

## The Shallow Serpentine

By Angel Andrews

This is the second in a series of articles on improving your dressage test. The first article covered the warm-up. These next articles will cover one movement from each of the Training, First and Second level tests. The first movement, after the halt in the Training Level, Test 4 is the shallow serpentine. This movement is ridden on each rein, that is, it is ridden from both directions. You will find that most of the movements in the lower level tests are ridden as mirror images. That is, if a movement is ridden on the left rein, later on in the test, it will be ridden on the right rein. After the halt, you track right. In the previous article, I explained how to keep your horse flexed in the direction you will be tracking. This gives your horse a little "checkered flag" as to what is going to happen next.

In Training Level, Test 4, you track to the right, thus my horse is flexed to the right when I trot off out of the halt. At "C", track right. Since my horse is already flexed to the right, he has a little "heads up" as to what direction we are turning after "C". This is, of course, assuming you are able to trot your horse up to "C" and the big, bad scary judge and the contraption they are sitting on/in.

I once had a scribe scoot her chair back and fall off the platform just as I got to "C". Needless to say, the young, inexperienced horse I was riding almost had a heart attack. Thankfully, I had a VERY understanding judge who let me start over from the halt. This is a very unusual, however, as most judges don't let you have a "do-over".

I use the corner to rebalance my horse. This can be done as a half halt or a slight counter flexion. My inside leg is on my horse as I go through the corner to keep him from falling on his inside shoulder. This movement is ridden as two sweeping, curving lines. It is NOT ridden as a "V" with two straight lines. Half-way to "X", I change my bend and flexion to the left. I just touch "X". Remember, the movement is "M"- "X"- "F". That means, you must travel all the way to "X", meaning at least one hoof must touch "X".

Practice this at home at the walk so you can learn your geometry. Again, I can't stress enough how important it is to learn your geometry. You don't want to lose points for poor geometry. Riding your figures correctly can make a HUGE difference in your score. It's always a good idea to ride your test at the walk to learn your geometry. Everything becomes more difficult when you add the element of speed. What does correct geometry mean? Well, first off, a circle is a circle, a corner is ridden as a corner. Most dressage riders don't ride into their corners. Corners is an invaluable tool in a dressage test. OK. We touched "X"; we are flexed to the left and are tracking to "F". Halfway to "F", again, change your bend and flexion back to the right. Remember, this movement is ridden as two sweeping, curving lines, not two straight lines. The judge wants to see that your horse can bend and flex in the direction he is traveling and that he is solidly connected into the outside rein.

As you approach the corner after "F", again half halt your horse. Counter flex for a stride or two if necessary as you go through the short side, half halt and prepare your horse for the next movement, which is the canter, depart between "A" and "K". Remember, how much you prepare for a transition is going to determine the quality of that transition and, then, in turn, will determine the quality of the next movement. This is true from Training Level all the way up to Grand Prix! Happy Riding!

**(BIO: Angel Andrews is a Grand Prix competitor and trainer based in Oklahoma City, OK and Wellington, FL. She has earned her USDF Gold, Silver and Bronze medals and currently rides and trains several horses and students.)**