

DRESSAGE TODAY

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# EXTRA

Trot Lengthenings:  
**THE WHAT,  
WHY AND  
HOW**

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When Periwoy is ridden by Milo Mott and ridden here by Marcel Van der Burgh, he learns that every upward transition is an uphill, pushing exercise. With every downward transition, Periwoy learns that he is putting his weight back, as if he were coming down a hill. This is how he learns to stretch.

## TROT LENGTHENING

# THE WHAT, THE WHY & THE HOW

A professional horsewoman explains how to do this basic movement.

By Carole Grant with Sally Silverman • Captured Moments Photography

**W**e start talking about lengthening the trot early in any training program. Trot lengthenings first show up in competition in First Level, Test One. Though the definition of the lengthening is pretty simple, trot lengthening is often misunderstood and not so simple to train properly. When horses don't learn to go forward and lengthen properly before they begin advanced work, which happens all too often, it comes back to haunt riders again and again in the higher levels.

### Covering Ground

The “what” of the trot lengthening is fairly straightforward. The horse pushes himself from behind and through his whole body into longer suspended strides. He covers as much ground

as he can in balance. If you watch a horse doing a proper lengthening across the diagonal of the arena, he will need fewer strides to get from one end to the other than he does at the working trot. That is the key to a good lengthening in both the trot and the canter. It doesn't quicken, and though the lengthening teaches the horse to put more weight on the hind legs as he is learning to push, it doesn't require carrying as much weight on the hind legs as do medium and extended trots at the higher levels.

When a horse is lengthening properly, in the walk, trot or canter, he uses his whole body, pushes off from behind and moves into the hand. He also has the ability to put his nose in front of the vertical, which I will explain more about later.

In the U.S. Dressage Federation's *Glossary of Judging Terms*, lengthening is defined as “Elongation of the stride and the outline of the horse, yet maintaining the same tempo [beats per minute] and balance as in the corresponding working pace.” I don't agree completely with this definition because there are fewer beats per minute when the stride is lengthened. The rhythm, however, stays the same. By rhythm, I mean the clarity and the



**The working trot doesn't naturally have much suspension. Suspension is the natural by-product of the lengthened stride, as seen on page 54. From the working trot, the ability to thrust, stretch and push into your hand, using the whole body, will develop suspension.**

regularity of the footfalls. In other words, the trot has two beats, the canter three beats and the walk four beats.

The feel of the trot lengthening should be familiar. Most of us have been trotting out in the field or down the road with a group of horses. The horse gets longer and gets some suspension. Typically the horse is carrying himself in a good way. Imagine that feeling. That is the trot we are looking for here. Suspension is the natural by-product of the lengthened stride. Even in many good horses, the working trot doesn't naturally have much suspension. Later, in the working and collected paces, after he has learned to lengthen or gain ground in his body when the leg goes on, his stride gets slower and longer.

### Learning from Lengthening

Why is lengthening such an important building block for training? Lengthening teaches the horse to use his body and neck and to move into the hand. If the horse does not know how to move into the hand when the rider's leg is used, pushing from behind with his nose in front of the vertical, he will have

critical problems throughout his training with contact and with the ability to use his back and to go forward properly. That is the biggest reason for teaching the lengthening.

Giving a tired, heavy horse the clues he needs to lengthen a little will ask him to push rather than to pull and become harder in your hands. A sensitive horse also learns to accept the leg because he understands, with calmness, that it means to go forward.

The horse's ability to stretch and to push into your hand, using his entire body, is a skill that will be key throughout the levels, all the way to Grand Prix. In piaffe and passage, for example, you are balancing more, while using your legs to make the horse active. At any moment, you should be able to use your leg to go forward into the hand. For this, the horse has to have full knowledge of the leg, knowing that you will push forward and he will reach forward into the contact and cover more ground. The calmness with which he can go into the hand is essential, and the lengthening can actually calm a tense horse. In fact, whenever I get in trouble with any advanced movement, I ask the horse to go forward to the lengthening.

### Introducing the Concept of Lengthening

Now that we've talked about the "what" and the "why," we need to discuss the "how." I have used trot lengthening throughout my career as a tool to teach the horse to use his back, neck and entire body. Because the horse's instinct might prompt him to canter in order to cover more ground, the mind of the horse, as much as the body, needs to be taught what the trot lengthening is all about. There are a number of exercises for properly teaching the trot lengthening, and it is easier for some horses than for others. When you try to teach lengthening, the horse starts to lose his balance. The exercises are about rebalancing and repushing. Some people feel that the horse doesn't learn to lengthen until he learns to collect. I don't think that is correct. Before he learns collection, the horse needs to know how to cover more ground. Collection, really, is the highest form of forwardness.

