



Classical Horse Training

Combining art with science to achieve balance and harmony



HALF-PASS

‘An exercise to continue building self-carriage’

MANUAL

Foreword

This document is the result of many years of research and personal experience worldwide. I sincerely hope that it will be useful to your personal learning experience and contribute to your personal training and development. This document goes together with the video assigned to you in the Online Support Program. Make sure to first watch the video and use the manual as an additional learning tool. I wish you a lot of fun and lightbulb moments diving into these materials.

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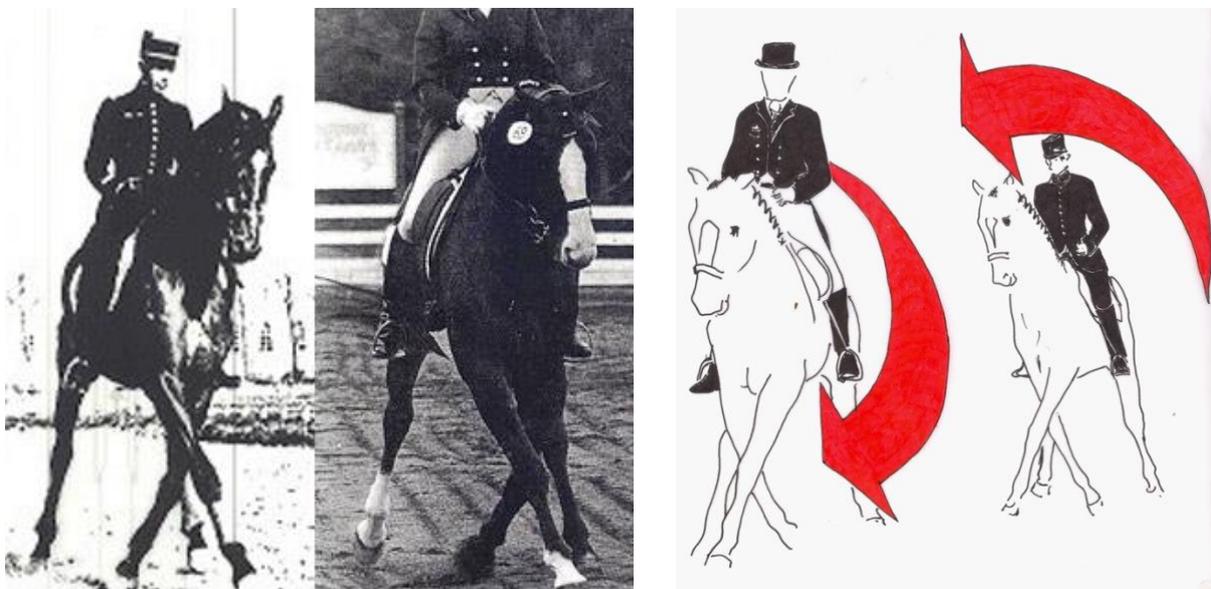
INTRODUCTION

The half-pass is another lateral exercise used to prepare the horses' physique and mental processing for the athletic demand of performance. The essential elements of lateral work have already been discussed extensively in the previous manuals, so please read those first if these elements are still unclear to you.

The half pass is a two track sideways-forwards movement performed on a diagonal line. It flows from a shoulder-fore/shoulder-in position after the second turn of the short side so that the shoulders are leading the movement. From there, the outside hind limb is added to proper the horse mass unto the diagonal line. During the half-pass, the horse steps under with its inside and outside hind legs alternated. The outside legs step in front and over the inside legs . The horse is bended towards the direction of travel and has to move in great self-carriage as it has no support from the wall.

Unfortunately, the half-pass often gets described in a false manner as being the same as haunches-in on the diagonal. However, this description is not accurate as it would assume a three or four track movement with the haunches leading and thus greater carrying on one hind limb. Furthermore, this way of moving has a high probability to induce inverted rotation. Instead, when executed correctly, the shoulders should always lead with horse moving towards the direction of bend and is thus more related to the shoulder-in than to the travers.

It is important to understand this relationship of the half-pass with the shoulder-in and how these exercises, when used in unison can improve each other. In a half pass, the outside hind limb propels the mass in the direction of travel, carrying the load forward. The inside hind limb receives and supports the mass of the body on bent joints, which is a similar strengthening action to levade. The inside hind is thus strengthened in its carrying capacity, whereas the outside hind is strengthening in its pushing capacity. As soon as a half pass loses the correct bend and rotation, these entirely different demands for each hind limb are neutralized. The shoulder-in can then be used to reinstate the bend and place the inside hind limb under the body again. On the opposite, when the bend is lost in a shoulder-in, a few steps of half steps are helpful to restore control over the outside hind limbs. In a way, the shoulder-in is the antidote to all half pass faults and vice versa. Therefore, a good shoulder in will flow seamlessly to half pass and a good half pass will flow seamlessly to shoulder-in, without the need for bend or positioning adjustments.



