

Lateral Movement Workbook

This licensed *Reitlehrer FN* shares a simple, no-nonsense introduction to these essential exercises.

Part 1: Leg-Yielding

By Volker Brommann
Photos by Tass Jones



This is a wonderful leg-yielding moment: Farino has maintained his balance and hasn't fallen sideways. To start, we've followed a shallow track from the quarterline toward the rail. Later, when he understands the aids even better, I can ask for a steeper angle from the centerline, as called for in First Level.

WELCOME TO MY WORK-
book on leg-yielding and the lateral movements—shoulder-in, travers (haunches-in), renvers (haunches-out) and half-pass. Each month, for five months, I'll describe one of these movements, explain its purpose and place in your horse's training, and show you how to introduce it and ride it in the competitive arena.

Each Horse Is An Individual

Because every horse learns in a slightly different way, I'll give you variations that will

help you fine-tune your teaching method to suit your horse best. And because your horse hasn't read the workbook even though *you* know how a movement is supposed to go, I'll give you several problem-solving tips for when things aren't going quite according to plan. Along the way, I'll also offer training tips to improve your schooling and help you "connect the dots"—use one exercise or movement to improve another.

But before we go any farther, you may be asking, "Why, in the first sentence, does Volker make a distinction be-

tween leg-yielding—which is, after all, a forward and sideways movement—and the forward-and-sideways lateral movements?" I do this because your horse has to maintain a certain degree of collection and self-carriage for lateral work, as well as sufficient bend through his body to travel with his hindquarters and his forehead on different tracks—either three or four. In leg-yielding on the other hand, your horse can be in a working tempo and stay straight through his body so he's on two tracks. Still, we group leg-yield with lateral work as a valuable prerequi-

site or precursor because it:

- Introduces your horse to your sideways- and forward-driving aids and begins to make him more reactive and obedient to them.

- Increases the freedom of your horse's shoulders and the suppleness of his hindquarters, as well as the elasticity of the connection between his mouth, poll, neck, back and haunches.

- Improves his cadence (well-marked regularity, impulsion and balance) and brings his balance and gaits into harmony.

Once these qualities are established, the lateral movements develop and increase the engagement of your horse's hindquarters and, thereby, his collection. This, in turn,

- Further develops and improves his balance and equilibrium.

- Develops and increases his ability to lower and engage his hindquarters for the benefit of the lightness and mobility of his forehand.

- Adds to his "ease and self-carriage" and makes him more pleasurable to ride.

Leg-Yielding Nuts and Bolts

When your horse leg-yields, he moves forward and sideways by virtue of his inside

legs passing and crossing in front of his outside legs (and remember, his "inside" in all these movements is always the side to which he is bent or flexed, no matter how slightly). He stays basically straight through his body except for a slight flexion at the poll away from the direction in which he's moving (you should just be able to see his eyelashes and nostril on the inside). He may leg-yield at the walk or trot but not the canter. When leg-yielding on a diagonal track across the arena—as in the First Level tests—he stays as close as possible to parallel to the long side, with his forehand slightly in advance of his hindquarters. When leg-yielding along the wall, he maintains an angle of about 35 degrees to the direction in which he is moving.

Leg-Yielding Prerequisites

You can introduce leg-yielding to quite a young, green horse—and I include in this category the older horse who might be making the switch from a different, less "dressage-y" career—as long as he willingly goes forward and stays on your aids with a soft contact on circles and straight lines. If he's very young and in the early stages of learning the aids for leg-yielding, I'm actually not one to get very stuck on how well

he flexes in his jaw. If he focuses on your rein aids and resists them, he might come to associate them with going sideways, and that is *not* correct. As I always tell my students, "Remember, it's 'leg'-yielding, not 'rein'-yielding." Later on, of course, he will have to fulfill stricter requirements, key among them being that he maintain a slight inside flexion at the poll.

Before beginning to practice the leg-yield, be sure to factor in your horse's fitness. If he's fit or tends to be hot, introduce a new movement at the end of your training session when he might be a bit more settled and calm. If he's a bit lazy, quiet or out of shape, introduce it earlier in your ride once he's warmed up. You never want to teach him something when his muscles are tired because they won't work as well and he may learn or remember the new lesson in the wrong way.

If you know how to stay balanced and use your seat on a 20-meter circle, your position is just about right for leg-yielding (but of course you won't use the circle's bending aids). You should sit very evenly on your seat bones. Many books tell you to sit more to the outside or the inside for leg-yielding, and to be honest, either one of those options is OK *if it actually helps*

Leg-Yield Along the Wall



Farino is in a rhythmic, active working trot as we cut the corner at the short end of the arena and ride on about a 35-degree track toward the long side. He is still slightly flexed to the inside (right), and my rein and leg aids are absolutely normal and typical for a horse tracking right.

The editors thank Charmayne Harrah for the use of her facility and her 8-year-old Westphalian gelding, Farino.



