

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Author's Note</i>	<i>xiv</i>
SETTING THE STAGE FOR DRESSAGE	1
CHAPTER ONE	
<i>Dressage—What's In It For You?</i>	3
CHAPTER TWO	
<i>Just What the Doctor Ordered</i>	9
CHAPTER THREE	
<i>Longeing—Riding from the Ground</i>	17
CHAPTER FOUR	
<i>Let's Get Personal</i>	27
STAGE ONE: DRESSAGE 101	53
CHAPTER FIVE	
<i>The ABC's of Dressage—Forward and Straight</i>	55
CHAPTER SIX	
<i>Shall We Dance? Paces, Gaits and Rhythm</i>	67
CHAPTER SEVEN	
<i>Contact—Your Communication Center</i>	85

STAGE TWO: NUTS AND BOLTS	101
CHAPTER EIGHT	
<i>Straightforward Flatwork</i>	105
CHAPTER NINE	
<i>Going Sideways—Lateral Work</i>	143
CHAPTER TEN	
<i>Suppling For Balance and Harmony</i>	173
CHAPTER ELEVEN	
<i>Putting It All Together—Sample Schooling Session</i>	185
CHAPTER TWELVE	
<i>Trouble Shooting With Basic Flatwork</i>	191
STAGE THREE: THE PROFESSIONALS' SECRET	213
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	
<i>The Half-Halt</i>	215
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	
<i>Connection</i>	239
STAGE FOUR: FANCY STUFF!	265
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	
<i>Float Like a Butterfly: Self-Carriage</i>	267
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	
<i>Coiling the Spring: The Collected Gaits</i>	283
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	
<i>Going Sideways: Lateral Movements to Develop Collection</i>	297
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN	
<i>Advanced Lateral Movements</i>	327

CHAPTER NINETEEN

*Shifting into Second Gear:
The Medium and Extended Gaits* 347

CHAPTER TWENTY

Flying Changes 367

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Typical Problems Solved by Using "Fancy Stuff" 389

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

*Putting it All Together: How to Organize
a Logical, Systematic, Daily Work Session* 411

Glossary 435

Index 443

Illustration Credits 454

STAGE THREE



THE PROFESSIONALS' SECRET

Do you ever wonder why you struggle with movements and transitions that professional riders seem to do effortlessly? Are you puzzled by the fact that your trainer's horse can be persuaded to march by large rocks, farm equipment, umbrellas, and all manner of scary objects, while your horse is overwhelmed by his flight instinct?

Well, here in Stage Three, you're about to discover the secret of professional trainers. This is an exciting point in the education of both you and your horse. In fact, if I were told that I could only teach you one concept to help you train your horse successfully, I would choose the information you're about to learn in this stage.

Here's what professionals know that you don't. They know the formula for "putting their horses on the aids" (their horses react instantly and obediently to invisible signals); this secret is a versatile aid called the **half-halt**.

In chapter 13, I will dissect the half-halt into manageable pieces and put it back together for you in an understandable, user-friendly way. I'll even give you tips on what to do if your horse just doesn't seem to be getting it.

Then, in chapter 14, I'll show you how to use the half-halt to **connect** your horse—also known as **putting him on the bit**. You'll love this part, because when a horse is "on the bit," not only is he more comfortable to ride but it's also a lot easier for you to communicate with each other. This is the beginning of your being able to reach a whole new level of working together happily.



The pure joy and expressive movement of a horse at play.

The Half-Halt

What, you may well ask, is a half-halt? How can I possibly do a half-halt? And why would I want to anyway?

Well, like Robert Dover, I too feel that the half-halt is the most essential tool in riding. Learning how to give a half-halt not only allows you to take charge of your horse's body and mind whenever you need to, but it also enables you to proceed further in the development of your horse as an athlete.

The word "half-halt" itself often creates confusion. The term is something of a misnomer because the half-halt really has nothing to do with *halts* at all. In fact (as Olympic dressage rider Lendon Gray suggests), it might help you to call it a "half-go" since every half-halt should contain the feeling of *adding* power from the horse's hind legs up to your hand. But more about that later.

Think of the half-halt as an *aid*. You could call it a "bringing-to-attention" aid. It will help you rebalance your horse, mentally or physically, whenever you need to. Think of this aid in the same way that you use your outside leg behind the girth as an aid to signal your horse to canter, or you close both legs near the girth as an aid to ask your horse to do a transition from the walk to the trot.

