

DRESSAGE TODAY

VOL. 8

EXTRA

A smiling man and woman standing next to a brown horse with a white blaze, in front of a large bush of pink flowers. The man is wearing a white polo shirt and khaki pants, and the woman is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The horse is wearing a black halter and has a saddle on its back.

Ride Counter Canter with
George and Noel Williams

Common Mistakes
in Fly Control

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THE Counter CANTER



Four exercises to develop your horse's straightness and collection

By George Williams with Beth Baumert
Photos by Amy Drago

Counter canter is beneficial to your horse's training because it develops straightness and collection and it ultimately improves the true canter. Due to the nature of canter, there is always a leading leg and the horse is always naturally positioned slightly through his body toward that leading leg, which defines the "inside" of the horse.

ABOVE: George Williams and his daughter, Noel, use this article to explain how the counter canter can improve your horse's straightness and collection. Noel rides Sir Velo, a 2006 Westfalen gelding owned by Melissa Mulchahey.



In true canter, the inside hind leg naturally carries more weight because it steps farther under the horse's body, toward the center of gravity.



In counter canter, the focus is on helping the outside (right) hind leg reach, carry weight and propel the horse. Counter canter is one of the few exercises that allows the rider to activate and engage the outside hind so directly.



In counter canter, the horse not only must be in front of the inside leg (left in this left-lead canter), but he must also respond correctly to the outside (right) leg. That is, he should go straight forward from the outside leg instead of swinging his haunches to the inside (away from the outside leg).

So, in canter, there is always an inside and an outside. That inside hind leg naturally carries more weight because it steps farther under the horse's body,

toward the center of gravity.

In counter canter, the focus is on helping the outside hind leg to step up under the horse's body, thereby encouraging it

to carry more weight and be better able to properly propel the horse forward in a good balance. The rider's half halts on the outside help to equalize the weight-bearing of the horse's hind legs. In the process, the horse's body straightens and closes. Counter canter is one of the few exercises that allows the rider to activate and engage the outside hind so directly.

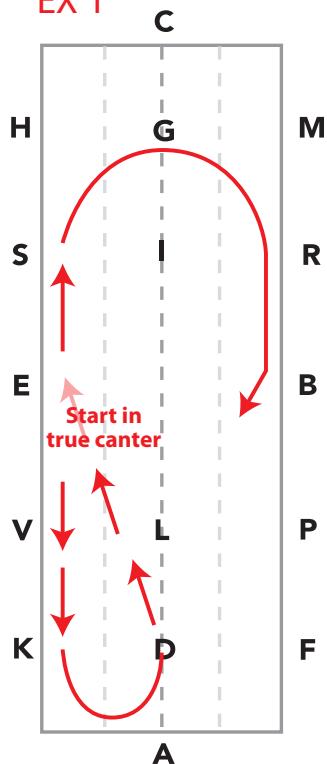
A Prerequisite

Before I introduce counter canter, I want to be sure my horse is correctly on the outside rein and well established in walk-canter and canter-walk transitions. The upward transition from walk to canter helps the horse understand the placement of the aids in relation to the lead he is asked to take. That is, the horse understands that the rider's outside leg tells him which lead and the inside leg tells him to go forward. Together, the horse learns to go forward into the desired lead. The downward transition from canter to walk is valuable because it teaches the horse to understand half halts and gives him the ability to shift weight back to the hindquarters, which improves the carrying power. Before asking for counter canter, horses need to have this basic understanding of and ability to collect. Then the counter canter can be used to increase the quality of the collection.

Finding the Feel

The counter canter should feel exactly like a quality collected true canter: balanced, easy to sit and with an uphill tendency. Because the horse is well balanced, he enables the rider's position to be correct; that is, the rider's inside seat bone on the leading side is slightly lower and the horse elastically fills up the outside rein. In this situation, your horse is very receptive to half halts and his shoulders are maneuverable so you

EX 1



can straighten and surround your horse quite precisely with your aids.