Pictures adapted from Science of Motion.

Find the differences between correct versus incorrect rotation in the half pass.

The half pass prepares the horse for other exercises such as pirouettes, but also counter-change of hand in which more than two half-passes are combined with changes of direction in a zig-zag pattern.

The exercise can be performed in all gaits. However, a special note must be made that due to biomechanical nature of the canter, the hind limbs are not physically able to cross over in an alternating manner as seen in the walk and trot.

HISTORY

The half pass has been described over centuries. It has the unique ability of serving two purposes: developing both collection and impulsion. From an academic perspective, most focus was on the collecting abilities of the half pass. From a military perspective, its ability to increase impulsion was emphasized.

Since the exercise is closely related to the shoulder-in, we might have a look as to what **Francois Robinchon La Guérinière** had to say about the half pass: *“We have said in the preceding chapter that, in putting a horse in the shoulder-in to the right, one supples his right shoulder which gives fluency to the same right leg in crossing over the left legs when he moves sideways when traveling the left direction [left half pass]. The same is true of working him on the shoulder-in to the left, it is the shoulder on this side [left] which is suppled and which gives the same [left] leg the movement which it must have to freely cross over the right when one asks the horse to move sideways on the right hand [right half pass]. Following this principle, which is indisputable, it is easy to convert the shoulder-in into the croup to the wall.”*

So in summary, La Guérinière advocates the use of shoulder-in left as a suppling exercise that will prepare the horse for half pass to the right and vice versa. Now this might be a bit confusing as in this program I am teaching you to initiate a right half pass by a right shoulder-in. So again, we have to remember that La Guérinière accredited the shoulder-in as the ultimate exercise to supple the horse’s inside front limb whereas today, we know that although it does increase flexibility of this limb as well, it’s true power is to free up the horses outside shoulder. Remember that La Guérinière invented the shoulder-in from the observation of the limitations of circles in which the horse is confined most in its inside front limb. So when comparing to the circle, the shoulder-in does free the inside shoulder more and that is why he focused on this aspect as a better solution than endless circles. But with the advancements of modern day science, we know that most freedom within the shoulder-in is created for the outside shoulder. So this to me is an interesting example of how we use the geniality of the old masters, but evolve from its practice by the use of modern day science.



Picture adapted from *Reflection on Equestrian Art* displaying Nuno Oliveira on Harpalo Prince in a half pass to the left.

In later days, **Nuno Oliveira** elaborated more in the relationship between the shoulder-in and half pass arguing that although they look the same, there are essential differences:

“Only when the horse knows this lesson [shoulder-in] well should the teaching of half pass be started; this last, despite an analogous appearance with shoulder-in, is actually very different.”

The main difference would be that it requires an energetic gait. The horse should be able to start and continue a half pass with an impulsion that allows you to maintain the same cadence without slowing down or speeding up. This is exactly why the half pass both improves impulsion and collection and why no other dressage movement can be started until the horse does half passes well.

However, although Nuno Oliveira emphasized the difference between the exercises, he did acknowledge the value of doing transitions: *“Having thus specified that the shoulder-in and the half pass are two totally different exercises, I must not omit to add that constant transitions from one to the other is one of the foundations of good dressage training, a schooling based on the easing of the horse, and not in making him more tense.”*

Finally, he provided us with a nice description on the aids of the half pass in which he considered too strong abuse of the inside rein the ‘kiss of death’: *“The horse being, for example, engaged in shoulder-in to the right, the right hand aids must remain in place as the left hand aids maintain the horse’s incurvation in order to execute a half pass after the second corner of the riding school’s short end. The animal moves by advancing from left to right. He must keep the same bend that he would have while doing a right shoulder-in, and he must, advance, bent to the right, shoulders ahead of the hindquarters as a result of the enveloping action by the left rein. The rider’s rider leg should maintain the impulsion and the bend to the right with the help of the rein on the same side. The horse must keep to the same degree of obliquity with which he began during the entire exercise. The rider’s outside leg stays in the same place as it was during the right shoulder-in, that is to say, a touch farther back than the inside leg, and should only intervene to give impulsion in case the hindquarters become idle (...) This type of half pass allows the horse to achieve maximum suppleness and engagement.”*

So in summary the half pass should always be initiated from a shoulder-fore or shoulder-in and requires good coordination of the outside rein and retrain from any abuse of the inside rein as this would disturb the bend and thus the balance and self-carriage of the horse.

PREPARATION

The half-pass requires adequate preparation work of the previous lateral movements. In the words of Nuno Oliveira: *“It’s difficult to improve a half pass. Success depends above all on the conditions under which the half pass was started”*.