So, let's get started on the "how."

Once it is established that the horse can be ridden, goes forward and has some degree of rhythm, you will begin to give him the concept of lengthening. He already will be schooled in walk, trot and canter—of course, not perfectly, but he understands the concept. You want to teach him that from the trot, he can push without picking up the canter.

So, pick a spot a long way off on which to focus with your eyes, and feel in your own body as if you want to push your horse and take him with you to that long spot. At the trot, push him with your legs, and let go a little bit with the hand. He will undoubtedly make the mistake of breaking into the canter. You have to push from behind and let go, knowing that he will make this mistake. Don't think of breaking into a canter as a problem. You will only have a problem if you don't give the same correction each time. So, push him from behind, let go a bit and when he canters, say, "no," with a half halt or a "whoa." Ask again.

This is the main concept in the beginning: to give him a way that he can push his whole body forward and not canter. It must be very



**Marcel is using cavalletti to teach Periwyo that he has to reach with his neck. Cavalletti also teaches the rider to feel a lengthened stride. You feel as if you are riding one complete horse rather than many components—A neck, a middle and a hind end.**

clear that you are not afraid if he canter a million times. You can't hold him from the canter. The most important thing is that he goes forward from behind. He may also become off balance. If he becomes off balance, you need to be willing to push and give and allow him to canter and then bring him back. In the arena, I start this exercise in the middle of the long side, so that when the short wall comes up, he slows down without you having to stop him, allowing you to push him without him losing his balance.

Does he understand that to push forward doesn't mean to canter? Probably not. He may fall on the forehand, but you still need to push him. I don't want you to pull back on the reins, because the first requirement is always to go on and push. When he gives you the response you want—a few steps in which you feel that he has attempted to cover more ground without cantering or just the slightest lengthening of the stride without cantering—reward him and don't ask him again. Say "good boy," pat him or do whatever it is you do to reward him. You might change direction or simply let him walk on. That would be a good reward. Now he is beginning to think more and be more in tune with you, and you can ask more another day.

When he does break into the canter, I prefer that he canter on the true lead. It takes a little equestrian tact to think that way. In other words, if we are thinking of true canter, we are apt to use our outside leg as well as the inside leg. Pushing needs to come from both hind legs. If the horse is always taking the off lead, you are not using the outside leg enough. In that case, try to work on this exercise a meter from the wall.

Sometimes you will have a horse that learns the concept of covering more ground but goes a bit wide behind or isn't being totally correct in some other little way. He is still using his body, and I don't get too upset in the beginning when the horse makes these mistakes. Some people want the horse to carry so much weight behind that he never learns to push and only gets quicker. He never really comes to the length or the suspension because he hasn't learned the concept in the beginning. Right now, we're trying to influence the horse to be willing to push into a long neck and know that he won't be held back. Refinements can come later.

I have used the term "push him into your hand" a few times. When we are teaching lengthening, it is important to remember that the horse must keep his nose in front of

the vertical. If he is too much on the vertical or behind, there is no way to learn to use his whole body because he doesn't come through the withers to the hand. It's a clue that you are teaching it wrong. If he has his nose in front of the vertical, you are on the right track.

I have also asked you to "give." As a rider, you must learn to ride your horse to the end of the rein. I don't want the horse to go with a short neck, but there should also be no slack in the rein. For example, if you were riding a horse up a hill, you would give him more rein and he would use that length and reach for the bridle to use his neck more. If you give with your hand, you have to teach the horse to reach into the bridle. Push, but give proportionately and allow the horse.

### Exercises Incorporating Lateral Work

By the time the concept of the lengthening is being introduced, the horse should know something about moving away from the leg—the turn on the forehand and the leg yield. After the first exercise, when you feel that the horse is attempting to cover more ground without cantering, you may introduce a little lateral work to improve the lengthening. From the short side, at the trot, turn onto the quarterline and, from the quarterline, ask for a leg yield to the rail or wall (photo 1, p. 6). When you reach a point one meter from the wall, push with your legs and give with your hands to ask for that longer trot stride (photo 3, p. 6). Continue straight, either a meter from the wall or along the wall. This narrowing of the hind legs through the leg yield can give the horse more strength to develop an even better lengthening.

A more advanced version of this exercise is to ask for shoulder-fore at the trot as you turn onto the long side (photo 2, p. 6). Midway down the wall, ask the horse to go straight, giving him the aids to lengthen his stride at the same time (photo 3, p. 6). The horse will bring the inner hind forward, increasing the engagement. In both cases, it will feel as though the horse is pushing more

## USING LATERAL WORK



Marcel asks Periwyo for a leg yield from the quarterline to the long side.