Alignment Challenges

When you ride down the long side in counter canter on a straight line, you, of course, ride it the same way you would ride a true canter. But as you approach the corner or go onto a circle, you need to displace the shoulders to the inside and the haunches need to follow the track of the shoulders. As I begin the turn, I think of renvers, displacing the shoulders to the inside of the arena so my horse doesn't feel like he's going to go straight out of the arena. But, unlike in renvers, you keep your horse straight and aligned; that is, his body stays aligned with the shoulders in front of the hips and the neck stays centered as it comes out of the shoulders. This is especially important because all the while the horse's hind legs must be in line with the front legs so that he continues to track straight.

In counter canter, the horse not

only must be in front of your inside leg, he must also respond correctly to the outside leg. That is, he should go straight forward from the outside leg aid instead of swinging his haunches away from it. A common rider problem is the inclination to push the hindquarters of the horse away from the outside leg. As a result, the hind legs are displaced toward the outside of the arena instead of the shoulders being moved to the inside. To counteract that tendency, you want to be conscious and make certain that your horse goes forward from your outside leg aid. When he's in front of the outside leg, he pushes well off his own outside leg and tracks straight. For example, if you're tracking left in right-lead canter, you want to be sure he pushes forward rather than sideways from your left leg. Your horse must stay aligned so your outside (left) half halt goes through to his outside hind leg.

As in the true canter, the inside leg should be on the girth and the outside behind the girth. Make sure your horse is supple on the inside rein, allowing you to stretch and elastically fill up the outside rein. Then you will be able to use it and lead the shoulders in the new direction as needed. Here are some of my favorite counter-canter exercises. Normally I repeat any exercise three times to help my horse understand.

Exercise 1: Introducing the Counter Canter

Initially, I simply want my horse to understand that he should maintain the canter lead through a change of direction. As in teaching all movements, it's very important to let the horse have a comfort level, so I choose lines that take me to the new direction easily and give me ample time to return to the direction of the true

lead. You want your horse to maintain a basic balance and feel comfortable with coordinating the movement.

Try this movement from Second Level, Test 2:

1. Track left in true canter and ride down the long side from H to K.
2. At K, do a half 10-meter circle and return to the track at E.
3. At S, do a half 20-meter circle to R in counter canter.
4. The test requires that you do a simple change at B, but you can change across the diagonal and repeat. Then do it in the other direction.

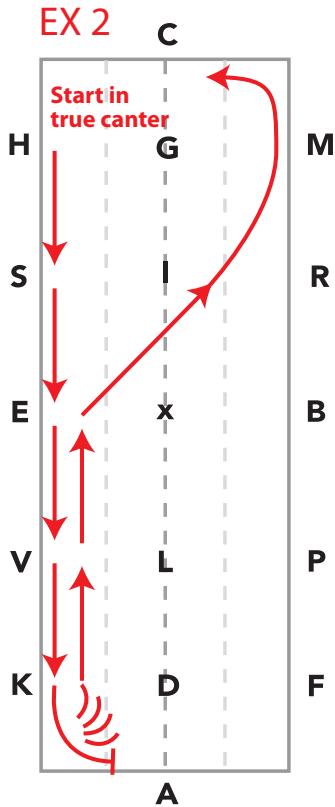
Exercise 2

Try this exercise fairly early in your horse's counter-canter training because it teaches the basic ingredients—especially the importance of the outside leg aid.



This turn on the haunches is done on such a big arc that it has a half pass feel to it, so you might call it a hybrid of turn on the haunches and half pass.

