

Put Your Horse On the Bit

No matter where I travel, the most frequently asked questions I get are, "How do I put my horse on the bit...and how do I keep him there consistently?" This concept baffles many riders. My hope here is to simplify the process for you with the following information.

First, you need to know that there is a SPECIFIC AID to put your horse on the bit just like there is a specific aid to ask for canter or for a leg yield. That aid is a half halt. (Don't groan...I can hear you!)

Now for some information on the half halt:

1. The reason we give a half halt is to bring the horse to a more perfect state of balance.
2. The half halt is the most important yet most misunderstood concept in riding. It is important not only because it is the aid to put your horse on the bit, but also because it is the doorway through which you do every change of gait, balance, movement, or exercise.
3. There is no "stopping" in a half halt. Think of it as a "half-go". That is, every half halt contains the power, the surge, or the thrust from behind that you'd have if you asked for a medium gait.
4. There is one generic, "over-the-counter" half halt. It consists of the momentary closure of seat, legs, and hands.
5. The confusion about half halts stems from the fact that there are many possible variations of that generic half halt because you can use your seat, legs, and hands in different ways. To add to the many options available, you can also vary the duration and the intensity of the half halt.
6. Different variations of the generic half halt create different results such as connection, collection, or preparation for something new.
7. To put your horse on the bit, use the version of the half halt that "connects" your horse's back end to his front end. For the sake of clarity, I will call this version of the generic half halt, the "connecting half halt".
8. The "connecting half halt" consists of the marriage of 3 sets of aids.
 - A. Driving aids (seat and two legs)
 - B. Bending aids (inside rein and both legs)
 - C. The rein of opposition (outside rein)
9. These 3 sets of aids are applied for about 3 seconds. (not a MOMENTARY closure of seat, legs, and hands!)
10. To the naked eye, the aids are given at the same time.

11. However, if you had freeze frame photography, you would see:

- A. First, close both calves as if you're squeezing toothpaste out of a tube to create that surge of power from behind. (You'll only be using your legs as your driving aids at this point. I'm purposely leaving the seat out for now to keep things simple.)
- B. Next, close your outside hand (rein of opposition) in a fist to capture, contain, and recycle the energy back to the hind legs.
- C. Finally, give 3 little squeezes and releases on the inside rein to keep the neck straight. (If you don't use your inside hand, your horse will bend his neck to the outside because your outside hand is closed in a fist for so long.)
- D. After 3 seconds, soften everything . Go back to the light, maintenance pressure of legs and hands you had in the beginning before you gave the half halt.

12. Putting your horse on the bit is as simple as giving any other aid, Don't make it complicated by searching for exercises to connect your horse. (Don't get me wrong. Exercises like leg yields are helpful. They give the novice horse or rider the "feel" of connection. But at the end of the day, you need to train your horse to come on the bit from an invisible aid that you can use anytime...like in the show ring!)

Here are additional resources for more information on putting your horse on the bit.

- 1. More-Cross-Training--Chapters 1 and 2
- 2. The Half Halt Demystified!--Volumes 1 and 2
- 3. Train with Jane-Volume 2-- "Connection"

To get to those resources, click on: <http://janesavoie.com/author.htm>

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