One major difference, however, is that you use the half-halt as an aid far more often. You use it every time your horse needs a reminder to pay attention to you, either because he's distracted by his surroundings or because you want to warn him that you are about to ask for a new movement. You give a half-halt to rebalance him every time he's heavy on the forehand, leaning the wrong way around corners, yanking at the reins, sticking his head up in the air, feeling stiff in his body, or is otherwise resistant and uncomfortable to ride.

"The half-halt is the most important concept in all of riding, because it calls the horse to a perfect state of balance, harmony and attention."

Robert Dover,
Three-time Olympic
and World Equestrian
Games bronze medalist
in dressage



13.1

Trying to train a horse to be more athletic without a half-halt is like trying to nail a board to a wall without a hammer. Impossible! You don't have all your tools.

As an instructor I often meet riders who blame themselves when they have a hard time controlling their horses. They think the fault is theirs because they're not properly coordinated or talented enough to ride and train as effectively as a professional does. Well, if they haven't learned how to give a half-halt, they're right!

After all, imagine someone giving you a board and some nails—but no hammer—and asking you to nail that board to a wall. It would be quite a task for you to put the board up. Well, trying to train a horse to be more athletic without the half-halt as an aid is like trying to nail a board to a wall without a hammer. It's pretty difficult because you don't have all your *tools* (fig. 13.1).

So I tell my students not to be so hard on themselves. I remind them, "You're not born knowing how to give a half-halt and your horse wasn't born knowing how to respond to one!" But with what you've been taught up to this point, you're ready to learn. I'll teach you in a clear-cut, step-by-step approach. Then it will be up to you to train your horse.

PREPARING TO GIVE A HALF-HALT

It's essential that you know how to give a half-halt because when you ride your horse you are always dealing with the issue of *balance*. Since your horse was not "designed" to carry weight on his back, he often loses his balance with a rider on top. The half-halt is the key—the *aid* that you use—to restore lost balance (fig. 13.2).

As we begin Stage Three, the half-halt is simply used to *regain* lost balance. Later on in Stage Four (chapter 15), I'll describe how more advanced riders give half-halts to *maintain* balance, by using them while preparing for new movements and exercises.

Earlier in this book, I laid the groundwork for a half-halt; I told you about riding your horse forward and straight, in a regular rhythm, with an inviting contact. This groundwork must be established before you can give a successful half-halt. In other words, you can execute a half-halt only when you have the following prerequisites:

Horse

1. **Forward**—not only over the ground but also "*thinking*" forward.
2. **Straight**—with the hind feet following the tracks of the front feet and the spine overlapping the line of travel.
3. **Rhythm**—steady and regular.



13.2

Since a horse is not designed to carry weight on his back, he can easily lose his balance like this horse does in a canter-to-trot transition.

Rider

Contact with the horse's mouth is inviting and sympathetic because it is firm, consistent, elastic, symmetrical and with a straight line from the bit to the hand to the elbow.

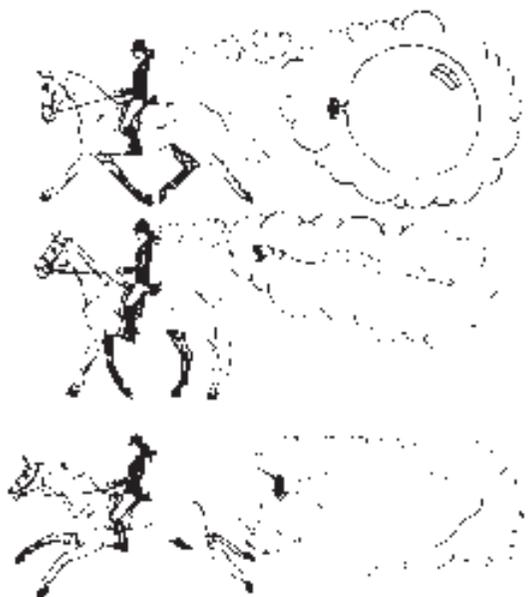
If you lose any of these qualities while giving the half-halt aid, stop what you're doing and re-establish whichever prerequisite is lacking. Only then can you try again to give the aid. For instance, if you give a half-halt and the horse stops *thinking* forward, you'll need to go through the process of putting him in front of the leg again before continuing to use half-halts to correct any of your horse's resistances.