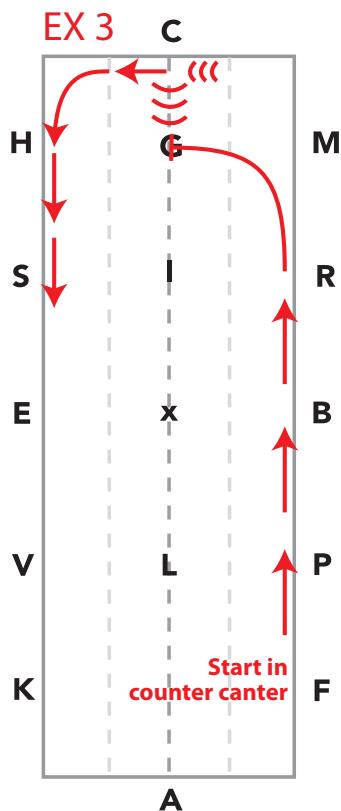
Exercise 3



1. Track left in true canter and ride down the long side from H to K.
2. Go through the corner at K and transition to walk.
3. Halt 1 meter past the first quarter-line, keeping your horse's positioning to the left.
4. Do a large turn on the haunches on an arc around the corner, taking you to K. This turn on the haunches is done on such a big arc that it has a half-pass feel to it, so you might call it a hybrid of turn on the haunches and half pass.
5. At K, keep the positioning to the left and pick up left-lead canter.
6. Next, you have two options: Change rein from E to M and repeat the exercise. Or if your horse is more developed, continue with the counter canter down the long side and through the short side, Change rein from M to V and repeat the exercise.



In the rein-back the energy should track directly back on the outside, enabling a good transition to right-lead canter.



Exercise 3

This exercise helps the horse understand the half halt. It also helps him understand the correct response to the outside leg and it confirms the horse is in front of the inside leg. The shoulders must stay in front of the haunches.

1. Track left in right-lead canter (counter canter) down the long side toward M.
2. Ride the line from M toward H. At G, halt through the walk. (If your horse is truly an FEI horse, you can go directly from counter canter to walk-halt.)
3. Retaining the horse's positioning to the right, do a full pass sideways to C. Keep your horse's right positioning. This full pass teaches the horse obedience to the outside leg and keeps him in front of the inside leg.
4. At C, rein-back from the left rein approximately a horse's length, or 3 to 4 steps. For this, the energy has to

Counter Canter in Fourth Level, Test 3

One reason I thought counter canter would be a good topic for this article is that Fourth Level, Test 3 incorporates the old Prix St. Georges movement in which the horse is required to do a 10-meter half circle in collected canter and then a 10-meter counter canter half circle. This movement reminds us of the value of using voltes in canter work. To do it well, your horse's shoulders must be maneuverable to the new direction and the haunches must be directly behind the shoulders. Your horse must demonstrate straightness on the centerline. This movement, when done well, improves the degree of collection.

1. At C, pick up a true collected canter on the right lead.
2. R-I half 10-meter circle,
3. I-S half 10-meter circle in counter canter with flying change at E,
4. V-L half 10-meter circle,
5. L-P half 10-meter circle in counter canter and flying change at F.

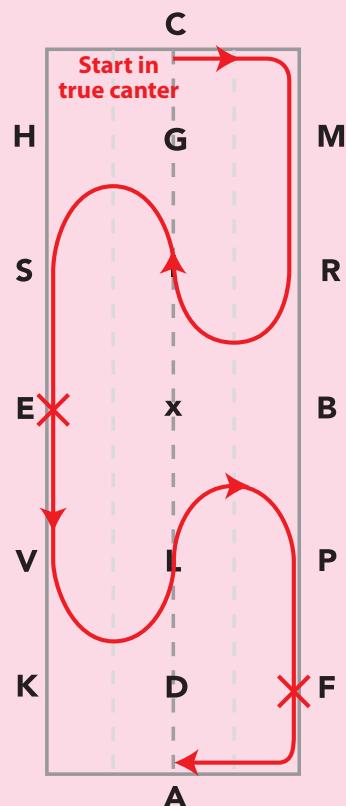
5. Pick up the right-lead counter canter again and repeat the exercise at the other end of the arena.

Exercise 4

Horses often pirouette better from the counter canter. Ride this exercise and you will find that combining half pass with counter canter will be beneficial to both and will help your pirouettes.