Or he can ride a shoulder-fore as he turns down the long side.



In either case, when Marcel reaches the wall on the long side, he asks for a lengthened stride.

and becoming in better balance because of that pushing. It's a good feeling. When he is going forward from behind, I feel as though riding the horse requires less effort. He is not against your inside or outside leg, but he is straighter and more together. He is using his hind end, his middle and his front end as one.

Half halts then become easier because he has stepped into your hand.

### Using Cavalletti

Once the horse has some idea of making his stride longer, it's a very good idea to put up some cavalletti. Cavalletti teach the

horse to reach with his neck. He does not have a choice. Remember to keep the horse straight with the neck in the middle of his chest. I start with poles on the ground. Once the horse understands the concept and is going over the poles easily, I like to use secured poles or true cavalletti, because I don't want the horse to get careless, hit the poles and move them. Place them about four feet apart. Ride into the line of cavalletti at the working trot, and the horse will use his whole body, lengthening his frame as he goes over the cavalletti. Start with two, then add a couple more, building up to five or six.

Riding over the cavalletti will tell you if you have successfully taught your horse the concept of lengthening. Cavalletti require the horse to push forward with the hind legs and to trot into his whole body. If he doesn't, he may stumble, lurch forward, put his neck up and grab the reins out of your hands, or he may canter.

Cavalletti are also very helpful for the rider to feel a lengthened stride. When you are on a horse that trots into his whole body, it is a whole different feel from riding a horse that you are always designing into the proper shape or making round with your hands. You feel as if you are riding one complete horse, rather than many components—a neck, a middle and a hind end. It is quite amazing. But in the beginning, it has to be taught.

### Transitioning from Trot to Canter

When you have taught your horse the concept of lengthening and he knows how to do his trot-canter-trot transitions, which he learns at Training Level, you have another great exercise at your disposal. On the 20-meter circle, transition from trot to canter, then ask him to come back to trot as you normally do. Then immediately ask him to lengthen the stride a bit—maybe for four or five strides. It's likely that the same old pitfall will return, and he will try to canter. But when you ask, and he lengthens a little, reward him; come back to working trot and ask him to canter on. After you do this a few times during maybe two or three

## TROUBLESHOOTING



**Problem (top):** If Periway's head is too much on the vertical or behind it, he can't learn to use his whole body, because he isn't coming through the withers. **Solution (bottom):** Marcel gives with his hands, teaching Periway to reach into the bridle. Push, but give proportionately.



A rider, teacher and trainer, Carole Grant has won many honors. She rode at the 1982 World Equestrian Games in Switzerland and earned two gold medals at the 1983 Pan-American Games in Venezuela. Grant has worked with Georg Theodorescu, Melle Van Bruggen, Reiner Klimke, Harry Boldt and George Wahl but credits her late ex-husband, Chuck Grant, USDF Hall of Fame inductee, with helping her "get into the mind of the horse."

With daughters Mary Ann Grant and Tonya Grant-Barber and partner Dr. Larry Baudin, Grant operates Equistride International, a dressage facility in Fenton, Michigan, and Wellington, Florida.

training sessions, you will get the most amazing feeling—because when he understands this, he will canter into the hand in better and better balance without rushing. It may take some time and will require that you accept mistakes. Keep it simple and, most important, be consistent with your aids and corrections. He is learning that every upward transition is a pushing exercise like going up a hill and that every downward transition is putting weight back, like coming down a hill. This is how he learns to stretch.

It is particularly important when working on the circle to use your outside leg as well as your inside leg. Remember that the horse's outside leg has a longer way to go than the inside, so the pushing power has to be greater. It's like the horse at the end of a drill team pinwheel or the last kid in that game "Crack the Whip." Whoever is at the end of the line has a longer way to travel, just like the horse's outside leg. That concept is difficult to grasp for many riders, and it's the reason horses with less experienced riders will often take the wrong lead or trot with an irregular rhythm when learning the lengthening.

Again, you cannot be deterred by mistakes. Know that they are natural mistakes that need to occur for the horse to learn more. When you can do these transitions correctly, the horse has learned to use his whole body, and now, when you push him forward without holding him back, he will cover more ground.

If these exercises sound easy, it is because the best way to train a horse is with very simple work. The horse that has been taught to lengthen his trot stride properly has gained more than the ability to cover more ground. He has acquired an essential building block for the rest of his career. 

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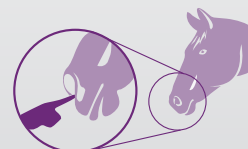
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# The Stuff of NIGHTMARES

Is your approach to deworming your horse keeping him healthy or contributing to a bigger problem?

