

Developing Expression in the Trot Half-Pass

with Karen Pavicic

Karen Pavicic was a member of Canada's 2007 Pan Am Games Dressage Team as the travelling reserve with her horse, Lionheart. A Level III dressage coach, she has trained a number of horses and riders to success at the FEI levels. Currently long-listed for the Canadian Team with Don Daiquiri and London, Karen has declared for the 2012 Olympic Team with Don Daiquiri. She trains out of Centre Line Stables in Richmond, BC.

by Karen Robinson



Alternate between a few strides each of shoulder-in (left) and half-pass (right), which trains the horse to continue bending around the inside leg while also moving sideways.

The quality of any dressage movement can be only as good as the quality of gait in which that movement is performed. The trot half-pass is a movement with considerable potential for expression, and the real key to achieving greater expression in the half-pass is to both start with and maintain quality of the gait. If your collected trot is good, there is a higher probability of performing a good half-pass. Additionally, a more supple horse is capable of a higher degree of expression in the half-pass than a horse that lacks suppleness.

The secret to a great trot half-pass is to

have your horse connected to the outside rein correctly through the use of a shoulder-in, which provides the bend required for the half-pass. It also frees up the shoulder to give expression of the front leg, and keeps the horse forward – in front of the driving aids – throughout the movement.

One of my favourite exercises for improving the quality of the half-pass is to alternate between shoulder-in and half-pass. I start in shoulder-in for a few strides, then I ride a few steps of half-pass, followed by a return to shoulder-in, and then back to half-pass. The number of transitions between shoulder-in and half-pass over a single length of the

arena will depend on how many strides I ride of each movement before changing, as well as the length of the arena. The transitions train the horse to continue bending around the inside leg while also moving sideways.

Each individual horse has its own tendencies, and this exercise can be modified accordingly. With a horse that doesn't listen to my outside leg in the half-pass, for example, I will begin with shoulder-in left, then go into half-pass left, followed by a few steps of travers left. After the travers I will always return to the shoulder-in left before doing half-pass again; it's important that the haunches don't lead in the half-pass, and the steps of shoulder-in between the travers and half-pass prevent the horse from leading with the quarters.

When using this exercise with one of my students, I make sure she remembers to continue using her inside leg. Riders often develop a habit in lateral work of using a strong leg on the side that is driving the horse sideways, while forgetting to continue also using the leg on the side toward which the horse is travelling. The inside leg is what creates bend and expression in the half-pass. Reminding the rider to use the inside leg also helps to ensure that her weight remains on the inside seat bone. Too much outside leg in the absence of an inside leg pulls the rider's weight into the outside hip, which creates a conflict of aids for the horse. The effect of an unbalanced seat will prevent the horse from performing what is desired: a supple, ground-covering half-pass with the freedom in the shoulder that allows greater expression. 🐾