

## **Riding from the Ribcage**

Many people in the horse industry know that riders use their hands and their legs to aid a horse. Typically, a rider's hands steer, stop, collect, and control the shoulders of the horse; while a rider's legs tell the horse to move forward, pick up specific canter leads, and move laterally. Well, what many riders don't know is that all of those things can be done by riding a horse from the ribcage.

If a rider can control the center of the horse it allows for more control over the entire horse; head, neck, shoulders, back, hips, and hocks. It allows us to accomplish certain exercises with one aid vs multiple. For example, when asking a horse to bend some riders will use an inside rein to bend the pole and neck and use that rein to hold the horse in a bend, but what happens is the hip of the horse is pushed to the outside. For proper balance and collection a horse needs to be driving from the inside hind in order to be soft in the rider's hand. If the rider rides from the ribcage by using an inside calf with an upward moving heel as to lift the horse the rider will find that the horse will break at the pole, extend their stride, impulsion will increase, and will wrap around the rider's inside leg into a bend. If the horse loses forward motion add the outside leg in the same manor to drive the horse forward while maintaining the balance of the ribcage. The hip will be correctly positioned up underneath the horse and the horse will be driving from the inside hind.

*To understand this concept hold each end of a piece of string in each hand. Then, have a second person pull the center of the string as if a rider's leg was pushing against the ribcage of a horse. What you will see is that your two hands will wrap around the second person's hand as a horse's head, neck, and hip would wrap around a rider's leg.*

Collection is another exercise that many riders ask for primarily from their hands. Instead, the rider should use both calves and an upward pressure heel to lift the horse's ribcage, which will encourage the horse to round their back and neck, and break at the pole. As the rider adds light pressure on both reins the horse will bring their nose onto the vertical with very little pressure on the rider's hand.

Walk to canter transitions can be taught or improved by riding from the ribcage and using the same bending exercise explained earlier. A rider uses the same aids, but in a counter bend until the horse becomes soft on the inside rein. Once the horse becomes soft, allow the horse to take one or two steps back into a regular bend and then ask for the canter. The horse will pick up the inside lead and will step into the lead from behind, which will help the horse hold their collection through the transition. Canter leads are always determined by the hind legs and hips. Just before the rider asks for the canter the horse's hip is set to the inside, which sets the horse up for that particular lead. This exercise is much easier and more natural for a horse to learn than trying to teach a horse to keep their hip positioned to the inside at all times and through the transition.

*Riding from the ribcage will improve the horse's performance in every exercise. I encourage all riders to keep this article in mind while in the saddle. I tell all of my students to simply play with the aids and to experiment with them. Soon your horse's improved performance will become evident in the show ring with higher scores.*