



MOVING ON UP - ASPIRE TO ACHIEVE

ANDREW EXPLAINS THE WORK THAT HE DOES AT HOME WITH HIS ADVANCED HORSES AND HOW TO OVERCOME ANY PROBLEMS AT THIS LEVEL

Warm Up

Even when a horse has reached a more advanced stage in its training, the basics remain as important as ever, one simply has a few more "tools in the box" to help work on them. Andrew continues to use lots of stretching exercise and transitions during the warm-up and will work with test movements as much to improve the horse's overall way of going as to perfect specific exercises.

Although lateral work, like shoulder-in, half pass, travers and renvers, is well established at this level, Andrew still likes to use leg yield in his training. "I find I can keep the horse moving more freely forward into both reins using leg yielding," says Andrew.

"With a young horse you can ride it with flexion but you can keep a more advanced horse straighter and make it step under and through the body more."

Flying Changes

In Advanced tests, the horse has to perform flying changes of lead in canter both individually and every three or four strides. Andrew advises introducing flying changes early on in a horse's training. "Young horses naturally want to change leads, especially as they don't have the balance to maintain counter canter. I tend to encourage individual changes in the youngster and then leave them alone until the horse is



Advanced tests include canter serpentine with a flying change of lead over the centre line

more established in the rest of its work." Andrew will first teach individual changes by riding a half 10 metre circle and returning quite steeply to the track. The half circle helps compress the canter, which needs lots of energy whilst maintaining balance, but the change should not be forced and patience may be required in the early stages. Advanced tests include a canter serpentine with flying changes of lead over the centre line and, when introducing this movement, Andrew advises riding the loops a little back on themselves across the centre line to help give a definite change of direction.

Attention to Detail

'Zig zags' in half pass are another Advanced movement and are ridden in trot and canter, when the horse also has to perform a single flying change. "A common error is not finishing off the movement in one direction before changing and half passing in the other direction," says Andrew. "Whether in trot or canter, the rider must

ride these changes of direction correctly in order allow the horse to half pass freely in the new direction." If riding half pass right, as preparation for the change of direction, I will ride a couple of strides of travers right, then change the bend and then ride half pass left." It is attention to detail, like this, that not only gains marks in the test but allows the horse to maintain suppleness and self carriage from one exercise to the next.

Pirouettes

Canter pirouettes are also introduced at Advanced level and Andrew will begin training these by riding travers down the long side in canter to ensure the horse is used to moving away from the leg. He then rides a square between four markers in the school with a quarter pirouette turn at each corner/marker. As ever, the canter must be ridden forward between each quarter turn. The next step from this is to reduce the size of the square and eventually cut out the "straight bits" until the turn is continuous.

"Always aim for a larger "turning circle" with the canter pirouette," advises Andrew. "This helps maintain the quality of the canter which is all-important; ride them too small, too often and the horse will become tight and stuck."

Riding Forward

Being able to ride the pace forward and bring the horse back again is important whatever stage of training a horse is at. "The more advanced the horse gets, the more you tend to be working on collected work so it's even more critical that the horse is still able to go forward when you want it to," reiterates Andrew. "Horses that don't naturally take you forward should be ridden on the outside track and pushed down the long sides but not steadied or shortened on the short sides."

"You can cut the corners a little to help maintain momentum and the horse will soon learn that it must go forward freely. Conversely, horses who are naturally more onward-bound should be ridden forward in



Canter travers is useful preparation for canter pirouettes



Extended walk - the rider may need to be clever to keep the walk relaxed



Use the whole arena to ride the pace forward



At this stage the horse can be introduced to half steps of piaffe/passage

shorter bursts so that they learn to stay in self carriage and not pull."

Clever Walking

Walk is an often forgotten but very important pace which must be ridden both collected and extended in Advanced tests. "The horse must never be put under too much pressure in walk," says Andrew, "and the rider needs to be clever to maintain suppleness while keeping the horse relaxed and avoiding tightness at all costs. When you release the rein in walk, as in other paces, the horse should take it forward and stay on the end of it, then remain relaxed as you take it up again."

Half Steps

One other thing that Andrew introduces at this stage in a horse's training, are "half steps" of piaffe/passage, when the horse is compressed while energy is maintained and expressed as short elevated steps. Andrew rides transitions from trot, almost

to walk, and then trotting forward again to gradually collect and contain the energy. "The horse must be allowed to travel at all times in the early stages so as to avoid tightness and tension," he explains. "Once the horse understands what you are asking you can begin to change their position so, if they carry their head high, you can ask them to lower it, soften their back and bring it up. Likewise, if they tend to lower their head during the half steps, you can ask them to raise it to encourage the hind quarters to lower and engage."

Warming Down

With all the collected work your advanced horse is doing, warming down and relaxing should never be forgotten. Andrew will finish a session by trotting on a long rein but the pace must always be controlled and the horse on the end of the rein. "The horse should stay in self carriage and on a contact," he reiterates, "don't throw away all your hard work by letting the horse slouch or run along! I will finish off with some easy suppling and bending work, like leg yield, on a long rein so the horse can relax but not fall apart."



When the rein is eased out, the horse should take it forward



Double Bridles

You can now ride your horse in a snaffle right up to Grand Prix level in British Dressage competitions but a double bridle is required when competing in International FEI competitions above Advanced. Unless a horse has particular "contact issues", Andrew would recommend introducing a double bridle sooner rather than later so that the horse can learn to accept it. "When I first use one, I will ride the horse in it for long enough to feel that it is understanding and happy in the new bridle," explains Andrew. "After this I will use it regularly in my training but will perhaps ride in a snaffle on "easy" days or out hacking."

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Zig zag in trot - Attention to detail in the change of direction will pay dividends

The horse featured here in Andrew's How To is the 8-year-old Cortaflex Varisto, see page 12 for his profile.