Therefore, not only should the horse be familiar with the aids and shape for shoulder-in and haunches-in, it should also be able to perform these exercises with a steady cadence / rhythm.

From there, the half-pass is optimally prepared by starting off in one or two steps shoulder-in after which you include the outside hind leg and ask the horse to travel diagonally.

VARIATION



Once you and horse can perform the exercise effortlessly you can perform a counter-change of hand, combining more than two half-passes with changes of direction in a zig-zag patterns. In the canter this is accompanied by a flying change in between.

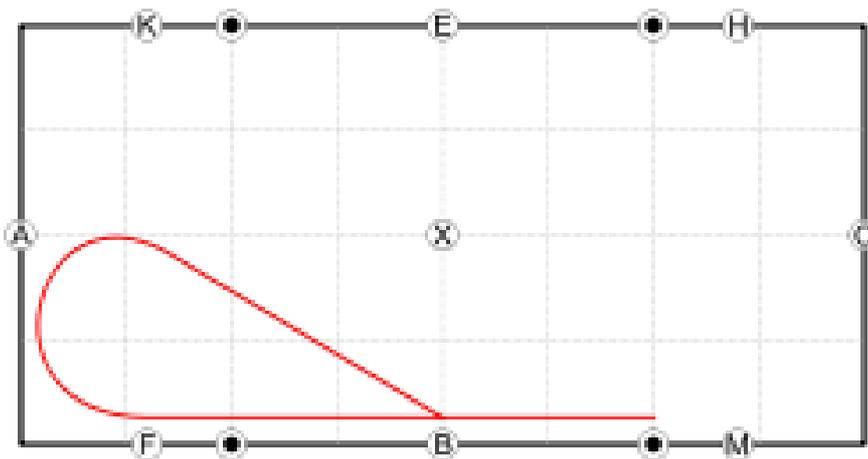
The moment of a counter change of hand in trot captured.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

The aids and teaching process are similar to that of the preceding shoulder-in and haunches-in. The main difference is that it requires an even bigger inner picture to ensure a smooth execution. Now let me explain the step by step process.

GROUNDWORK – ONE REIN (CAVESSON)

1. Prepare the horse by practising the shoulder-in either after a half 10m or from the corner of the short side. Start moving backwards, adjust your own body position and take the horse's shoulders with you on the diagonal line. It is very important that you can keep your own track so in the beginning it might be useful to outline the diagonal with either poles or cones.



An example of initiating the half pass from half a 10 m circle.

2. Add the outside hind leg by providing a traversal whip aid. Please make sure to provide the whip aid more vertically so the horse can't get confused with the haunches-in cue. If the horse doesn't understand, slow down or even halt to explain the aids just as done in the previous lateral exercises.
 - The difficulty of this exercise is to draw the horse towards you while it has learned previously to move away from pressure. If you lose the outside hind and the horse keeps drifting away you can use a direct whip aid on the outside – see video travers – just to teach the horse to cross over diagonally after which you immediately return to a vertical traversal whip aid.

3. Reposition the whip aid over the outside shoulders if needed to guarantee the shoulders are leading.
4. Make rebalancing half halts where needed:
 - Use a directional inside rein aid if the horse loses the lateral flexion
 - Use a lifting half halt if the horse has too much push in the rhythm of the limb needed to control or rebalanced
 - Use the whip at the inside girth area to assist for the bend if needed.



5. In the beginning reward every good try. Do not ask the horse to quicken and go steeply sideways, but gently suggest the movement across a long diagonal, until the horse can gather the strength and ability to maintain the exercise at a steeper sideways angle.
6. Once the horse can travel on a full diagonal, you can either choose to turn into the corner through a Renvers or change back to a normal bend.
7. Enjoy the process and don't tire the horse 😊

WORK IN HAND & LONG-REIGNING – TWO REINS (CAVESSON OR BRIDLE)

1. To teach the exercise with two reins it is best prepared through a renvers through the corner of the short side after which you turn in to the quarter/centre line.
2. Keep moving forward around the shoulder of the horse. In the beginning it is best to be a bit in front or next to the shoulder. When the horse gets more experienced in this exercise, you can gradually slide back behind the shoulder to increase self-carriage. From there adjust your body position:
 - For a half pass to the right → turn your left shoulder across and forward so that you can ask the horse's outside shoulder and bend away from you on the diagonal line.
 - For a half pass to the left → turn your right shoulder across and forward so that you can ask the horse's outside shoulder and bend away from you on the diagonal

3. From the renvers, the outside hind should already step under the body. However, you can add a direct whip aid if needed to encourage the limb to cross over. Make sure to not push the hind too far sideways so that the shoulders remain leading.
4. Apply rein aids if needed to rebalance:
 - The inside rein should be used for lateral flexion only and remain as light as possible. Any pull on this rein will alter the correctness of the exercise.
 - The outside rein control the outside shoulder and the bend
 - Any action on one rein should not result in losing the quality of the other.