As Farino crosses the quarterline, I ask him to change the flexion in his poll and jaw to what will be his new "inside"—the left. I turn my left wrist so my knuckles point toward my new "outside" (right) hip. I'm sitting relatively evenly on his back with my hips and shoulders perpendicular to his spine. The wall can sometimes back off a horse, so as we approach it, I'm making sure that Farino maintains the same energetic rhythm, tempo and, especially, fluidity of the movement.

your horse and doesn't disturb his balance. But if your horse could speak, I'll bet he would say, "I LIKE you to sit evenly in the saddle. Yes, I'm supposed to go sideways, but I don't want to fall sideways, so please don't sit too much to the outside. And if you sit too much to the inside, I CAN'T go sideways." You may find yourself naturally sitting a hint more on your inside seat bone, and that's fine as long as your horse is putting you there when his inside hind reaches under and across, and not because you're forcing yourself to do it.

In addition, keep the Training Scale qualities uppermost in all the work:

- **Rhythm** with energy and tempo (*Takt* in German)
- **Relaxation** with elasticity and suppleness (*Losgelassenheit*)
- **Connection** or acceptance of the bit through the aids (*Anlehnung*)
- **Impulsion** or increased energy and thrust (*Schwung*)
- **Straightness** or alignment and balance (*Geraderichten*) and ultimately,
- **Collection** or increased engagement, lightness of the forehand and self-carriage (*Versammlung*).

Finally, remember that the quality of the gait comes first. The purpose of any

exercise is to preserve and enhance your horse's natural movement. So if you allow him to shorten his stride when you ask him to move away from your inside leg, you're defeating the purpose of the leg-yield. As I tell my students: "You have to be able to ride the same walk or trot in the leg-yielding that you ride on a straight line or a circle."

Get Started

You'll introduce leg-yield to your horse at the walk. The walk doesn't produce the suppling effects of the trot. It doesn't have the collecting effects of the canter. But when you're introducing a new movement, the walk is invaluable for slowing down the work and giving you and your horse a chance to figure out your aids and timing.

You'll also want to start in your horse's easier direction. Experiment with your leg aids. Ask yourself, "How does my horse react? What's his tendency? Does he move more easily away from this leg or the other?" I'll give you a hint: Most horses seem to prefer to move to the right from a rider's left leg. But whichever way seems easier for your horse, always try to introduce a new movement in that direction and you'll

make it that much easier and more understandable. Later on, when your horse has the feel for what you want—certainly during the same session—switch over and do it on the slightly more difficult side. You never want to strengthen or condition one side more than the other.

If your horse is like most, the easiest way to introduce the idea and aids for leg-yielding *at the walk or trot* is to cut the corner at the short end of the arena and ride straight from the centerline toward the wall on a diagonal track of about 35 degrees. Just before your horse's nose reaches the wall, you slightly change the flexion so his "outside" becomes his "inside," and apply the aids for a leg-yield to ask him to move along the wall at a 35-degree angle.

The **leg-yield along the wall** method works well because your horse isn't going to go THROUGH the wall, so you won't be tempted to use your reins too much to steer him, and you both can focus on your forward, sideways-driving leg aids. For a detailed, step-by-step explanation of this method, see the photos below.

You can continue to ask him to leg-yield for as long as he maintains his position, rhythm, energy and balance. Even if he gives you only four or five steps before



I've flexed Farino and asked for only as much angle as I feel he can handle while maintaining the quality of his trot. With my "inside" (left) driving leg slightly behind the girth, I keep him going forward. Then, with a little additional left-leg pressure when his left hind comes off the ground, I ask him to step forward and sideways in front of his "outside" (right) hind. My right leg slightly behind the girth is helping to send him forward as well, but it's also serving as a guarding leg so his haunches don't fall out.



From this angle, you can see how little bend I want in Farino's body and how little flexion in his poll and jaw. Every time I ask him to cross his inside hind leg under his body, I slightly soften the pressure on my inside rein so that his crossing is completely unrestricted. My outside rein regulates his speed by "capturing" and controlling the momentum created with my leg aids. It also supports him by allowing a slight flexion to the inside at the same time that it sets a limit, so he doesn't overflex and fall out over his right shoulder.

Leg-Yield Parallel to the Rail



We've made a nice turn off the short side onto the quarterline, and I'm keeping Farino straight and forward before beginning to leg-yield on a shallow angled track toward the rail. He is straight, with his hind legs following in the track of his forelegs, and a slight inside flexion to the right. I am square and centered on his back, and I've just moved my inside right leg slightly back to begin to ask him to move to the left.



I apply exactly the same aids to ask Farino to move forward and sideways toward the rail that I applied when leg-yielding along the wall. I like this photo because it clearly shows a very gradual beginning to the leg-yield, which allows Farino to stay balanced, straight through his body and parallel to the long side, with his forward energy uninterrupted.

losing any of those qualities, be sure to straighten him and ride normally down the rest of the long side to refresh them.

