

## Centered Riding and Classical Riding - why Centered Riding?

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Sally has made it clear that by the correct use of her 4 basics and grounding we can develop focus, balance, awareness and feel. These are all essential for the correct way of “going” or good riding. Soft eyes and breathing develop focus and awareness. Centering, building blocks, and grounding promote centered balance for both horse and rider. Only when we are focused and in balance can we really feel. Knowledge of correct basics, coupled with good feel, allow us to develop the correct way of going, essential for the development of the horse. In nature, the horse runs from in front, his natural means of easy escape. In training, we must teach the horse to go forward from the hind end into balance, under the weight we are asking him to carry. This is engagement and ultimately collection. To do this, we must develop the following seat -

the seat bones moving towards the pommel of the saddle in rhythm with the horses swinging back. Sometimes we fail to recognize the habits we develop which block the following seat, for example hard eyes lock the body in tension, blocking the natural following motion of the pelvis. The list can be fairly long - holding the breath, gripping with the knees, tight thighs, locked hips, off center vertically or laterally riding with straight arms, heavy and tight.etc.

As we explore this list, we begin to appreciate the number of problems created by riders which must be addressed for them to ride in balance and lightness. Let us now look at common problems that preclude the correct way of going, i.e. hind end engaged, allowing the horse to step under the weight of the rider. Holding breath, hard eyes (tension, locking the body) gripping with the knees, (blocks pelvis from swinging through) tight thighs (locks the hip joints and contracts the buttocks muscles which must be relaxed to allow the pelvis to flow through.

If the rider is off center vertically (leaning forward), it will not allow the horse to step through. If the rider is off balance laterally, it invites the horse to adjust his center of gravity under the rider, losing the straightness essential for correct pelvic swing. Contact is critical for allowing throughness. Remember, the horse is allowed to push against us; we are not allowed to pull against him! If we do, the horse will immediately respond by hollowing the back and raising the head, thus blocking engagement, losing ability to carry from behind.

The upper arm hangs in relaxation on the torso, the elbow bent, pointing to the ground. When the horse puts weight on the rein, it should be immediately transferred to the elbow, which buttresses and supports, while the rider immediately re-engages the hind end with the seat and leg aids. The hand is the communication center; it never pulls, elastically massaging and giving little releases to allow throughness. To allow this, the hand should be carried in the position of carrying a mug of hot coffee or a soup spoon that you want to lift to your mouth - thumb up and flexed to maintain wrist suppleness. This will hold a very elastic contact.

Sally has always worked primarily on her riders - when they are right, the horse will be right. Consistent work on the 4 basics and grounding is very rewarding and results in happy horses.