

## Does Your Dressage Horse Cross His Legs Enough In Leg Yields?

When you do leg yields from the centerline to the long side as you do in the First Level dressage tests, it's not always easy to make sure that your horse is crossing his legs enough. That's because as long as you manage to get from Point A to Point B, you can fake yourself out into thinking you're really going sideways.

But if your dressage horse isn't crossing his legs enough, you're losing most of the suppling, loosening, toe-touching benefits of leg yields.

So here are some easy tips to help you ride better leg yields.

When you do this exercise, do it in the head-to-the wall position. Your horse's front legs stay in the track, and his hindquarters come toward the middle of the ring. We'll start by tracking to the left. Also, start the exercise in the walk so you can coordinate your aids and really feel what you're doing.

1. Use your outside rein to make sure your horse's neck is straight. (If you're tracking to the left, the left rein becomes the outside rein in the leg yield because your horse should be flexed at the poll to the right.) If your horse's neck is bent, he won't be crossing his legs.
2. Ask the hindquarters to come in at a 35-degree angle to the rail (slightly less than half of a right angle). If you settle for less angle, your horse won't be crossing enough.
3. If your horse isn't crossing enough, use an opening rein to help you. DON'T push harder with your leg that's behind the girth (the right leg). If you push harder, you'll lean to the right. Your body and your right leg will be giving contradictory signals. Your leg says, "Move over", but your body says, "I won't let you move over."

Instead, support with your left rein and use a quick opening right rein. Bring your right hand to the right and then immediately put it back in riding position. Then, if necessary, repeat the opening rein. If you coordinate the two reins correctly, the action of the right rein will go back to your horse's hind legs and he'll swing them to the left.

By using your opening right rein and your supporting left rein, you can transfer some of the responsibility for going sideways away from your leg and into your reins.

4. Give a small squeeze with your right leg at the same time you use your right leg. It's important to time the use of your right rein and leg. Open the rein and use your leg when his right hind leg is on the ground.

Timing is important because the only time your horse can respond to your aid is when his hind leg is on the ground— specifically just before it pushes off.

You can learn to feel when a hind leg is on the ground because your corresponding seatbone feels like it's being pushed "up" or "forward". Each time you feel your seatbone pushed up, say out loud, "Now, now, now" so you get into the rhythm of when that hind leg is on the ground.

Then keep saying, "Now, now, now" aloud, and time your opening rein and squeeze of your leg with the word "now".

Once you learn what it feels like when your horse crosses his legs well in the head to the wall position, go back to your "center line over to the long side" leg yield as asked for in the dressage tests. Check that it feels the same under your seat when you do it in this pattern as it does in the head to the wall position.

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