

# Applying the Riders Seat

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A rider that uses their seat correctly is a rider that is seeking refinement and finesse. When a horse responds to the seat, self-carriage will be able to exist for longer periods of time.

Most of what we do with our horses classically, they do in nature. Training is not teaching the horse how to do what we want. It is about teaching them to understand the aids so that they know when to do what we ask on cue. A horse is very sensitive by nature. They can feel a fly land on their side with a heavy winter coat. Your horse can feel every move you make with your body but, if the movement does not have any meaning, they will not respond or will respond incorrectly. It will take time for your horse to understand the subtleties of your seat. The first step is to start using your seat with intention so that it has meaning to what you want.



Before your seat becomes an effective way of communication, you must understand how

a horse responds to pressure. A horse is going to respond first to whatever pressure is the strongest. Wherever the pressure is



the strongest is what the horse is going to make an adjustment to first. Horses are very intelligent creatures, yet they think simply. A person can stand between two or three people having different conversations and be able to get the gist of what all the conversations are about. Not so with a horse. François Baucher said, “Leg without hand and hand without leg.” This means to only use one aid at a time and never use opposing aids together.

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Your horse will only ever be as light as the first time you ask for the movement. Always make sure that your first “ask” is done in a way that you would like them to be someday.

What are the aids a rider uses? Remember to keep it simple. Seat, hands, legs, and voice are the most common aids. Remember that there is also a mental aspect to it as well. You need to have a clear picture of what you want in your head so that you know what aids to use and when to use them. Never use an aid without clear intention or meaning. Knowing what you want and how you want your horse to feel in the movement will give intention and meaning to your aids.

Your seat should always be your primary aid (other than being mentally prepared). The primary aid is always first without exception. Secondary aids such as the legs, hands, and voice help clarify what the primary aid (the seat) was telling them. Make sure to give your horse a moment or two (one or two steps) to try to figure out what the seat was telling them. You have to give the horse a moment to try. In the beginning, most horses will not respond to the seat because it has been static or because they are young and do not understand yet.

After you have waited a moment without the horse trying to respond or responding incorrectly, you gently apply your secondary aids to help explain what the seat was asking for. Do not use your secondary aids as a correction or as a discipline; they are for clarification of the seat. If you are too abrupt or strong with the secondary aids, your horse will stop trying to respond to the seat for fear of repercussion of the secondary aids.

If any or all of the secondary aids are applied before or while you are using your seat, the horse will not respond to the seat. Remember, the horse will always listen to the strongest aid first. The seat is used in the middle of the back (more or less). An area of the horse that is not as sensitive as to where the secondary aids are applied. The legs on the ribs, the hands to the mouth, and the voice to the ears. The secondary aids are connected to more sensitive areas than the seat and can also be applied with a greater amount of force than the seat. So, for the horse to feel the aid of the seat and respond to it, the secondary aids MUST be very, very quiet or not applied at all when the seat is talking to the horse. Nuno Oliveira said, "Every action of the hand must be preceded by the seat..."

If you need to use the secondary aids, you only use them until the horse understands what the seat was asking. Once your horse has achieved the position or the movement by the guidance of the secondary aids (if needed), slowly release the secondary aids and return to the seat as the primary aid. If the horse can maintain the position without the continued use of the secondary aids, you will find your horse starting to carry itself in the infamous self-carriage that we are all looking for. It is in this lightness of self-

carriage where amazing things can happen between horse and rider where you will feel like you are one, and everything happens with ease.

As you progress with teaching your horse how to respond to your seat, you will find that you

not only can direct your horse but also help them to find balance. It is in your horse's best interest that you continue to strive to refine the aids. Even if you are already light, you can always become lighter. Continually be thinking about how it can be done.

Please reach out to us if you are interested in clinics, lessons or training. We would love to get to know you and your horse and help you build your partnership with Classical Dressage training. [Info@CH-Equine.com](mailto:Info@CH-Equine.com)

For more information about Cody Harrison please visit our website at [www.CH-Equine.com](http://www.CH-Equine.com) Like & Follow us on FaceBook at CH Equine.

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