

DRESSAGE TODAY

VOL. 30

EXTRA

5 Exercises
for Rider
Suppleness

Winter
Grooming Tips

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5 EXERCISES FOR RIDER SUPPLENESS

By Jessica Jo Tate with Annie Morris

Photos by Beth Baumert

A horse knows how to be a horse. A person needs to learn how to become a rider. A rider must ride in balance herself to create balance in her horse. When the rider can sit in a way that helps her horse move with better balance, then she has truly achieved something.

The rider should sit into the wave of her horse's motion so she can influence his movement. If she sits on top of the horse, she is more of a passenger. For a rider to be able to influence the horse's movement, the horse's back must be warmed up and he has to be accepting of her leg and seat. Only then can the rider feel the wave of energy. Once the horse lets her in, he is in front of her leg and the half halts work to balance him, allowing the rider to be the trainer. Remember, the rider is always teaching the horse something and she must make sure that what she teaches is correct.

One major component that allows a rider to sit into the horse is learning how to use her absorbing joints. A good rider must let the horse's energy go up into her absorbing and supple body and be quiet enough for that energy to go back down into her horse. Top riders can do this and appear still on top of a powerful moving horse. The only part of a rider's body that should absorb the shock of the horse's motion is her lower back, hips, knees and ankles. Sometimes we see a rider take the motion up into her elbows or even into her neck, which results in the "pecking-chicken" dynamic. The non-absorbing joints must be kept soft and quiet, allowing the energy from the horse's movement to return back into the horse, thereby allowing him to move more brilliantly. If a rider allows the energy to go up into her upper body, it gets released into the universe, never to be gathered again. The rider's job is to develop a supple low back, swinging hips and bouncy ankles.

Five Stretches to Increase Suppleness

1. Stair Stretches. This exercise helps make the ankle more flexible. The Achilles tendon is incredibly strong and needs to become supple to absorb the shock of the horse's movement, especially in the sitting trot. Before getting on, stand on a mounting block and do stair stretches to help the calves, hamstrings and



STAIR STRETCHES

- ankles release. This helps keep the stirrups from feeling too long.
- 2. Toe Writing.** To help supple the ankle and create better nerve control, write the alphabet in the air with your toes.
- 3. Arm Circles.** Big, backward arm circles help open the chest and slide the shoulder blades down the back where they belong. This can be done on the ground or while the horse walks on a long rein at the beginning of the ride.

ARM CIRCLES



NO STIRRUPS



This exercise helps identify the rider's core muscles and gets them warmed up for the ride.

by teaching better balance and improving fitness. Every day before I put my foot in the stirrup, I do a little yoga to

stretch out my hips, legs, lower back, neck and chest. I find that this makes me physically and psychologically better prepared to hear my horse and approach the training in the best possible way. Working out will also help you understand what your horse goes through while learning how to use his body better and gain strength through dressage training.

Another awesome activity to improve body control is to take longe lessons. First, you will need a wonderful horse to do this successfully. Always make sure your instructor follows safety guidelines and that you are not wearing spurs. There are two types of longe lessons. The rider can either practice gymnastic exercises to develop the seat and independent aids or she can practice riding transitions within and between gaits without the use of the rein aids.

I think the first step in a longe lesson is to ride without reins and stirrups, which allows the rider to truly sit into the horse and swing with the horse's movement. For a rider, learning the correct swing of her back and hips is challenging and takes lots of time and practice. She must always remember that the more she improves her seat and sits into the horse's movement, the less she will rely on her hands for balance and interfere with her horse's mouth.

I want my students to strive to become the best riders their horses can have. Stretching, exercising and practicing on the longe are all ways to improve the seat and body control. The horse should never be punished for reacting to a rider's missed cues or accidental aids when her body is involuntarily reacting to his movement. A rider must keep a very high standard for herself to master her own body so she can always remain in beautiful balance and allow her horse to have joy and expression in his riding sessions. 🐾



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ask the experts

What are Good Winter Grooming Tips?