1. Track left and pick up true canter.
2. Ride through the beginning of the short side and turn down the

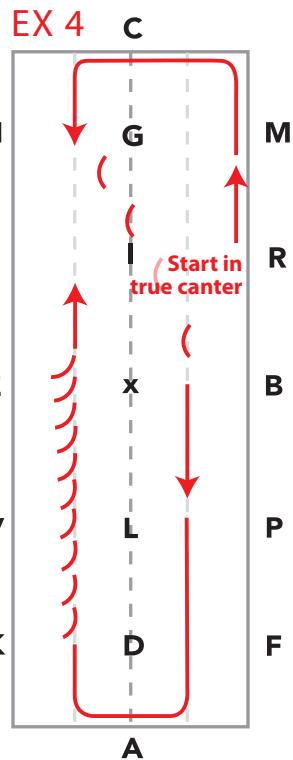
From Fourth Level Test 3



- second quarterline.
3. Half pass to the other quarterline and then go straight toward the short side.
4. Turn right and go straight down the next quarterline, parallel to the long side.
5. Ride a travers, keeping the front legs on the quarterline and the haunches displaced to the left.
6. Then collect the horse toward a pirouette. How much you collect will depend on your horse's ability.
7. Then straighten your horse.
8. Next, you have two options: You can come down the next quarterline, still tracking right, and repeat the travers



Horses often pirouette more easily from the counter canter. The amount of collection in this exercise will depend on your horse's ability.



and the pirouette canter or do the exercise in the other direction.

The more accomplished your horse is, the easier the counter canter will be for him. Incorporating other movements in the work will help: turns on the haunches or pirouettes in walk, 8- and 10-meter voltes, playing with transitions within the gait. Try renvers and travers in walk. Horses become more responsive after doing these exercises. When you focus on your ability to develop your horse's responsiveness, counter canter will help collect your horse easily. 📺



George Williams is an international dressage competitor whose career highlights with Chuck and Joann Smith's Grand Prix mare, Rocher, include numerous championships. Williams trained in Germany at the Reitinstitut von Neindorff and with the Olympic gold medalist Klaus Balkenhol. Williams was a resident trainer and rider alongside Karl Mikolka at Tempel Farms, in Wadsworth, Illinois, for 20 years. He has served as president of the USDF, a member of the USEF Dressage Committee, Chair of the USEF High Performance Eligible Athlete Committee, member of the USEF High Performance Dressage Committee and USEF National Youth Coach. He and his wife, Roberta, operate Williams Dressage, LLC, with their daughter, Noel.

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What Are the Most Common Mistakes in Fly Control?

Q Every season our farm seems to be overrun by flies. We do our best to keep manure picked up and use fly tape throughout the barn. Are there any other tips that can help keep flies away?
Name withheld by request

CLARA ANN MASON, DVM

The most common mistake horse owners make is not treating or eliminating the flies' breeding and resting grounds. The second most common mistake is treating all fly populations located on the horse as if they are the same insect. Fly-control

methods vary depending on the species of fly attacking your horse. Here are things you need to be aware of:

Dealing with Manure. Sanitation should be your first defense in controlling fly populations. The life cycle from egg to adult in suitable environments is approximately 14 days

for the house fly and 28 days for the stable fly, and adult females can lay up to 150 eggs every few days. Stable and house flies breed in manure, organic matter and soiled bedding. Therefore, keeping a stall clean is important in controlling breeding fly populations. However, after cleaning a stall, many horse owners will dispose of the soiled bedding in a compost manure pile too close to the barn. Manure piles should be located 100 to 200 feet away from the barn to limit flies returning to the area to annoy the stabled horses. Soiled bedding and manure should be stored in a dumpster or manure shed, where it can be hauled away for disposal or conveniently spread onto a nongrazing

Sanitation should be your first defense in controlling fly populations. Manure piles should be located 100 to 200 feet away from the barn to limit flies returning to the area to annoy the stabled horses.



