

## **X – HALT – SALUTE**

By Angel Andrews

X – Halt – Salute. Sounds simple, right? How many of you have received low scores for something that seems so simple and yet at the same time, seems so difficult?

Hopefully, after reading this article your halt scores will go way up. I get very frustrated when my students lose points on the simple things in a dressage test such as the halt and rein back. I think the reason for this is that everyone thinks they are so easy so there is no need to practice them. The halt and rein back are movements just as a turn on the haunches, leg-yield, canter pirouette, etc. You wouldn't dare attempt to do those movements in a test without schooling them at home, I hope. The same holds true for the halt.

Remember, you get 2 scores for the halt: one at the beginning and one at the end of the test. In fact, the FEI has now added 2 halt scores to the freestyle tests. This is a very easy place to earn bonus points. Teach your horse to halt correctly and you will know at least you had a wonderful beginning and a wonderful ending to your test. What happens in between depends on a myriad of elements.

The judge's first impression of you is your trot (or canter) down centerline. I start to prepare for my halt as soon as I hit centerline whether the halt is at "A" or "G". A straight line to my halt increases the chances of a straight, square halt. Come down centerline like a drunken sailor and chances are you are going to have a crooked, "drunken" halt.

Halt means stop! It doesn't mean meander or slam on the breaks when I get to "X". I also don't want to see the horse doing the "hokey pokey" with his left foot in, left foot out, etc. He must remain immobile. One of the problems I see in the halt is that riders tend to stay in it too long. They adjust this, then

they adjust that, fiddle with their reins, etc. This gives your horse the opportunity to get wiggly. Once your horse has halted, salute and move on.

OK, so how do you get your horse to halt straight and square? Remember, a correct halt is dependent on the preparation that went into it. Some key things to remember are: (1) prepare as soon as you turn on centerline, (2) ride STRAIGHT to "X" with your legs on, (3) as soon as your horse is immobile, salute and trot on.

As I turn on centerline I am looking at "X". This will also help you maintain a nice forward trot in a straight line. It gives you an end spot to focus on. Don't wait until you are at "X" before you ask for the halt. The entire way to "X" I am giving little half-halts and putting my horse a little deeper on the outside rein. This insures that he will stay round and through into, during and out of the halt. To execute a perfect halt, think of your horse as an airplane landing; back wheels touch down first and then the nose gear. Same thing in the horse. I want his hind end to come underneath him and then for his front end to float down into the halt. This is riding back-to-front. I don't haul on the reins and hope and pray that he is going to stop (and hopefully, not in the judge's lap!) I also don't want a halt that looks like the horse just fell on his nose.

I also keep both legs on my horse during the approach to "X" and during the halt, I soften my legs but they remain on the horse. Keeping my legs on the horse gives him a "shoot" to remain in and will prevent him from slinging his haunches from one side to another during the halt. I soften the reins because I don't want him to think rein back.

Next, I give a little tickle on the outside rein (so he remains on the contact – no giraffes here, please) then quickly put both reins and the whip (if I have it in my right hand) into my left hand and salute. NEVER, NEVER NEVER, salute with the whip in your right hand or salute left-handed. Remember, dressage stems from the

military and no one salutes left handed in the military nor would you salute a superior officer with something in your hand. To salute properly, put all reins and the whip in your left hand, drop your hand STRAIGHT down by your right thigh and nod your head. Do not wave your hand out and about somewhere around your horse's hip bone. You are not in a parade! Straight down to your right thigh. Your hand should never go past your thigh. Pick up your reins and your whip, a little tickle on the outside rein and trot off. If it is a final halt, after your salute, drop your reins to a long contact and walk out of the arena. You do not have to wait for the judge to salute back.

I teach my young horses to halt by practicing on the side of the arena. This means you really only have to control their haunches in one direction because the arena fence is going to keep them from falling out in that direction. I never halt from the walk. I know the Training level tests allow you to walk in and out of the halt but starting at First level, you must enter and exit the halt from the trot. I don't want to have to re-teach the halt so I teach them to halt from the trot from day one. You also have more control of the hind end at the trot than at the walk. It is way too easy for the horse to sling his haunches left or right into the halt because of the lack of impulsion.

Young horses don't have much of an attention span so if they have halted and truly been immobile for even a few seconds, I ask them to move on. The key here is timing. I ask them to move on before they get wiggly or move off on their own. I also use my voice to teach the halt. Hopefully, they learned voice commands, such as whoa from the ground or from lungeing.

At the beginning of the article, I said to practice the halt. This does not mean you spend 20-30 minutes of your ride practicing halts. I do a few halts a day on my youngsters. I do not halt over and over again. All this does is teach a horse to halt incorrectly. If all of my halts (I'm talking 3-4) were not square that day, I don't panic but just put it aside for that day's ride. Tomorrow is another day and another opportunity to work on the

halt. Keep it light and fun for your horse. Don't drill halts endlessly. If I get a halt that is even a fraction better than the last one he did, I pat him and quit or go on to something else.

By the way, the one and only "10" score I received in my entire dressage show career was on a halt!