



Watching people at clinics and correcting my old habits, one thing that I have noticed that happens quite commonly is that we can tend to start relying or carrying our horses around with our legs and offering too much support. Squeezing in rhythm with your horse is a hard habit to break. But I want you to try this exercise which is the first part of 5 lessons I'm about to share with you. Each of these lessons will build up on the previous – and they will all help you to create a better riding relationship: follow these and your horse will listen to you more; respond with less pressure; and be more willing. They'll come weekly – this is your chance to get out on your horse, practising each lesson every day for a week before the next comes flying in.

The aim with this first lesson is to get your horse freely moving underneath you and to not need your legs to hold them or carry them (keep them moving forward). I want your horse to start to read your shift in energy and seat. You should be able to speed up your trot without relying on your legs. Doing this, your horse will become much sharper at responding to leg aid when you do use it – so your legs can do far more than just hold them.

**Finding your horse's natural forward impulsion at any speed is important when building true softness and self carriage.**

This is more than just giving you better tools too. I've found that when horses are given responsibility they are much happier. That responsibility gives them freedom to move naturally without feeling constantly pushed, squeezed or controlled. As you'll read, I want you to start building a partnership with your horse. You will give them mental space by taking off your legs; you'll allow them to move how they choose without over steering – and you'll just ride them lightly. Only guide them when you get stuck in a corner or for safety ie spiral down to slow them if they rush.

## **Lesson 1) Forward Impulsion**

I see people constantly squeezing their horse with their legs, thinking that if they stop, their horse will too. Actually all we need to keep a horse motivated in going forward is focus and a belief in your horse: no matter how lazy they seem you should trust they are happy and free moving. Our early anticipation of our horse's behaviour can be what traps them the most.

- Start in a bigger yard – horses are freer with more space
- Sit in a normal relaxed way. Let your horse know clearly that you are not going anywhere.
- Then, focus ahead with purpose and belief.
- Lighten your body and ask for forward. Like when you are about to lift yourself out of a chair (don't stand, just sit lightly, as if you are about to stand).
- Keep a light, slightly forward seat. Keep focusing ahead. Do not restrict your horse at all – there should be no bit pressure. Feel your energy transfer to your core and forward. Many horses are quite capable of moving off on this transfer of energy alone. Only squeeze lightly with your legs if your shift in energy doesn't get a response. Always try the transfer in focus and energy first – your horse may well start to read it after practise.

- If your horse doesn't respond to your light squeeze, bump and increase the pressure until you get a response (you can use your voice kiss or cue to help)
- If your horse thinks or even just leans forward, release for a moment to show them that their idea is right.
- Don't worry about where they go too much. Focus on riding lightly and feeling your horse move underneath you.
- If your horse stops whilst steering, stop steering; ask for 'go' then steer again.
- Don't worry about speed, just start any stops (only worry if your horse really rushes).
- Only do one thing at a time – so if you need to steer don't steer and squeeze your legs.
- Be motivated – ride lightly and fluently. When your horse finds extra energy you should become even easier to carry. Be relaxed in your lower hips and lower back. (Don't deliberately rock your hips forward and back as this feels restricting to your horse.)
- Repeat this until your horse is carrying themselves at a walk. You may find your horse finds natural motivation.
- Then, keep them at the walk for some time.
- Next, try a slightly faster walk. Don't have a speed set in your mind – any increase is good. So, lighten your seat and ask with a squeeze, then a bump. (Don't ask for a faster walk if your horse can't carry its own slow walk.)
- Only ask for energy when they fall back. If they find a jog, that's okay, stay with them and gently steer them into a soft spiral until they walk. When they slow to a walk, let them walk for a bit before asking for a faster walk again.
- Don't anticipate your horse slowing. This may cause you to carry them.
- Only squeeze after you have asked with your seat and energy, after your horse has actually slowed. Only squeeze for a small moment before you bump. A long squeeze causes a slow reaction.
- Once you progress to a trot, match the speed that your horse chose.
- To increase the trot later, increase your posting (rising) but only a little. Only squeeze your legs and bump if they don't catch up.
- If your horse falls back to a slower trot, your challenge will be to get your horse to carry a faster trot without you constantly asking.
- Do not squeeze your horse's ribs as you rise to trot. This is a common trait which dulls your horse's ribcage.
- Reward the smallest tries and don't be too picky.
- Have no expectation, eg "I wanted a jog, speeding up a walk isn't enough" is the wrong attitude to start with. We only want them to rise in energy. Any rise is good.

What is most important is that they are carrying themselves, not you.

I recently gave some lessons in Bangalow where there were 2 horses which had shut down and were showing lots of attitude and tension. They required a slightly different approach to this one here, but it didn't require whips or spurs – it required an understanding of how to release tension and gain connection. I shall cover this in a separate newsletter in the future for those of you who think you may have a shut down horse. Still try this method and see how you go.