The Aids for a Half-Halt

Let's break down the half-halt—or if you prefer, the “half-go”—into its parts. The half-halt itself is the combination of the driving aids (both legs and seat), the outside rein, and the bending aids (both legs and the inside rein), maintained for about three seconds.

During those three seconds, close both legs and push with your seat as if asking for that 100% wholeheartedly forward response that you practiced when you put the horse in front of the leg (see chapter 5). This is the “go” part of your half-go. But, rather than allowing the horse to go more forward as you did then, receive and contain this energy almost immediately by closing your outside hand in a fist. This becomes the **rein of opposition**. Make sure you *feel* the energy surge forward into the rein just before you actually close this outside hand.

By using your driving aids a fraction of a second before you use your rein aids, you ride your horse from *back to front*. This is your goal no matter what type of riding you do, because it's the only way



13.3

When giving a half-halt, think about inflating a balloon. Your driving aids blow it up, and closing your outside hand in a fist puts the knot at the end. If you close your hand before you drive your horse forward, you'll tie the knot before you inflate the balloon. If you use your driving aids without closing your fist, you let the air whoosh out of the balloon. In both cases, your half-halt doesn't work.

you can honestly **connect** your horse and make him more athletic and obedient. If you're preoccupied with creating an artificial "head-set" by fiddling with your hands, you'll be riding your horse from *front to back*, and you'll never truly be in charge. Remember, she who controls the hind legs—the "engine"—controls the horse. Always ride from *back to front* by directing the power from the hind legs forward into your hands.

To the naked eye, it will appear that you use all of these aids simultaneously. However, freeze-frame photography should show you using your driving aids first, then closing your outside hand, and finally, if necessary, vibrating your inside rein to keep the horse straight. (Remember, "straight" means straight on a line and bent along the arc on a curve.)

It is absolutely necessary for you to send your horse forward with your driving aids a fraction of a second before you close your outside hand. If you close your outside hand before you use your driving aids (or even exactly at the same time, for that matter), it's like picking up the telephone before it rings—no one is there!

To help you imagine this concept, think about a balloon. Your driving aids blow up the balloon, and closing your outside hand in a fist puts the knot at the end of it to keep it full of air. So, to give a good half-halt, use your seat and legs first, and then close your outside hand just as you'd inflate a balloon first and then tie the knot (fig. 13.3).

The Aids for a Half-Halt (on a circle to the left)

Seat: Stretch up and use your seat in a driving way as if pushing the back of the saddle toward the front of the saddle. Be sure to stay sitting in a vertical position when you push with your seat. Leaning behind the vertical can cause the horse to stiffen or hollow his back, and his head and neck will probably go up in the air as well.

Legs: close your legs steadily as if squeezing toothpaste out of a tube.

Outside rein (right rein): close your hand in a fist.

Inside rein (left rein): vibrate, if necessary, to keep the horse's neck straight.

The aids are applied *almost simultaneously*, but basically they should be thought of in this order:

Driving aids first to create energy;

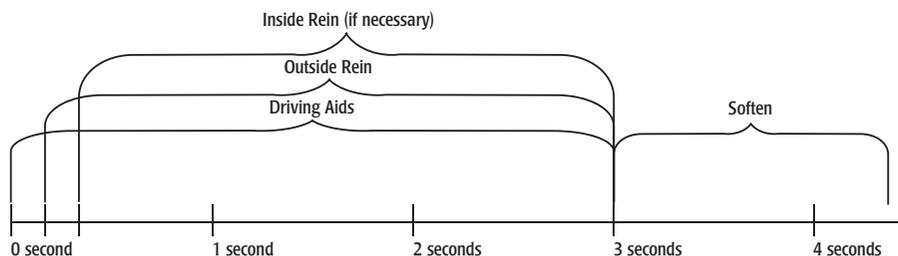
Outside rein second to contain energy;

Inside rein third, if necessary, to keep the neck straight.

Apply these aids for about three seconds by increasing the pressure of your legs and reins so that it is slightly more than the maintenance pressure you have when your legs are softly draped around your horse's sides and your hands have a firm but gentle feel of his mouth. After you give the half-halt, *relax*. This relaxing—the finish of the aid—is as important as the aid itself because it is the horse's reward. When you relax, let your legs rest lightly on your horse's sides again, keep correct contact with his mouth, and continue riding your circle.