5. In the beginning reward every good try. Do not ask the horse to quicken and go steeply sideways, but gently suggest the movement across a long diagonal, until the horse can gather the strength and ability to maintain the exercise at a steeper sideways angle.
6. Once the horse can travel on a full diagonal, you can either choose to turn into the corner through a Renvers or change back to a normal bend.
7. Enjoy the process and don't tire the horse☺

RIDING – TWO REINS & SEAT (CAVESSON OR BRIDLE)

Once the horse can perform the half-pass on the ground, you can also ask it ridden. When performed ridden, the aids of the seat are added to those of intention, body posture and reins. The aids are the same as during lateral bend and riding in which the most important element is to remain vertically balance over the seat bones.

1. Prepare the horse by practising the shoulder-in either after a half 10m or from the corner of the short side.
2. Use the outside rein to envelope the horse as much as needed.
3. Use the leg aids the same ways a during the shoulder-in:
 - The inside leg is the most important leg in the half pass as it receives the horse, maintains the bend and, if necessary, the impulsion.
 - The outside leg should be placed slightly backward to control the outside hind limb propelling the mass forwards. Make sure to not overdo the use of this aid.

4. Keep vertical over your seatbones and follow the horses bend to the inside. This would bring your outside shoulder a bit forward and your inside shoulder a bit backwards. The difficulty is not lean to the outside of the movement but to be able to sit towards the inside of bend to not disturb the proper execution of the movement.
5. In the beginning reward every good try. Do not ask the horse to quicken and go steeply sideways, but gently suggest the movement across a long diagonal, until the horse can gather the strength and ability to maintain the exercise at a steeper sideways angle.
6. Once the horse can travel on a full diagonal, you can either choose to turn into the corner through a Renvers or change back to a normal bend.
7. Enjoy the process and don't tire the horse☺

CHALLENGES & TROUBLESHOOTING

When you and your horse are starting to practice this exercise, you might come across a few challenges:

1. Inverted rotation



Enough has been said about this already so just compare the cartoon and the pictures below to get an idea.



2. Hind quarters lead.

One of the most common mistakes that happen when starting the half-pass is that the hind quarters start to lead instead of the shoulders. The way, the horse performs a haunches-in on a diagonal and thus not a correct half pass. In order to restore this, ask the horse a couple of steps in a forward shoulder-in after which you continue in the half pass.

3. Falling on the inside shoulder

Opposite to the hind quarters leading, another easily made mistake is that the horse ends up falling onto the inside shoulder. When this happens, the horse is pushing through the movement and blocking proper coordination and bending of its body and limbs. If this happens, restore with a more forward and straight haunches-in cue until the inside front is lifted. Then go back to a shoulder-in and ask again.

4. Overbending of the head and neck.

If you're working on the ground with one rein, correct this issue by giving forwards on the rein and gently push the nose back in front of the sternum will timing the movement of the outside shoulder to come your way. You can also use a vertical whip aid over to the outside shoulder. When working with two reins and ridden, give forward on the inside rein while opening slightly on the outside to invite the horse to place its head/neck back in the correct position. Be careful not to use any weight displacements as leaning to the outside of the direction of movement will again only make the problems worse.

5. Rushing into the sideways.

This way, the horse is not moving in self-carriage and proper cadence but is pushing away. You will have to prepare the half pass with an impulsion that allows you to maintain the same cadence without slowing down or speeding. So, when the horse is speeding, go out of the movement and work on the building blocks and try again as you can't improve too much within the half-pass itself.

5. Ending up on too many tracks

When this happens, the ratio between sideways and forwards is unevenly balanced. In general, the more 'spectacular' a half-pass looks like in the sense of over tracking, the less functional it is for its body. If the horse is asked to perform the movement beyond its natural ROM, it will have to force its joints into hypermobile movements. Especially the hip, hock and stifle often get compromised. Restore any over tracking by going a few steps forward to close the angle and into a slight shoulder-in.

6. Blocking of the movement with incorrect rein and/or seat aids

If the inside rein is too strong, the horse is forced into inverted rotation. On the other hand, a limiting outside rein blocks the outside front limb to cross over. Common mistakes in the seat are leaning too much to the outside, tilting and leaning backwards with the shoulders, placing the outside leg too far back and forgetting about the inside leg. To restore these problems, go back to the basics of how to apply correct independent aids. Furthermore, it might help to think about 'chasing your enemy'. Imagine having a 'sword' in your inside hand and that you want to hit your enemy that is travelling on the diagonal. Usually, this places your seat better in tune with the horse.

THE END 😊