

## Pick Up the Correct Canter Lead

### PICK UP THE CORRECT CANTER LEAD EVERY TIME!

...I asked readers to send me their training questions and was deluged with questions about people who have trouble picking up one of their canter leads... Here are some tips and exercises to help you with this all too common problem.

The first exercise is done completely in the walk. It's a great rider coordination exercise. You'll practice positioning your horse alternately for the left lead and then switch to the right lead after a few strides.

Let's say you decided to pick up left lead:

Put your weight on your left seat bone.

Flex your horse to the left by turning your left wrist as if you're unlocking a door. That is, start with your thumb as the highest point of the hand. Turn your thumb to the left, and bring your baby finger very close to the withers, but don't cross over the withers. In this moment, your knuckles or fingernails will be pointing up toward your face. Then put your hand back in the original position with your thumb as the highest point of the hand.

Support with your right rein so your horse doesn't over bend his neck to the left. His face should be one inch to the inside of a neutral position. (Neutral means his head and neck are straight in front of his body so that his chin is directly in front of his "cleavage".)

Your left leg is on the girth to say, "Go forward to the canter."

Your right leg is a couple of inches behind the girth because it will signal his right hind leg to strike off into left lead canter. (He has to start cantering with the outside hind leg in order to end up on the correct lead.)

Stay in this "left lead canter" position for a few strides in the walk, and then switch your aids as if asking for right lead canter (Remember, you're doing all of this in the walk). That is:

Weight on the right seat bone.

Right rein flexes the horse's head one inch to the right.

Left rein is like a siderein that prevents too much bend in the neck.

Right leg on the girth.

Left leg behind the girth.

When you get ready to ask for the depart, do the following things:

Keep the horse positioned to the inside as you did above.

When you ask for the canter depart, push your inside seat bone forward toward your horse's inside ear.

Give a little squeeze with your inside leg on the girth to tell your horse to go "forward into the canter"

Use your outside leg in a windshield wiper-like action to signal the outside hind to strike-off into the canter.

Check that you're on the correct lead by:

Keeping your head erect, but peak down at his front legs. If you're on the correct lead, the inside front leg should reach further forward than the outside front leg.

Make a circle. If you're on the correct lead, the canter will feel balanced. If you're on the wrong lead, the canter will feel unbalanced.

If you end up of the wrong lead, chances are you didn't keep your horse bent through his body and flexed to the inside at his poll during the transition. Your horse will pick up whatever lead he's bent and flexed toward.

Here are 2 things you can do to help with the bend:

Walk on a small circle to bend your horse. Just before you finish the small circle, keep the bend, and apply the aids for the canter. Once he canters, arc out onto a larger circle.

Walk or trot on a small circle. Leg yield with a bend (That is, push your horse sideways.) out to the larger circle. Keep your inside leg on the girth and your outside leg behind the girth as you leg yield with a bend. If you're circling to the right, imagine you're pushing his rib cage to the left while his neck and hindquarters stay to the right. Ask for the canter WHILE you're leg yielding.

For more information on picking up the correct lead, check out Cross-Train Your Horse (Problem Solving with Basic Flat Work) and Train with Jane-Volume 2-Using Leg Yielding to Solve Common Problems.  
<http://janesavoie.com/shop/i>

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