

MOVING FORWARD THROUGH THE USE OF THE WHIP AND SPURS

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Impulsion comes naturally to the horse; the desire to move forward is a part of his instinct. So, when your mount doesn't want to go forward, it is because he hurts or he has been conditioned not to. If you suspect in the least that he is in pain, have a veterinarian see him. When you are certain of his soundness, examine potential reasons for his actions by evaluation of your own riding techniques.

If you aid your horse forward into unyielding hands, you will make him balk from confusion. If you are in the habit of thumping at his sides incessantly with your legs, he has learned to ignore them. If you are careful to aid correctly and find him losing interest in your requests, he could just be bored. Whatever the cause of his lack of impulsion/attention, proper use of the whip will restore that desire to move forward.

When you use a whip from the ground, you think of it as an extension of your hand. Under saddle, your horse must perceive the whip as a reinforcement of your legs—it must never act alone, but only as an aid. You want your horse to realize that if he does not respond to the leg, the whip will tap him instantly to attention.

If the horse is afraid of the whip, some lessons from the ground must be given. You will need a riding whip of about three feet in length. Carry it every time you handle him and stroke and pet him all

over with it, starting at his shoulder and moving slowly, gently back to his haunches. Do this on both sides of him for as long as is necessary until he is at ease with its presence.

When you mount, hold the whip in your inside hand with it resting on your thigh. The end of it should be just behind your calf, a few inches away from his body. This way, a simple flick of your wrist will make it tap his side right behind your leg. Never hit him on the shoulder nor reach back and whack his buttocks. You do not punish him, but work to create a more intense concentration on your leg aids.

Using your normal aids to move forward (engage seat, soften hand, apply leg), follow them instantly with a single tap from the whip. For some horses, a mere touch of the stick brings a response. Others may need a sharp pop. The important thing is to use the whip right after the leg aid with one snap as firmly as needed. As your horse moves off correctly, be certain that you reward him by ceasing use of the whip.

With quiet legs just breathing at the horse's sides, wait for him to slow. When he does, nudge him on with legs and follow them instantly with the whip once. It may take only seconds or it may be several minutes before he slows again—keep the legs quiet until he slows.

Each time the horse loses impulsion,

aid him forward again. If he begins to respond to the leg aid alone, don't use the whip. You must be consistent in applying the whip only when—and every single time—he ignores the leg. It will take time to condition him to respond promptly to the leg and he must know absolutely that the whip will follow if he hesitates.

When you change rein (change direction) you will want to change the whip to the new inside hand smoothly and quickly. Put both reins in the hand that holds the whip; simply turn that wrist so that the whip points directly up in the air; turn the free hand so that its thumb is down, its back toward you and take hold of the whip. In one gentle motion, bring the whip over to the new inside and rest it on your thigh.

There will be times, during lateral movements especially, when you will carry the whip in the outside hand to reinforce the outside leg. Spiraling in on a circle, executing haunches-in, half-pass, when you are moving the horse's body away from the direction of his bend, you will need to just press the whip against his side behind your leg.

Remember, be consistent. Apply the whip behind your leg, use only as much force as needed, apply the whip once—if the horse does not respond, apply leg again, then whip sharper. Concentrate so that you do not confuse your horse with conflicting commands or rewards.

Spurs are a tool used to make lighter aids possible. They can be used at any time on a schooled horse, but are essential when using a full or double bridle. The curb bit on the full bridle is a tool for making lighter rein aids possible. Its potentially severe effect can retard forward motion, so the spurs should be introduced before the full bridle is put to use. This helps keep the horse thinking forward.

If, at any time with or without spurs, your horse starts ignoring the leg aids, correct him with the whip, not spurs.

Introduce your horse to the spurs at a walk after a good schooling session. Do some leg yields and some shoulder-in movements to help him understand the new feelings. Apply leg and spur together so he will not be confused. Your aim is to bring the horse to the point where you can brush him with the spur instead of having to knead his side with your calf.

Your legs will always "breathe" on the horse's sides just as they did without spurs. Be certain that your spurs are not constantly touching his sides. You want their use to have meaning and if they are always against him, it is just like thumping at him with your legs—he will soon ignore them.

When your horse is comfortable with the spurs at a walk, move on to a sitting trot and then the canter. Give him time to get used to the spurs' more concentrated action. If he overreacts, do not punish him in the mouth, just calm him with all the aids.

Get lateral movements with the spurs down before you ask him to lengthen and shorten his stride. The feel of the spur as it is used for lateral work will help explain it better and prepare him to move out longitudinally and remain calm.