For simplicity's sake, when first learning the half-halt, try it without the push from your seat. Just use your legs for the driving aids. Later, when you get comfortable with the timing and coordination of the half-halt, you can add the push with your seat toward the end of the three-second count as part of your driving aids.

You may have noticed that I said (when I laid out the aids above) that using the inside rein is optional. Since three seconds is a long time to keep your outside hand closed in a fist, some horses might bend their necks to the outside. (This usually happens going in one direction more than the other—when the horse's soft side is on the outside.) If this does happen, the horse obviously isn't straight anymore. He needs to be straight in order for your half-halt to be effective.

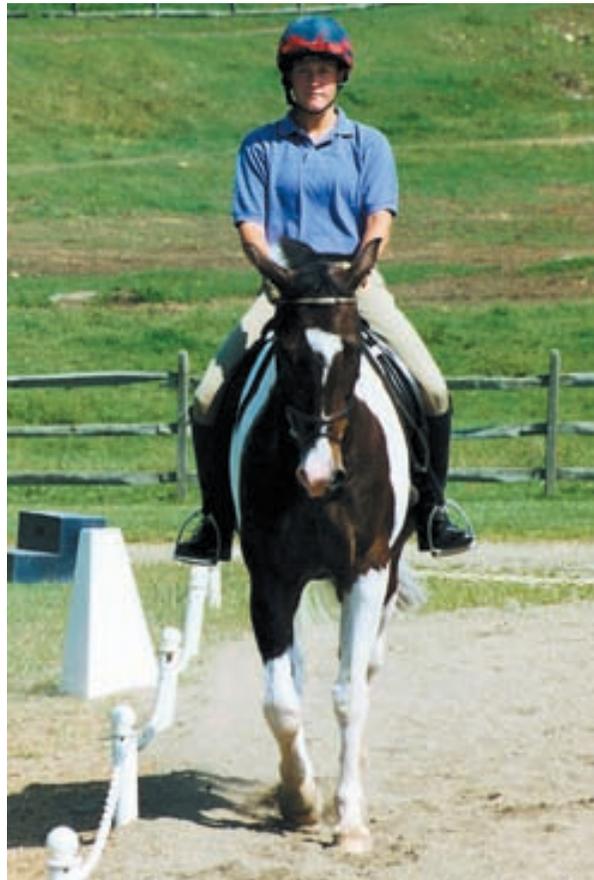


Half-Halt Timeline

13.4 to 13.6
*Keeping the Neck Straight
 During the Half-Halt*

13.4

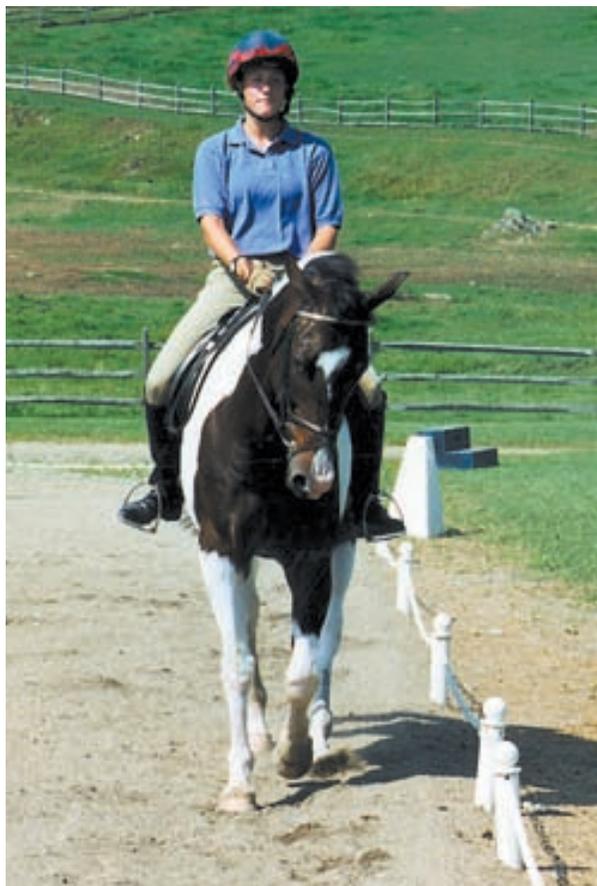
Amy Foss and Special Effects are going to the left with his soft side on the inside. Since Special Effects' neck stays straight in front of his body as Amy sends him forward through her outside hand during the half-halt, she doesn't need to use any inside rein. Her driving aids and outside rein are doing the job perfectly.



