



Your Ultimate Guide to Contact

The Three Must Do's To Get Your Horse On The Bit

The big question and challenge we all face is how to get your horse through and on the bit. Everyone knows that your horse has to have that neck arch - but how do you make sure your horse is actually on the bit and working through his back?

How Do I Keep My Horse Forward and On The Bit?

Some horses will go on the bit but not forward - others will go forward but not on the bit. Learn the tools you need to make sure the horse is doing both.

How Do I Get My Horse On The Bit Using My Legs?

Learn the tools and techniques you need to ride the horse from back to front.

How To Get Your Horse On The Bit (Made Easy)

Learn how to get your horse 'properly' on the bit rather than 'faking it'!

How To Get Your Horse On The Bit (Without Pulling)

Just because the horse is tucking his head in does not mean he is through and on the bit. Learn how to get your horse on the bit using the hind legs and back to get your horse round.

The 3 Biggest Mistakes Riders Make Getting The Horse Round And On The Bit

Learn the biggest mistakes I see riders make in getting their horse on the bit, and how to fix these mistakes to make sure you have great contact!

How To Get A Young Horse Out In The Neck

We never want a horse to be over bent - we want the horses nose to be on the vertical. How do you get a young horse to search for that contact and use his back properly.

Rein Connection - How Much Should I Have?

Learn what your arms should look like and get a nice line from your hands to the horses mouth so that you can feel what the horses mouth is doing without having stiff hands and arms.

How To Keep A Contact In A Loose Rein Walk

Learn how to maintain a contact in the loose rein walk during your dressage test and learn how to give your reins so the horse takes the contact down into the loose rein walk.

How Do I Get My Horse More Through In The Back?

Discover the tools you need to get your horse more through and on the bit.

IF YOU LEARN BETTER BY READING, HERE ARE SOME OF THE VIDEOS FOR YOU TO LOOK BACK ON LATER:

The Three Must Do's To Get Your Horse On The Bit

The big question and challenge we all face is how to get your horse through and on the bit. Everyone knows that your horse has to have that neck arch - but how do you make sure your horse is actually on the bit and working through his back?

I think the biggest problems dressage riders have with getting their horse on the bit is worrying too much about how it looks instead of thinking about how it feels. When I ride my horses at home, I work on how it feels and then check to make sure it also looks good.

The three biggest things I think you need to do to get your horse on the bit are:

Must Do #1: Impulsion - Get Your Horse Forward

Start off at the trot (the walk has no moment of suspension and no forward spring so it's a lot harder to go forward) and get your horse really forward without worrying about where the head is at the moment. I'm caring more that I have the handles pushing and I have some forward momentum. If I don't have the horse going forward, I will have trouble shaping the body and movement of the horse.

Rather than thinking that you want the head down rather than in the air, you want to think about getting the back up. So while you are riding the horse forward, have a play with your reins - if you were to change something with the outside rein or the inside rein, does this change the way the back feels? Is the back coming up more when you do this? Good!

Must Do #2 - Keep a Steady Outside Rein (Catching the Forward Energy You Have Created)

I can't over-emphasise how important this is!!!!

If my rein is too loose, my horse has no frame to stand by. Any time I move my hands, the horse moves his head. So my hand has to be still (but still moving with the horse). The outside rein has to be still, and the inside rein should not be pulling. This allows you to ride your horse into a contact, into the bit.

Must Do #3 - Your Need to Ride The Inside Leg To Outside Rein

As the horse goes around a circle, if his ribcage is flexed to the outside, it's not supple and he is stiff. If the horse is a bit stiff and not supple, then he can't use his back correctly, he can't lift his back and he can't go on the bit.

So the inside leg asks the horse to bend his ribcage around you and move more of his body and weight to the outside and bends around your inside leg like a banana. This allows you to fill up the outside rein so you now have a contact and connection with it. Therefore you can influence where the head goes, where the neck goes and most importantly how the back is shaped so you can ride the horse on the bit.

How Do I Keep My Horse Forward And On The Bit?

Sometimes horses will go on the bit or keep their head down and look really nice if they can go slow and not really go forward. Or perhaps they will go forward but not really into the contact.

This isn't really getting the horse on the bit. Forward creates connection, forward creates through and forward creates on the bit.