By Jennifer M. Keeler

**I**nternal parasites: They're wiggly, gross and latched on to your horse's intestines—the stuff of nightmares. And in certain situations, they can even be deadly to your horse. But no worries—you've got your trusty arsenal of paste dewormers from the feed store. Just like you've done for years, you check the calendar, choose your weapon, quickly depress that handy apple-flavored tube into the mouth and, boom, he is safe, right?

Except you may be doing it all wrong.

## Times They Are A-Changin'

FEI veterinarian Dr. Anne Christopherson has treated clients' horses in Minnesota and central Florida for more than 20 years and during her career has seen some monumental changes in deworming practices. "When I started practicing, we were still routinely deworming with organophosphates via nasogastric tubes," Christopherson remembered. "But then paste dewormers came on the market, and I believe having them readily available and affordable to the majority of owners has been the best thing that happened to horses. We now see dramatically fewer parasite-related diseases, and I think this has directly contributed to horses living longer and healthier lives."

Paste dewormers were (and still are) offered with different active ingredients, such as benzimidazole, pyrantel and ivermectin, some of which work better than others against certain parasites. So with the influx of paste dewormers onto the equine market, it became a widely held belief that horse owners should alternate between different classes

of products every two months throughout the year. This rotational schedule, which worked like clockwork and was ingrained into generations of horse owners, generally worked very well—until now.

## The Dreaded "R" Word: Resistance

As years went by, veterinarians like Christopherson noticed the playing field was starting to change back in favor of the parasites thanks to resistance, which develops when a few worms endure a deworming treatment and pass onto their offspring the traits that helped them survive. "After four decades of using the same products on a set schedule year after year, there started to be reports of resistance issues," she explained. "We probably should have used a more careful approach all along, but at first all the products were effective and it was so easy to just blindly rotate through them."

"Additionally, as the key ingredients in dewormers eventually came out of patent protection and became available in even cheaper generic forms, some horse owners would walk into their feed store and just



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buy the cheapest dewormer on the shelf over and over, which usually was the same product every time—so this also contributed to additional resistance problems,” added Christopherson.

Some studies have shown that as many as 52 percent of horses remain on an outdated rotational deworming schedule to this day and that an alarming 98 percent of farms have horses with small-strongyle resistance to certain products. “Just like we also see now with certain antibiotics, with the overuse of antimicrobials when they’re not necessary, it creates resistance and it’s a problem we created ourselves,” Christopherson continued. “And since we haven’t had many new deworming chemicals introduced to the market, resistance is a big concern because when it develops, our products are less and less effective and we don’t have any new options to turn to.”

### **Fight Smarter, Not Harder**

Today, most veterinarians like Christopherson advise their clients to throw their rotational deworming calendars into the

trash and devise a smarter, more targeted strategy for their horses to combat internal parasites. The first step is knowing your enemy.

As far as internal parasites go, a horse is predominately faced with the same players as in years past, but some have become more or less predominant over time. Large strongyles used to be a major concern and cause of colic, and awareness of tapeworm risks have increased over the last decade. But overall, small strongyles have become the most insidious—and resistant—foe. Which is why it’s critical for horse owners to know exactly what they’re dealing with. Veterinarians most commonly use a fecal egg count, which is a microscopic examination of a horse’s manure to look for and measure the number of strongyle eggs a horse is passing through his body and into the environment. Christopherson noted that the fecal egg count is an effective gauge as long as the manure is fresh and stored properly.

After sending a sample to their veterinarian, horse owners will receive a report with a number followed by EPG (eggs per gram), which will indicate whether a horse is a low shedder (0–200 EPG), medium shedder (200–500 EPG) or high shedder (greater than 500 EPG). High shedders are the biggest concern, not only for their own health but because they can repeatedly and heavily contaminate a pasture, infecting other horses and continuing the cycle. After the initial survey, most veterinarians recommend performing a second fecal egg count reduction test 10 to 14 days after deworming to gauge effectiveness. Ideally, the count should drop by 95 percent.

Even horses living in the same pasture can carry different parasite loads, so for best results every horse should be routinely tested. Studies have indicated that just 20 percent of horses in a herd produce 80 percent of the parasites, making it critical to identify what Christopherson calls the “sentinel horse.” “This is the one horse on the farm who has chemical-resistant strongyles and always carries a higher load of

parasites, so he’s the one infecting the other horses,” she explained. “He’s the one we worry about and want to control because if we have him as clean as possible the others will fall in line. We often end up testing the sentinel horse once a month until we get the situation under control and then we’ll usually go to twice a year.