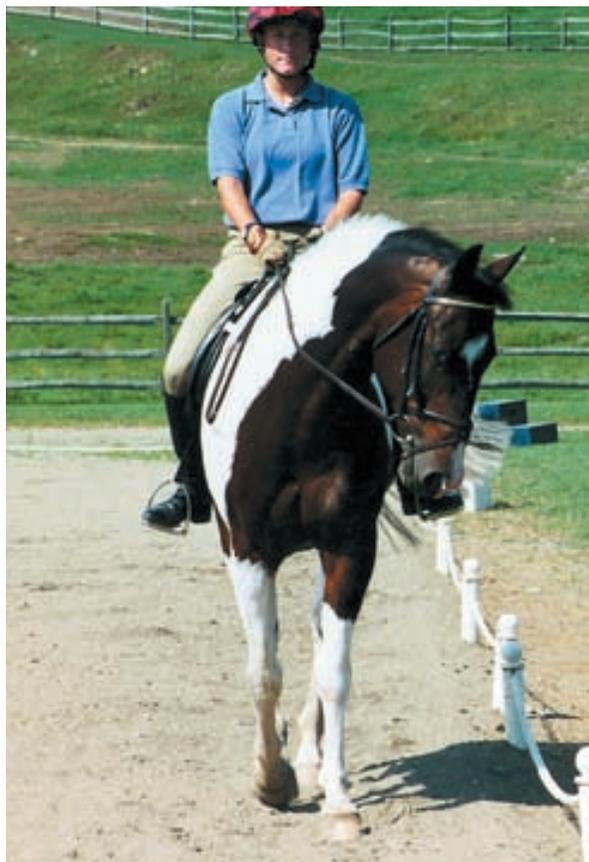
To prevent the horse from bending his neck to the outside, give a few soft squeezes on the inside rein at the same time that your outside hand is closed. Use of this inside rein is optional because its use depends on whether or not your horse bends to the outside.

If you're not sure how much inside rein to use or whether to use it at all, just apply a half-halt without it. Close your two legs and outside hand for three seconds and watch your horse's neck while you're doing it. If his neck stays straight, you don't need to use any inside rein when giving the half-halt. If the neck bends a bit to the outside, you need a little inside rein. If it bends a lot to the outside, you'll need even more inside rein during the next half-halt.

To sum up, the degree to which your horse's neck bends to the outside tells you how much inside rein to use in order to keep him straight (figs. 13.4 to 13.6).

13.5

When Amy combines her driving aids and outside rein during this half-halt going to the right with his stiff side on the inside, Special Effects' neck bends slightly to the outside. The bend in his neck tells her she'll need to use a little inside rein next time she gives a half-halt in this direction in order to keep his neck straight. This is what generally happens when the horse's soft side is on the outside.

13.6

In this case during the half-halt, his neck bends a lot to the outside. During the next half-halt, Amy needs to use an even greater influence of the inside rein to counteract the action of her closed outside hand.

If you find the previous explanation of the half-halt at all confusing, trying thinking about it this way instead. The half-halt is a marriage of the driving aids, the bending aids, and the outside rein. The outside rein is very important because it opposes too much speed from the driving aids, and too much bend from the bending aids.

In other words, if you applied the driving aids (seat and both legs) and bending aids (inside rein and both legs) to their extreme without adding the outside rein, your horse would run very fast on a very small circle. But the outside hand says, “You’re not allowed to speed up or bend to a greater degree than you already have. Instead you must yield to the outside hand and because you’re being driven, you’ll bend your hind legs more.”

When all three aids are correctly combined, the horse maintains his original speed and stays straight as he steps more forward under his body. He yields in front—flexing “in” (longitudinally as opposed to laterally) at the poll—to the closed outside hand, and he bends the joints of the hind legs to a greater degree. This changes his balance and **frame**, or silhouette, so that it looks more **round**. In the next chapter, you’ll see that this change of balance and the resulting round frame is called “**connection**” or “**on the bit**.” This is what you’re looking for (figs. 13.8 to 13.11).

