

Fine-tuning the Half Pass

By Angel Andrews

In the previous article, I gave a step-by-step plan on how to introduce the half-pass. This article will cover any little problems or mishaps that might crop up and test to see if your half pass is "show worthy"! As your horse becomes more confirmed in his half pass and stronger, you can ask for more bend. As you move up the levels, the half passes become steeper. The Third level half pass covers a 10-meter width (centerline to rail) and you get 24 meters in length to move over that distance. The Grand Prix half pass covers a 20-meter width over a 24-meter length! When I start to train the half passes across the entire arena, I ride them out of a 10-meter volte in the corner. This ensures that my horse has enough bend. A good exercise is to ride a few steps of half-pass and then ride a few steps of shoulder-in. I repeat this as many times as necessary to maintain my proper bend. One of the things that can happen is for the haunches to trail. If my horse does not move his haunches sufficiently sideways, I concentrate on just the haunches. I insist that he move sideways and don't worry about the shoulders. Remember, you are training. Daily riding does not have to be show ring perfect. Test riding is often very different than daily training.

I send his haunches more sideways than I would than if I was riding a true half pass. Think of a Western side pass. He must learn to move over from your leg. I've actually heard horses grunt because I am asking them to move over more sideways. Of course, the grunting is their way of telling me that this is way too hard! If you do not have mirrors in your arena, you can actually check the position of your horse's haunches by looking over your shoulder. If they are trailing, give a little push with the outside leg to move them over. Keep your inside leg on AT THE GIRTH to give him something to bend around.

The most important thing to remember about riding a half pass is that the shoulders MUST always lead. They should be just in front of haunches. As you move up the levels and your horse can do a steeper half pass it is important to remember that it takes time for his body to warm up. If you recall from my very first article for this publication on "how to warm up your horse", I mentioned that I start out riding every horse (regardless of their level of training) in a Training level frame to give his muscles time to loosen up. This also holds true for the half pass. When it comes time to school the half pass, I start out by doing a few shallow ones and then gradually increase the steepness. I also don't do very steep ones every day as I want my horse to have something left for the show ring. Every movement he does everyday does not have to be a "10"! A key thing to remember when riding a half pass regardless of whether it's from centerline to rail or across the entire width of the arena is to make sure you ride ALL THE WAY TO THE RAIL. I pretend I'm going to ride the half pass 2 strides outside of the arena. This ensures that my horse carries the bend all the way to the rail. Horses are very smart and they learn to stop the half pass about 2 strides from the rail and it just kind of fizzles out. Remember, the judge gives the score at the END of the movement, not at the beginning so you want to finish the movement just as spectacularly as how you started it!