

PASSING THROUGH THE BACK

How should the muscles under a rider move? How can we manage to access the back area, start it working and allow energy to pass through it? How do we know whether a horse is blocked or active? How does this influence riding? Many of us have voiced these questions at one time or another. In this report, I will attempt to respond, and explain a suitable methodology.

TEXT: JORGE CONDE

THE BACK IS ONE of the main parts where the horse is able to exercise resistance. Anatomically, it is a bridge of vertebrae that run from the withers to the loin. Each vertebra of the ten making up the spine has a joint with a rib and the muscular planes of this same area. Thus, horses with short backs generally find it more difficult to bend, and those with long ones have more weight-bearing problems. A horse's back should play a role in the movement in each pace.

A rigid and inactive back, as well as being blocked, can be identified by irregular, tense movements and planes. There is a feeling of disconnection in the horse; it breaks the coordination between the hind quarters and the forehand within each movement and it makes having a good contact difficult. Transitions become more complex as do the possibility of the horse becoming engaged (placing its hind quarters under its body mass). In other

words, the influence of a blocked back on the horse, as a whole, is tremendously negative and harmful for the competitive development of the animal and its ridability in general. As if this were not enough, the horse's walk tends to become mechanical, generating a tendency towards lateralization, even in walks that are naturally correct.

When one says that the back does not work, that is technical language for "a lack of connection" or we say that "it doesn't go through." I once heard a national junior trainer say that any muscular block works like "a brake on the impulsion." He gave a very graphic example: "it is as if you had a hose full of liquid, that is bent back on itself." In our case, the bend is the rigidity and the liquid the energy. It is clear that when the hose is bent, the liquid flows more slowly or not at all. That is what happens with the lack of connection; all of the energy produced by the hind quarters is wasted, as it fails



Quantum III, owned by Muellers
Pferdeparadise, bred by Pablo Pérez
Jiménez and ridden by Cándido Tardío.



Luis Lucio ridden by Os-Nervi, owned by Deer Meadow Farms and bred by Yeguada Burgués.



Regidor XXXVI, owned by Hnos. González Naranjo, bred by Miura and ridden by José A. Fdez. Líneros.

pain must be ruled out with the aid of the veterinarian, physiotherapist or an equine health professional, who might be able to help.

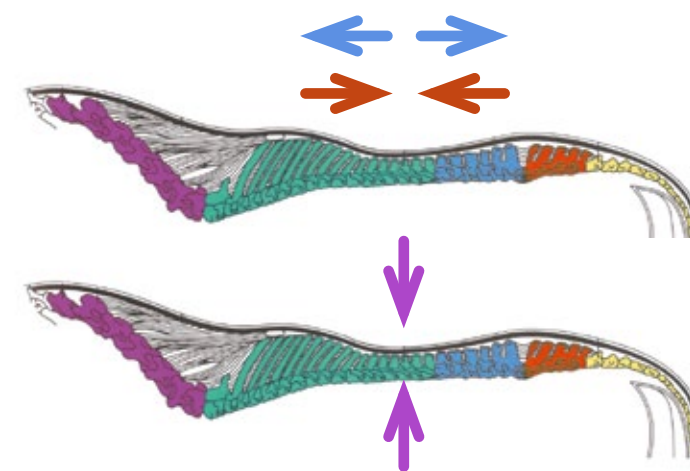
When a horse resists through its back, it is a defensive reaction; generally, there is a reason for such a reaction. Resistance is one way to avoid being hurt or of being subjected to efforts that have a high cost for the horse and that it dislikes. When the back begins to work, it is normal that the horse increases its resistance. Once the muscles begin to free up, you will notice how they relax, and, little by little, those same muscles are able to show freedom of movement.

GETTING THE BACK TO START WORKING

For this musculature to work properly, it must be relaxed and tension free. Once this occurs, these muscles work due to their interaction. Stretching the neck muscles pulls on the back, putting these in a stretching position. The fact that these muscles are constantly stretched does not make them more elastic. Elasticity comes from varying the position in which the horse works—collected and lengthening—and from the relaxation of these muscles. Freedom of the top line allows movement to go through, causing the energy produced by the hind quarters to reach the hand. The capacity of the horse to bend laterally also gives a feeling of freedom of movement and it shows the flexibility of its top line.

On the other hand, using the abdominal musculature strengthens the back. As with humans, when one has a strong abdomen, his/her back benefits from it; the back gains in support, and has the ability to curve and work with firmness.

Therefore, working the back can be viewed lengthwise and laterally. To facilitate correct work, one should contemplate the plane front-back (collected-lengthening) and right and left. A last point is that it is also a good thing if the back has the ability to move up and down.



Working the back is shown from the lengthwise and lateral perspective.

To generate all of this movement in the top line, part of the work session should be spent doing gymnastics with the horse. What is meant by gymnastics? Leg yielding,

lengthening and shortening, bending the horse in general through flexions, circles with the croup to the outside and to the inside (of the circle), shoulder-in and head-to-the-wall. To practice gymnastics, it is necessary to work in short, alternating movements, with a lot of variation in the position of the horse. The introduction of strides in piaffe at a more advanced stage is also beneficial when working the top line. A correct combination of these, with the introduction of pauses in the work, the adaptation to and individualization of the specific horse (What phase it is at? What problems does it have? What is the origin? What resources are available, etc.), analyzing its health and the advice of somebody who can help from below, is what, without a doubt, can lead to success in this truly complex matter of “going through.” ■■

WHEN ONE SAYS **THAT THE BACK DOES NOT WORK**, THAT IS TECHNICAL LANGUAGE FOR “A LACK OF **CONNECTION**” OR SIMPLY STATED THAT “IT IS **NOT GOING THROUGH**”

to reach the hand and no contact is established.

Always, before looking for a technical solution, we must ensure that there are no injuries of any type. Undoubtedly, what disconnects a horse most from the hand is the possibility of pain in the dorsal, lumbar or wither areas. Therefore, if your horse is showing difficulties in this aspect,

CHARISM® INTRODUCES A SADDLE FOR *Lightness, Precision & Harmony*



RMS™ LEGERETE SADDLE

- SHOULDER FREEDOM
- NATURAL ALIGNMENT
- CORRECT BALANCE
- INNOVATIVE FLAP DESIGN
- LIGHTWEIGHT
- SUPERIOR CRAFTSMANSHIP
- GERMAN LEATHER

Visit our Website
www.saddleforlightness.com

To contact **CHARISM®**
saddleforlightness@gmail.com