“Once you know what you’re facing, your veterinarian can help make the decision as to what chemical should be used and how,” Christopherson continued. “But remember, regardless of the product you use, one of the key things is to obtain as accurate an assessment of the horse’s weight as possible and treat him according to that weight. There are some products which are dangerous if overdosed and all products are ineffective if underdosed.”

### **Go Your Own Way**

Christopherson emphasized that every farm should have its own deworming protocol individually designed in partnership with a veterinarian. “Don’t just buy what catalogs tell you to or what your friends on social media use—it may not be right for your horse and by blindly using the wrong product you can take something which may have been effective in a certain situation and render it useless,” she noted.

Targeted deworming plans will vary from region to region and even from farm to farm. “I would certainly have different recommendations for horses in Minnesota, where cold weather suppresses parasite activity in the winter, versus in Florida, where we can grow anything year-round,” Christopherson explained.

“A modern deworming strategy also takes into consideration a number of other factors, including the individual horses and the strength of their immune systems; the stocking [equine population] density on the farm; potential exposure to other horses, such as grazing in common areas at shows; manure management practices and whether it’s an open or closed farm, just as a few examples.

“To a degree, the age and activity level



**Every farm should have its own deworming protocol designed in partnership with a veterinarian.**

of horses also come into play, as younger horses are more susceptible to certain parasites, such as ascarids, and horses do tend to develop some natural immunity to some parasites as they mature,” she added. “For instance, on a large breeding farm a herd of weanlings will most likely be on a different plan than a separate field of broodmares. At a boarding stable, a competitive dressage horse that travels regularly to shows may be on a different protocol than a recreational riding horse that happens to have a high level of natural immunity, lives in a closed field with no new horses and never leaves the property.”

### Hidden Danger

Christopherson also warned that looks can be deceiving. While it’s often easy to identify a horse with a heavy parasite load due to an unthrifty appearance, weight loss, diarrhea or colic, it’s much more difficult than one might think to look at a healthy horse and decide how much of a parasite problem he’s carrying around, even in the show ring.

“I’ve seen some pretty high loads come out of what appeared to be very healthy

high-performance horses,” Christopherson warned. “And it’s usually small strongyles, which are difficult to deal with because of the way they encyst in the intestinal wall. There is nothing worse than the feeling you get when your fecal egg count comes back with the letters ‘TNTC’—too numerous to count—after thinking that you have been doing everything right in deworming your horse, who looks completely fine standing in the stall. If there were signs at all, they can be incredibly subtle. So I cannot stress it enough—without fecal exams by your veterinarian, you are working completely blind.”

The thought of any parasite chomping away on your horse’s intestinal lining is horrifying, but an effective and modern deworming strategy will ensure your horse enjoys a perfectly clean gut, free from any future infestation, right? “Wrong,” said Christopherson. “We are better equipped to get close to that goal than we used to be, but the goal should be to keep them as clean and healthy as possible, not expect total prevention. Horse owners will probably still see one or two eggs reported on a routine fecal egg exam, and that’s nor-

mal. It’s just not realistic to expect that every horse on your farm will be parasite free for the rest of his life, unless we come up with some new and better chemicals.”

Frustrating? Yes. If all the parasites are killed off with the administration of a dewormer, how can they keep coming back like something out of a horror movie? Christopherson reminds owners that most parasites have an approximately 21-day life cycle, so on the day a dewormer is administered, that chemical is effective only on certain stages of life of any parasites that are present—not necessarily *every* stage of life. “So if 75 percent of the parasites that are present are adults and the chemical is 100 percent effective on adults, you’re still only getting that 75 percent and leaving the 25 percent that are still growing. That’s why we often do repeat testing and treatments when we discover a resistance situation,” she added.

On the other hand, success is possible, and some horses in certain situations can enjoy a chemical-free life. “I do have a few clients with closed farms where we have gotten to the point where we have not used a dewormer in a couple of years,” Christopherson said. “If the horses are clean, we don’t just give them dewormers any more for the heck of it because of resistance concerns.

“Resistance is an ongoing problem, and we all have a responsibility,” she continued. “Knock on wood, I have not had a situation yet where we couldn’t eventually find something that worked to help get a horse’s parasite problem under control, but there is no silver bullet. The bottom line is that the days of blindly administering pastes are over. Every owner needs an individual parasite-control strategy for his or her horse and farm designed in partnership with a veterinarian, using both chemical products and good management practices.”

To learn more about the different types of parasites that are most troublesome to your horse, visit the American Association of Equine Practitioners’ website ([aaep.org](http://aaep.org)). 



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