Q

Without the option of bathing in the winter, what are some ways I can keep my horse looking tidy, well-groomed and polished? Name withheld by request



Arnd Bronkhorst - armd.nl

As the horse's coat grows denser, it's important to maintain a regular grooming routine and vigorously curry the body daily.

CAT HILL

As the weather transitions from fall into winter, your horse's coat will grow thicker. Since a full bath is often out of the question during colder months, many riders have trouble maintaining their horse's tidy appearance. Here are five tips for ensuring a well-groomed and polished horse all year round.

1. Maintain appropriate coat length. First, make sure your horse's coat length is appropriate for his workload. My general rule of thumb is that a horse should dry in 20 percent of the time he is worked. If the horse's coat remains

towel. To truly get under the coat, use a tool with wider, longer teeth. This can include a dandy brush, a sweep brush, a wide-tooth steel comb or a shedding rake. You should also incorporate your fingers into the routine to frequently check that the skin under the coat feels clean. While a tool can make a horse's coat look clean on the surface, it's crucial to check the skin for bumps, wounds and irritations.

3. Curry the coat. Begin by currying the coat in a circular motion to break up debris or tangled hair with either a long-bristled dandy brush with fairly

tooth comb or my fingers. Once it is smooth, I then braid it, secure with an elastic band and roll the tail into a ball. To wrap up the tail, I use Vetrap. You can leave the tail like this for a week or so and it will help keep the tail looking great for when you need it.

5. Spot-treat the coat. If you have a special event coming up that requires a clean coat, I recommend mixing a tablespoon of whitening shampoo in a bottle with one part rubbing alcohol and one part water. Spray this solution on any visible manure or grass stains, then towel out that area until it's clean and shiny. This mixture works better than any dry shampoo I've previously tried and it can be used on all coat colors, not just whites or greys. Overall, the key to maintaining your horse's appearance during the winter is to remain vigilant and attentive to the health of his skin. By frequently currying and keeping the coat trimmed, your horse will stay clean and healthy without requiring a bath.

“Overall, the key to maintaining your horse's appearance during the winter is to remain vigilant and attentive to the health of his skin.”

wet for longer than recommended, his skin can become irritated and sore. For those working with horses who have a very wooly coat, you should consider clipping. A low steeplechase clip will help your horse maintain a comfortable temperature while working. If you can't prepare your horse with a bath before you clip, it's important to thoroughly clean his coat using brushes and a comb and then apply oil to help ease the clippers during your groom.

2. Establish a daily routine. As the horse's coat grows denser, it's important to maintain a regular grooming routine and vigorously curry the body daily. Keeping this in mind, you will need a range of tools to properly execute this during the winter months. My daily grooming routine post-ride requires a few different types of curry combs, a bucket of warm water and a small hand

stiff bristles and/or a longbristled sweep brush with medium bristles. Next, fill a bucket with 1 gallon of warm water, a couple drops of mild dish detergent or glycerin soap and a few drops of grooming oil. If you don't have grooming oil, you may substitute olive or coconut oil for a similar result. Take the small hand towel and submerge it in the water mixture, then ring it out to avoid saturating the coat. Begin rubbing the towel in circles all over the coat. To ensure a truly deep clean, really rub the towel vigorously. Once you've gone over the horse's entire coat, smooth it down with a dense, shortbristled brush.

4. Maintain the tail. During the winter, I prefer to tie the horse's tail up as a precaution during the freezing mud season to prevent him from getting "mudsicles." To address this, I simply detangle the tail gently with a large-



Cat Hill

has worked as a farm manager and groom for several top riders, including

cutting-horse champion Craig Thompson and top eventer Mara DePuy. Throughout the years, she has worked at almost every type of competition, from the local fair to the Pan American Games. Hill is the best-selling author of "World-Class Grooming for Horses" and creator of World Class Grooming, LLC, which provides clinics, training and seminars for all levels of horse enthusiasts.

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