

## IMPROVING YOUR HORSE'S FRAME UNDER SADDLE

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For any combination of reasons, your horse may go under saddle with his head high, his back stiff and his stride hurried. The horse becomes unresponsive to the rider's aids and his gaits become jolting. Ridden habitually in this poor frame, a horse will develop the wrong muscles and become confirmed in its practice.

The first step toward correction is to put the horse in a smooth, hollow or rubber-coated ring or eggbutt snaffle bit. Ride with even contact on each rein. Use your outside rein to steady him, and keep your inside rein supple.

Work on a large circle at the walk, keeping your legs on the horse's sides, teaching him to accept your aids. Your outside leg should be slightly farther back than your inside leg to bend his whole body.

When the horse hollows on the circle at the walk, give and take with the inside rein, with the outside rein steady. Each time the inside hand is in contact with the horse's mouth, give a little nudge with your inside leg. If he yields and rounds

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his topline, make the aids quiet again to let him know his action was correct. If he resists, keep applying the aids and after a time, he should yield to you. Work him like this both ways on the circle.

If your horse overreacts to your leg aids, becoming tense and speeding up, work him on a small figure eight. When you change direction at the center of the figure eight, change your leg position—outside leg steady and always back behind the girth, inside leg actively supple at the girth.

Your outside rein will always control his excess energy. Slow him with its contact and keep the inside rein active, and maintain leg contact.

If he refuses to relax, begin spiraling a large circle slowly down to a small one and back out to the large circle, keeping the horse bent on the circle, moving him in with pressure from your outside leg and moving him out with pressure from your inside leg.

He will eventually accept contact from your legs; how long it takes will depend upon how hollow he has been going, and his individual temperament. Don't give up—persistence will bring progress.

Your horse will tend to hollow or rush more on straight lines, so keep riding him on circles and figure eights. Try stroking his neck now and then with your inside hand, keeping the contact on the outside. If he still cannot relax and yield to you, try the rhythmic give-and-take with your hands.

The final method for rounding his topline is called combing the reins and I've never seen it fail to improve a horse. Hold the buckle of your reins in one hand by your chest and, with the other hand, put your thumb and index finger outside the reins, your next two fingers between the reins, and your little finger to the other outside. Place the combing hand on the reins just above your horse's withers and move up the reins in a long, smooth movement until you touch the hand by your chest. Trade hands and do it over and over again.

This also takes time and patience. The horse should stretch his head and neck down in response to this vibrating of the reins.

When you feel progress at the walk, you can begin the same exercises at the trot. Just be prepared to start all over again at each gait and be patient.

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