An active trot helps to keep on the bit because the horse is actually travelling forward from behind. But if you stop riding and let the horse do the trot it wants to do... the horse might be on the bit, but probably won't be as through, the horse might slow down, less connection and not as nice a trot.

My biggest advice is don't let your horse dictate how you ride. The horse should mould to you. The horse should give you the reaction you ask for. Keep asking the question until the horse gives you the answer you are looking for - not the answer the horse wants to give you, the answer you want.

Get the horse forward, get the hind end going. I know it's harder to ride the horse from the back - because you can't see it. Stop thinking about what the head looks like - focus on what is behind you and underneath you, and I guarantee you the head and the neck and therefore the contact will take care of itself.

How Do I Get My Horse On The Bit Using My Legs?

When people want their horses to go on the bit, they tend to focus on what they can see which is the horse's head, and they use whatever they can - normally the hands - to try and get the horse on the bit.

The head and neck doesn't matter. If you can get the hind legs active and working correctly, that will in turn get the back to work and to lift because it is working as it should. The natural result of this is that the head is fixed - in the correct position.

I don't care and I don't get fixated on the head. I know if I focus on the back and the hind legs, the head will fix itself eventually.

If you can stay thinking about the back and the hind legs which are activated by your legs. I don't use my legs to ask the horse for transitions - I only use my seat for this.

My legs are used only to supple the horse, or to get the horse more forward - activate the hind legs, and therefore get the horse on the bit.

So - inside leg and outside leg are used separately if you can feel that the horse is not straight - is falling in or out of the circle. Use both legs together to get your horse more forward.

If you are on a horse that isn't on the bit and isn't where you want it with the head - don't worry about the head, start getting those hind legs active - and catch the energy with half halts. Don't confuse 'active' with 'fast' - you don't want the horse hooning around the arena, so the energy you create by making the horse have a more active hind needs to be managed with the half halts so that you can contain and use that energy to make the horse have active hind legs that the horse sits on.

How To Get Your Horse On The Bit (Made Easy)

Young horses are a challenge to get on the bit - a lot of the time you can kind of get the horse to tuck his head in and appear to be on the bit.

The outside rein needs to have a steady contact, there is no give. It needs to be like a side rein. If you soften too much, you drop the horse, you drop the energy you have created by getting the horse to go forward. You also need to make sure you keep the outside rein still.

The inside rein is a bit softer, because getting your horse on the bit is all about inside leg to outside rein - get the horse to bend with the inside leg, catch the energy with the outside rein. You can ask the horse to bend a little bit with the inside rein, but the outside rein **MUST** keep a steady contact.

When the horse is on the bit you can ask the horse to stretch and search for the contact a little bit.

How To Get Your Horse On The Bit (Without Pulling)

We all know we want the horse to put its head down rather than having its head up in the air.

There are tricks you can do to get the horse to curl his head. Just because the horse is tucking his head in - it does not mean he is through and on the bit.

I never care about the head - I care about what the hind legs are doing. If I can get the hind legs working, then I can get the back doing what it is meant to do - lift and curl. If the back is up and round, then the head has to come round.

If we are not using leg, and only focusing on the head, the horse is going to have no idea what you are asking, the head is more than likely going to stay in the air!

You want to ride legs into hands. If you use your legs to create the energy and don't have the hands there to catch the energy - the horse is just going to get faster.

You want the horse to lift their back, engage the hind legs and then come on the bit and the neck will look all pretty.

To do this you want to engage the back and the hind end by asking for forward with your legs, half halt in the outside rein, a little bend to the inside if you have to, and the horse's head is going to go down.

Horses are not computers - once you have them on the bit they are not just going to stay there forever until you ask for something else - you have to keep working on it with very light half halts, with your seat, stomach, your legs and your hands - light adjustments just to keep him there and on the bit.

If I am going to go a transition from walk to trot it's the same deal. If you ask for the trot transition and don't use your hands, the horse is going to be on the forehand, and not how you want it. You need to work through the trot transition. You need to keep halt halting with your outside rein, using your seat and then you have a nice trot transition. The horse will keep his head in the same position, but most importantly the hind legs are active, the back is where it needs to be so you can sit - if the back is not engaged and the head is up in the air it's actually really tricky to do a sitting trot.

You want to use very light half halts rather than pulling on the horse. You need to make sure you have a contact so that the horse can feel what you are asking for.