

Can You Pat Your Head and Rub Your Stomach? Putting Your Horse on the Bit

Putting your dressage horse on the bit is really as simple as patting your head and rubbing your stomach.

As long as you know the ingredients that make up the aid that puts your horse on the bit, you can connect him. And the great news is that aid is as simple, clear, and uncomplicated as closing your legs and asking your horse to go from halt to walk.

For the sake of clarity, I'm going to call the aid that you'll use to put your horse on the bit the "connecting aids".

The "connecting aids" are a combination of three ingredients that are maintained for about three seconds—the length of time it takes you to inhale and exhale:

Those three ingredients are the:

- driving aids
- bending aids
- rein of opposition

The driving aids consist of your seat and your two legs because any of those aids will drive the horse forward.

The bending aids consist of your inside rein which asks the horse to look in the direction that he is going, your inside leg on the girth, and your outside leg behind the girth. Each of those aids contributes to bend.

The rein of opposition is the outside rein. It's called the rein of opposition because it opposes too much speed from the driving aids and too much bend from the bending aids.

When you marry those three ingredients—driving aids, bending aids and rein of opposition for about three seconds, you give the cue to put your horse on the bit—the connecting aids.

Yes, it's important to time your aids. That's because your horse can ONLY respond to an aid when a hind leg is on the ground—and specifically just before it pushes off. But by giving the connecting aids for about three seconds, you'll be overlapping the time when each hind leg is on the ground.

So putting your dressage horse on the bit really is as simple as patting your head and rubbing your stomach. That's because basically, all you're doing is closing both calves to drive your horse forward as if you're going into a lengthening. Then you do something different with each one of your hands. (That's where the patting the head and rubbing your stomach comes in.) Your outside hand closes in a fist while your vibrating inside hand keeps the neck straight and asks for flexion at the jaw.

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