Arnd Bronkhorst - Arnd.nl

field on a regular interval based on the size of the waste pile.

In order to develop a waste-disposal plan, consider that the average horse produces between 2 to 2.5 cubic yards of soiled bedding and manure per month. A storage shed for manure for one horse for one year would require an area measuring 12 by 12 feet and allowing for a depth of 5 feet. These are averages that may vary depending on the amount of time a horse is located in the barn and the size of the animal. Disposal of the waste stored in the manure shed should be scheduled at least every six months. In addition, manure piles should be picked up from the pasture and paddocks and disposed of similarly. Though this weekly task may be a bit challenging and time consuming, in the long run, this practice will significantly lower the number of flies on a farm.

Know Your Types of Flies: Since fly-control methods may vary depending on the species of fly attacking your horse, it is important to know what type of flies you are dealing with. Stable flies and house flies are the more common breeds of flies in and around barns, with the stable fly inflicting a painful bite to horses and humans. Both female and male stable flies are blood feeders and usually attack the horse below the knee, causing the horse to stomp his feet or kick out. After feeding, the stable fly moves to a fence, barn wall or other surface to digest its meal. Most flies are only on the horse 5 percent of the time, so insecticides can provide only temporary fly control. House flies are nonbiting but extremely annoying to the horse as they loiter around the eyes.

Black flies are small biting flies that attack horses around the ears, neck and chest. They feed at dusk and dawn, and

only the female black fly sucks blood and lays her eggs in water. Elimination of the black fly is best accomplished with larvicides applied to water sources and fly deterrents in and around the horse's ears.

Horse- and deerflies are large biting flies that take a blood meal from the horse and fly away for three to four days until it is time to feed again. Deer-fly bites are very painful, and most topical pesticides are ineffectual. Fly control is best achieved by providing shelter for the horse away from the horse- and deerfly and eliminating muddy and wet areas where the female fly will lay her eggs. Box traps and some baited sticky traps may be effective in controlling the adult fly, and fly predators can reduce larvae and egg numbers.

Botflies lay sticky eggs on the horse's hair coat, including the areas of the lower leg, chest, shoulder, neck and flank. Scraping or picking the eggs off the hair coat will break the botfly's life cycle and prevent potential poor health for the horse.

Horn flies are tiny little biting flies that are located on the back of a horse and reproduce in cow manure only.

Using Insecticides, Baits and Fly Predators: Since a fly is off the horse approximately 95 percent of the time, controlling flies in the horse's environment may require residual insecticides, baits, fly predators, foggers and sprays applied at frequent intervals. Residual insecticides are applied to surfaces where the fly rests

when off the horse. The fly droppings that appear as brown specks can identify these fly-rest areas for insecticide application.

Fly predators offer fly control by consuming fly pupae in the cocoon. Fly predators must be reapplied to the barn environment in sufficient quantities every three to four weeks or as recommended by the supplier.

Fly baits can attract and kill house flies but have minimal effect on biting flies. Horse owners need to locate the bait and fly traps away from the barn to distract the flies.

Feed-through insecticides (insect growth regulators) are fed to horses and are passed through the feces to interrupt developing maggots. Though effective in reducing fly production in manure, they will not address problems with fly development in other organic matter such as bedding and spilled feed.

Fly sheets, masks and boots are effective in eliminating appropriate landing surfaces for attacking flies. Housing the horse inside a barn or shed with forced-air circulation will deter many flies from landing on the horse.

Finally, a topical insecticide can be effective in controlling flies on the horse provided that it is labeled for use in horses, is used as directed and is effective against the particular fly species that is attacking the horse. Most of these repellants must be used at frequent intervals and in conjunction with environmental fly control. *This article is from the Dressage Today archives.* 



Clara Ann Mason, DVM,

is an ambulatory equine practitioner in Winfield, West Virginia. She frequently lectures on and has published multiple articles on equine abuse issues. She has been actively involved with the AAEP and the AVMA and serves on Welfare Committees for both organizations.



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