Once your horse shows you that he understands leg-yielding along the wall, you can begin practicing **leg-yielding parallel to the rail**: Turn down the quarterline or the centerline and wait until he's completely straight—it's very important that you never allow HIM to decide when to start

the leg-yielding, especially if he hasn't yet completed the turn and isn't on two tracks.

Ask your horse to stay parallel to the side of the arena as he follows a forward and sideways diagonal line toward the wall. For a detailed, step-by-step description, see the photos above.

As you work, focus on accuracy. Begin and end every movement exactly where you want to, instead of just starting some-

where and ending somewhere else. By using your aids to very clearly define the start and finish, you'll teach your horse to wait, accept your aids willingly and NEVER go on autopilot.

Problem Solving

Problem: Your horse is such a "go-er" that every time you squeeze your leg to ask him to move sideways, he speeds

Problem-Solving With Turn On The Forehand



To show Farino that he can move away from my leg without rushing through the bit, I've walked him up to about the quarterline. I'll now use similar aids to ask him to move his haunches clockwise on a curved line around his forehand. I squeeze with my inside right leg slightly behind the girth. My outside leg is slightly behind the girth as a "guarding" leg to keep him from falling out. My inside rein maintains a slight inside flexion, and my outside rein controls the degree of flexion and bend in his neck. He's responding nicely, keeping his front legs almost stationary while crossing his inside right hind under and across. If Farino misunderstood my aids or attempted to avoid the difficulty of the movement by stepping back instead of turning, I'd squeeze to push him forward. By the same token, if he simply tried to walk forward, I'd take a more "resisting" feel on the reins to keep him in place. Once he's done a few steps, I'll move him straight forward and add a little right leg to reintroduce the idea of leg-yielding without rushing.



As Farino's inside hind and outside fore come off the ground, I "pulse" more firmly against his side with my inside leg slightly behind the girth. There's also a soft "give and take" in time with my leg on my inside flexing rein, softening just enough each time to leave Farino's inside hind unrestricted as it crosses in front of his left hind. My outside hand is giving him enough room to flex while also maintaining a consistent and steady contact that regulates his forward momentum.



As we continue, I sit straight and even with, if anything, a little more weight on my inside seat bone simply because it's Farino's inside hind leg that crosses. If I were to be critical, I'd say that my left leg, while correctly positioned behind the girth, is more off his side than is typical. But because Farino is so well-balanced, he does NOT tend to fall to the outside, so I don't need a lot of "guarding." If I were on a horse who tended to fall out, I'd have my left leg a lot closer to him and even, perhaps, a bit farther back.

up and rushes away.

Solution: Use a few steps of turn on the forehand to show him that he can move away from your leg without rushing through the bit (see the box/photo at left). After a few steps of turning—enough to show you that he understands your aids—simply combine the two movements by continuing forward and sideways in a leg-yield.

Problem: Your horse just *doesn't* understand your sideways-driving aids.

Solution: Circle 20 meters at A. As you begin the circle again, and just about as you cross the quarterline, allow your horse to drift out to the wall. If he's like most horses, he'll want to go out to the track. As he does, gently add your leg-yielding aids. Within a few attempts, he'll start to put his natural tendency to drift to the wall together with your aids. Is this cheating? Not really. To me, it's being a clever trainer. By using your horse's natural tendency, you're making leg-yielding easy and understandable.

Problem: Your horse resists or ignores your inside leg.

Solution: Ride up the long side on the right hand, and at E or S, ask for a 10- or 15-meter half-circle. On the sec-

ond half of the half-circle, start pushing your horse forward and sideways toward the wall, again almost inviting him to "fall out over the outside," but also half-halting on your outside rein so you control his shoulder and neck. You may end up with a little too much bend in his body, but at least you'll begin to correct his evasion by getting him to move away from your inside leg!

Problem: Your horse overbends to the inside and either falls sideways too much or swings his haunches.

Solution: Use a little less inside rein and a little more outside rein and ride him forward *always* straightens a horse. If he tends to react too much to your inside leg once he knows how to leg-yield, put him on a 20-meter circle, counterflex him to the outside and use your outside leg to leg-yield in to about a 15-meter circle. Immediately bring him back to the normal flexion and bend to keep him from "overlearning" the correction and starting to use counterflexion as an evasion. Circle once or ride *straight* out of the circle, then either continue straight or ride another 20-meter circle and repeat the exercise—but no more than two or three times. ■



Volker Brommann was born in Northern Germany, where he became interested in horses at his local riding club. He apprenticed in the German Equestrian Federation training program and became a licensed *Bereiter FN* in 1980 and a *Reitlehrer FN* in 1988.

Volker came to the United States to become the trainer at Pricilla Endicott's stable, *The Ark*, in Harvard, Massachusetts. During the mid- to late-1980s, he trained and competed for a number of sales barns and private stables, and he also operated his own training business. In 1994, Volker began training with Olympian Klaus Balkenhol, the US Dressage Team Coach.

Today, Volker is headquartered in Reno, Nevada, where he trains, competes and coaches students through the FEI levels. He also maintains a busy clinic schedule around the country and has written numerous articles on classical dressage techniques.