

# Introduction to the Half Pass

By Angel Andrews

In order to introduce your horse to the half pass, he must be confirmed at all of the second level movements and is gaining the strength needed for collection and self-carriage. His lateral work should be very easy and he must be able to bend his body around your inside leg. He should be able to perform both shoulder-in and haunches-in with no effort. A slight shift in your seat and outside leg should maneuver his body to where you want.

A fun exercise to do to see if your horse is ready for half pass is to turn up centerline in the trot and then perform a shoulder-in for a few strides, straighten and then perform shoulder-in in the opposite direction. Next time you turn up centerline, do a few strides of haunches-in, straighten and do your opposite haunches-in. Remember to take your time and get your (new) inside flexion and test to make sure he is in the new outside rein before bringing his shoulders off of centerline for the shoulder in or asking his haunches to move over.

The next part of the exercise is to mix it all up. Every horse I have ever done this with loves this because it keeps things interesting. This is especially invaluable if you have one of those really smart horses who think he knows more than the rider! When I start this exercise, I usually ask for a shoulder-in from the direction he was already flexed. As your horse becomes more advanced, you can turn up centerline, get your new flexion and then ask for the opposite shoulder-in. This becomes really fun as you trot up centerline and ask for shoulder-in left, haunches-in right, shoulder-in right, haunches-in left, etc. It becomes a game for both you and the horse and there are an infinite number of sequences. Just remember to take your time to confirm your inside flexion and that he is solidly connected into the outside rein. Don't just wiggle his head and neck back and forth.

When my horse is totally supple laterally and can perform this exercise at the trot without any change in rhythm, tempo or impulsion, it's time to introduce the half-pass. Some horses (and riders) find it easier to first figure out the movement from the walk.

I always introduce the half-pass from centerline. I think it is too intimidating to the horse to ask him to travel across the entire arena when he is first learning this exercise. Also, the first time this movement is shown is at Third level and it is done from the centerline to the rail. As I turn up centerline, I make sure I have inside flexion and my horse is in shoulder-fore (a baby shoulder-in). I travel straight up centerline for a few strides before asking him to do anything else. The next step is to point his shoulders (by using your outside hand) and your shoulders at the letter on the long side where you want to finish your half-pass. I suggest using the entire arena as you don't want to make this too steep. He doesn't have to do a Grand Prix half pass when he is first learning this movement! I keep my outside hand on his neck keep his shoulders from bulging out and slide my outside leg back to send his haunches to the rail. I also shift my weight to my inside seat bone. Think of standing in your inside stirrup. Shifting your weight to the inside encourages the horse to move in that direction as he wants to keep the rider centered over his back. Picture a haunches in on a diagonal line and that is a beginning half pass. A few key things to remember. Point his nose and your nose where you want to go. Keep your shoulders square (with your horse's shoulders) and level, as well as your hips. No collapsing! A tap, tap, tap with either your outside leg or a whip works better than just digging a heel or spur in his side. After a few seconds, that

spot becomes numb and you get no reaction. Also, you do not have to move your leg back very far. Just a few inches behind the girth is all that is needed. We've all seen riders who have their heels up by the corner of the saddle pad with their bodies so contorted it looks painful! This is not necessary. You must teach the horse to move over from the softest aids. If your horse gets sticky and loses impulsion (which he is going to do) trot a few steps forward in shoulder-in and then bring your outside leg back and again ask the haunches to move over.

Keep the mental image of a haunches-in on a diagonal line. It will help you to maintain the correct bend and forwardness. Also remember that every horse is right or left-handed and he will have one half-pass direction that is better than the other. Don't worry, when he gets strong enough, he will even out. Another thing that usually happens is that one day he will do a half pass and then the next act like he doesn't have a clue as to what you want him to do. It's no big deal. Horses need time to digest things mentally. I usually introduce the half pass for a couple of days and then leave it alone for a few days to let his body and his mind figure it out. Don't drill this incessantly as it will only make him mad and make his body sore. Just remember to ask gradually and let him figure it out in his own time.