

The Friesians and Canter Work

By: *Melissa Creswick*

One thing that training is all about is that there will always be something that could be better. There are some daily exercises that may help with the two most common problems at the canter. The first type of problem is when the horse pushes out with the hind legs when the legs are on the ground while at the canter; it will appear that the horse is running away or trying to catch up with itself. The second type of problem canter is one that is slow and heavy on the ground; the horse is not making enough of a stride to carry itself over the ground. Some horses that are not cantered a lot will panic when asked to canter, so take a look at the horse when it is free to help understand what kind of canter it has. In both of these types of canter, the horse needs to step under and carry more.

The horse that pushes out with the hind legs when the legs are on the ground needs to lower its hind end and step more to its middle line. This simply means to step more to the horse's center of gravity. The center of gravity should shift more to the withers as the training proceeds. Most horses that canter this way have to learn that they can slow down and step across the body to a longer and more carrying stride. For daily exercise, put your horse on a walk circle and ask the horse to push the inside hind leg across its body to the outside hind leg. The rider needs to think of the horse's front legs as the hubcap of the wheel making a small circle and the hind legs being the tire making the larger circle. You must also make sure to keep the horse walking forward, then sideways; this will insure that the horse does not feel blocked and does not know that it is asked of it. At this point, you should feel the horse's inside leg stepping up to your outside hip to some degree. The stride will feel longer and slower if it is right. The outside rein will stay straight and no over bending is needed; this would only block the horse from crossing under. Then take the horse to the trot and repeat the exercise. If all goes well, go to the canter for short periods of time. This exercise will make the horse slow down and understand the carry part of the canter. Do not over aid the horse to get results, that will defeat the exercise.

The second problem canter is corrected by many transitions that will make the horse respond more quickly to your aids and flex its hocks more in order to get more energy or jump in the stride. The longer you canter the horse with the lazy or flat stride, the worse it will get. Transitions from trot to canter on a circle will help. Make sure you change direction often and rest so that the horse is not too tired to understand what is asked. If the horse gets excited, bucks or refuses to go forward, then you have it on too tight of a circle or it is not ready in balance to do this exercise. If this is the case, go back to walk-trot transitions to help the horse understand what is being asked. You should be looking for the horse to quickly respond to the aids, but not explode, so that it can carry you better over the ground.

As with all good trainers and riders, you must evaluate the work daily, and if any problems occur go back to the basics to get the horse comfortable with the ride. A nervous or frightful horse will not progress in these exercises. **CHECK YOUR WORK.** Progress will come over weeks of varied work patterns, so remember to vary your exercises. Good Luck and here's to good riding.

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