Robert Dover has a saying to help his students absorb the relationship between the driving and restraining aids during a half-halt. He says that if your horse slows down, you have too much “halt” (outside rein) and not enough “half” (driving aids). Alternatively, if your horse speeds up when you give a half-halt, you have too much “half,” and not enough “halt.”

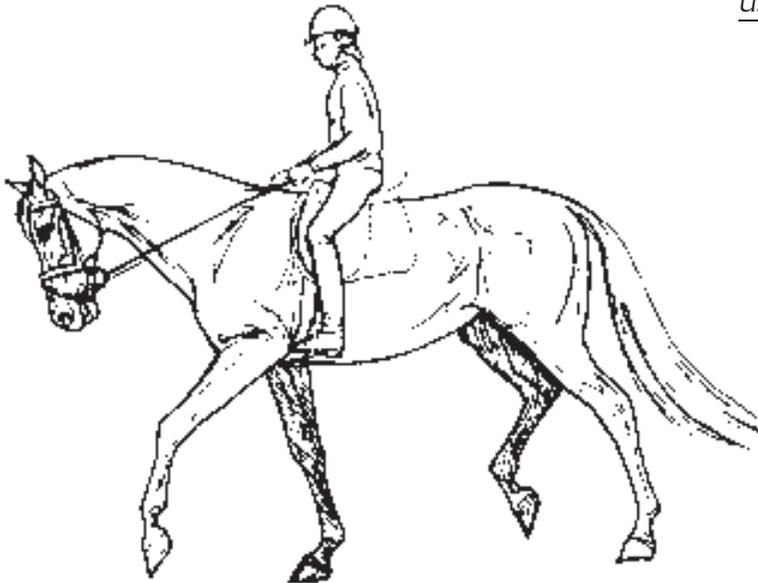
Many riders are surprised when I tell them that the half-halt lasts for three seconds, because they have been taught that it only lasts for a moment. I tell you to do this for three seconds because I want you to use it to bend the joints of the hind legs for two to three steps.

I’m not saying that there won’t be times when you give a shorter or a longer half-halt. In fact, once your horse has learned to respond correctly to the half-halt, you might apply the aid for only one second. On the other hand, if you’re struggling to maintain a round frame during a transition, you can sustain it for four or five seconds. (I’ll delve into variations of the half-halt at the end of this chapter.)

But, it’s helpful for you as you’re learning, to think of the half-halt as lasting for the amount of time it takes to inhale and exhale—about three seconds for most people. When you breathe in, you tighten your stomach and the small of your back, and the breath is like a wave that travels up your stomach into your chest. As you breathe out, your shoulders go back and down and the wave goes down your back into your seat. At the same time, close your legs. As the horse begins to move forward, you’ll feel this surge of energy come into the rein. At this moment, close your outside hand in a fist. Then you can relax all the aids and proceed forward in a new state of balance and attention (fig. 13.7).

Your first task will be to teach your horse the half-halt while riding in

13.7

Using a half-halt to improve balance

a) This horse is not in good balance. His hind legs are out behind his body and his weight is on his forehead.



b) As his rider gives the half-halt, the horse bends the joints of the hind legs, steps more underneath his body, and yields in front so that he comes into a better balance.

13.8 to 13.11
The Half-Halt Sequence

13.8

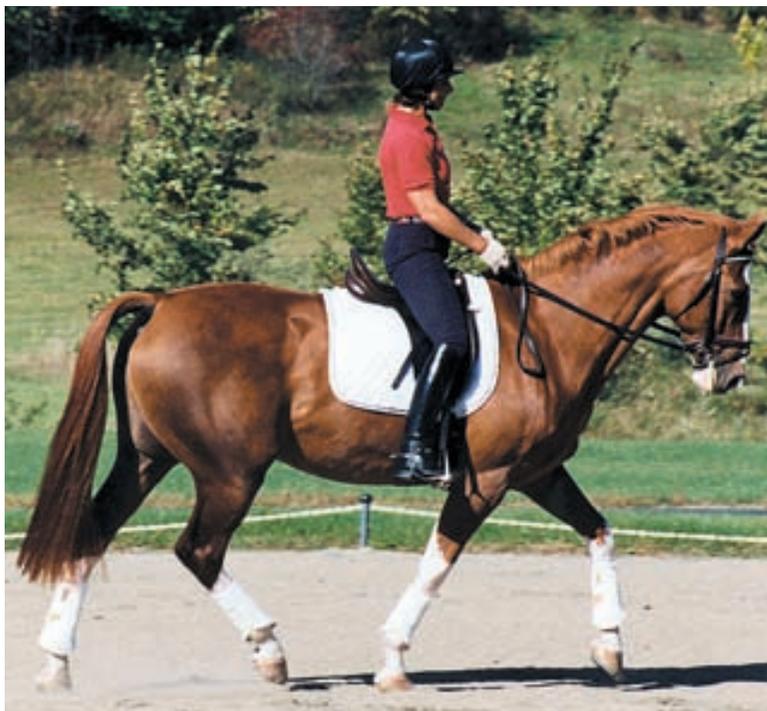
This is the frame and balance that Woody adopts on his own. His hind legs are out behind his body, lazily pushing him along. His back is so hollow and low that I feel like I'm sitting in a depression. His neck is raised and stiff, and he is not flexing in at the poll.



