correct canter work.



**Seat & Shoulder Blade Balance:** The seat bone balance is in the direction of travel (Illustration: Laterally to the right); Shoulders are level to the earth, with a little weight in the right scapula & heavy right elbow. Focus is in the direction of travel and forward.



**Leg & Rein Pressure:** The left leg caresses slightly behind the girth – it does not ‘push’ the horse to the right; The right leg maintains the bend; The left rein does not apply pressure, but stays rather passive, while the right rein helps maintain the bend and accepts the energy coming from the outside, left hind. The movement is “into” the bend and direction of travel, and is fostered by balance and focus, not pressure in legs or hands.



### Balance and Pressure Aids for Shoulder-in or Leg-Yield Postures

**What:** A movement with lateral flexion, that carries the energy from the inside hind foot to the outside shoulder, or away from the slight bend **Why:** Supple back and shoulders; Engage hind legs; Accomplish jobs with lateral movement such as working cows or getting a gate, & specific maneuvers

**Seat & Shoulder Balance:** (Tracking to the right with a slight right bend) Seat bone weight is in the left seat bone; Shoulder blade weight is also left, with a feel in the left rein to accept the energy. Fore & Aft balance is centered.

**Leg & Rein Pressure:** The right calve of the leg caresses; The left leg is relaxed, long, and draped-still touching the horse; The right rein feels for the tongue & keeps the bend, but does not pressure the shoulders, rather the horse & rider balance in the direction of travel