

Exercises: Under Saddle – Moving the Front

Moving the front end of your horse is the last exercise I strongly advise to practice in order to ride a safe and reliable horse.

As mentioned earlier in the groundwork phase, controlling independently the hind quarters from the front quarters helps the horse to feel comfortable in the maneuvers we will require from it.

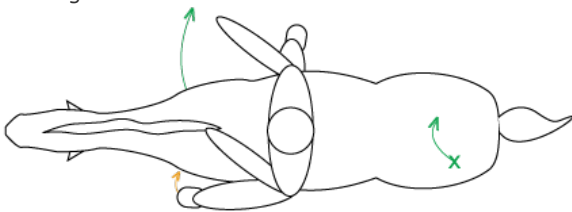


Positions

As usual, since you ask your horse to move, you should stay in position 2. There are two steps in this exercise and the position of your hands will change depending on these steps:

- In the "hind & front" exercise, your elbow is stuck against your hip and your hand at the front of your saddle when you ask your horse to untrack the hind legs, then this arm will open wide to the outside and backwards as if you were opening a door for your horse.
- In the "soft feel" exercise, both hands remain at the front of the saddle, well spread one from the other. The direct rein is leading the horse and the supporting rein is laying on its neck (your hand never crossing the neck line!).

You may remember that you started to teach the leg to your horse in the previous exercise: the serpentine. From now on, every time you want to turn right for instance, your left foot comes by the horse's left shoulder in order to push it away, and vice-versa when you want to go left of course.



In both exercises, the key is to make sure your horse's weight has shifted on the hind quarters, this will free the front end that can cross and move through.

Process – Hind & Front

Once your horse is familiar with the cue to untrack its hindquarters, the "Hind & Front" exercise is quite easy. Move your horse on a good walk, pick the lateral flexion and untrack its hind legs by applying your foot on its flank. That is the "Hind" part... In the same move, after your horse crossed its hind quarters a couple of times, you should open your hand holding the lateral flexion wide to the outside and backward, your weight shifted backward too. This will bring your horse on its hocks and help it to cross its front legs through. That is the "Front" part!

Tip: Sequence

- You pick the lateral flexion and untrack the hindquarters over a few steps;
- You open your hand and put your weight backwards, pulling gently on its head;
- You wait for the horse to cross its front legs, just one step;
- You release and make sure your horse does not move forward.

Process – Soft Feel

As for the untracking exercise, the second progression to move the front legs is much more subtle. The soft feel is an important part of the process as it will help the horse to shape its back and shift its weight onto its hindquarters. This posture frees the front end, so the horse can move more easily and cross the front quarters.

Once you can take and hold the soft feel, shift your hands sideways. The hand holding the direct rein takes the slack out of it. The hand holding the neck rein comes close to the neck line but never passes over it. Then, your outside foot comes by the horse's shoulder and activates it, pushing it away.

Pretty soon, your horse will feel your leg and move away from it...

Tip: Soft Feel

Backing up your horse a couple of steps after it crossed its front legs will help it to hold its weight on the hind quarters all the time.

Q&A

What if my horse does not cross the front legs but keeps walking?

Typically, when you start to work the "Hind & Front" exercise, that is the response you may obtain when you do not have a proper lateral flexion. Some horses will tend to pull on the rein in order to keep their neck as straight as possible and will keep walking.

Make sure you shorten your rein correctly and bend your horse's head enough (90°), pulling backward in order to stop the forward movement.

Remember that timing is the most important thing to educate horses: **release the rein as soon as you get one step across!**