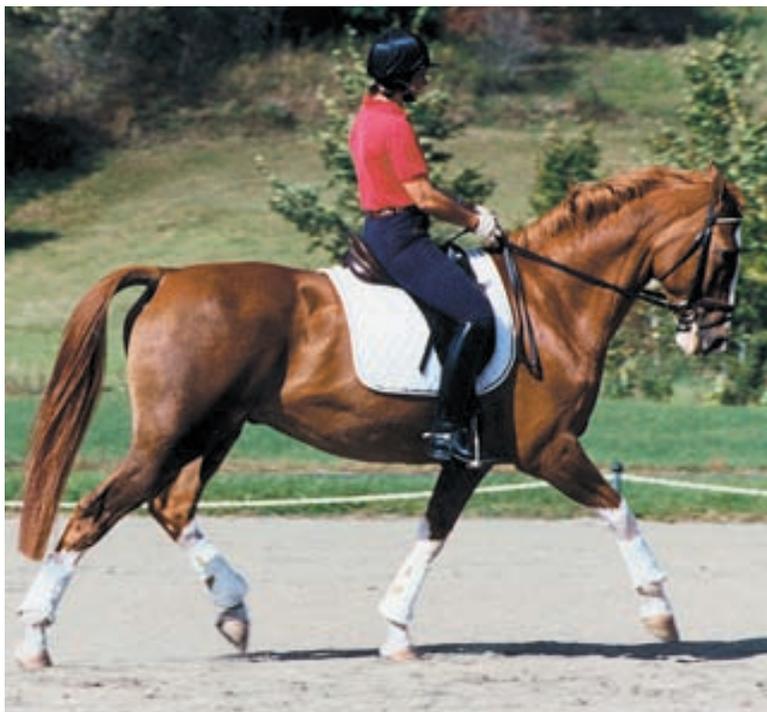
13.9

I'm starting to give a half-halt and as I use my driving aids to send him through the outside rein, the shape of his topline begins to change.



13.10

I continue to drive him through the outside rein. (Note that the contact with my outside hand is more firm than it is with my inside hand.) His hind legs are coming more underneath his body and they begin to carry rather than push.

13.11

As I finish the half-halt, Woody looks like a more compact package from tail to poll. I'd still like to see more of a "bloom" through the base of his neck just in front of his withers, and a greater degree of relaxation of the muscles on the underside of his neck, but I'm satisfied with the amount his balance has changed with my first half-halt. I'll soften the aids now and follow up with another half-halt to improve his balance even further.

13.12 to 13.15
*Common Mistakes
During the Half-Halt*

13.12

During this half-halt, Amy has used too much inside rein, and has also allowed her outside hand to move forward. As a result, Special Effects bends his neck too much to the inside.



each of the three paces. Start on a circle, since the curve of the circle helps the horse step through that outside rein. Usually the horse begins to understand and change his balance and frame during the very first session, although it often takes several sessions before his response is more or less confirmed.

Once you can execute a half-halt in all three paces on a curved line, follow the track of the ring and do the same thing on a straight line. If you run into difficulties, go back to the circle and review the half-halt there.

In chapter 14, I'll explain other situations during which you can use this same half-halt to improve or maintain your horse's balance and frame. For now this is where you should start; teach your horse to respond to the half-halt during all three paces on circles and straight lines.