

THE FEI TRAINING SCALE

1. Rhythm - The Regularity and Tempo

The first step of the training scale that should be established is the rhythm. The regularity is the correct sequence of the footfall, and, the tempo is the speed of the rhythm.

The rhythm is the regularity of the beat in all paces. Steps and strides in each variation of the pace should cover equal distances and also be of equal duration remaining in a consistent tempo.

The rhythm should also be maintained through the transitions within a pace and in all turns, also in the corners, as well on straight lines. No exercise can be good if the horse is losing rhythm. A loss of rhythm is often a sign of incorrect training.

In order to judge the correctness of the rhythm, the judge must know how the horse moves in the basic paces.

2. Suppleness – Elasticity and Freedom from Anxiety

Suppleness, together with rhythm, is an essential aim of the preliminary training phase. Even if the rhythm is maintained, the movement cannot be considered correct unless the horse is working through its back and the muscles are free from tension.

Suppleness is a central theme throughout the schooling. It should never be neglected and should be constantly checked and reinforced.

Only if the horse is physically and mentally free from tension (anxiety) or constraint can it work with suppleness and use itself fully.

The horse's joints should bend and straighten equally on both sides of its body and with each step or stride. The horse should convey the impression that it is putting its whole mind and body into its work.

Lack of suppleness can take many forms, e.g. tightness in the back, severely agitated tail, rhythm faults, hind legs lacking activity, a tense and dry mouth and crookedness.

Indications of suppleness are:

- A content and happy expression – freedom from anxiety.
- The elasticity of the steps – the ability to stretch and contract the musculature smoothly and fluently.
- A quiet mouth gently chewing the bit with an elastic contact.
- A swinging back with the tail carried in a relaxed manner.
- Soft and rhythmical breathing, showing that the horse is mentally and physically relaxed.

The best confirmation and proof of the suppleness is that, when the reins are given, the horse stretches the neck downward and forward to the bit without losing rhythm or balance.

3. Contact – Acceptance of the Bit and Aids/Self Carriage

Contact is the soft, steady connection between the rider's hand and the horse's mouth. The horse should go rhythmically forward from the rider's driving aids and 'seek' contact with the rider's hand, thus 'going into' the contact. 'the horse seeks the contact and the rider provides the contact.'

A correct, steady contact allows the horse to find its balance under the rider and a good rhythm in all the paces. The poll should always be the highest point of the neck, except when the horse is being ridden forward/downward with longer reins.

The contact must result from the energy of the active hind legs being transferred over a swinging back to the bit. It is totally wrong to try to obtain the contact by pulling back with the hands. This way of riding will always stop the energy coming through from behind. The horse should go forward confidently into the contact in response to the rider's driving aids.

Indications of good contact are:

- The horse steps forward to the bit through a straight and supple poll.
- The horse accepts an elastic contact with a quiet mouth gently chewing the bit. The tongue is not visible.
- The poll is the highest point.
- The line of the nose is in front of the vertical, and in highly collected exercises at the vertical.
- The frame should never be compressed; in medium and extended paces there should be a visible lengthening of the frame.

Judges should always differentiate between:

- *Nose behind the vertical*; this is caused by hands used too strongly. The fault may result either from a momentary mistake in applying the aids or it may be a symptom of long term incorrect training.
- *Behind the bit*, dropping the contact: the horse refuses to accept the bit. Often associated with this is a flexion at the vertebrae further down the neck rather than at the poll.
- *Broken arch in the neck*: This occurs as a result of the rider attempting to establish the contact by using his hands in a backward direction. The highest point of the neck is no longer the poll but a point further back, usually between the second and third vertebrae.
- *Leaning on the bit*: Because the horse is not working sufficiently from behind, it seeks support from the rider's hands, using them as a '5th leg'.
- *Against the hand*: Because the horse's nose is well in front of the vertical. The horse will not flex at the poll and uses the muscles on the underside of the neck to resist the hand, while at the same time stiffening and hollowing the back.

When judging whether a horse is correctly taking the contact or 'on the bit'. It is not enough to look only at the head and neck. Judges need to look at the whole horse, its position and carriage and, in particular, the way it moves.

4. Impulsion – Increased Energy from Hindquarters

Impulsion is the transmission of controlled, propulsive energy generated from the hindquarters into the athletic movement of the eager horse. Its ultimate expression can be shown only through the horse's soft and swinging back and is guided by a gently contact with the rider's hand.

Impulsion should not be confused with 'action', which refers to the horse's inherent ability to take expressive, ground covering trot steps. If the horse is working with impulsion, the moment of suspension will be more pronounced. However, it should not be exaggerated, because this is associated with incorrect hovering steps that result from tension, a stiff back and resistance.

The most important criteria of impulsion is the time the horse spends in the air rather than on the ground. Impulsion is, therefore, seen only in those pace that have a period of suspension. Therefore, impulsion is only possible in the trot, canter, piaffe and passage. There can be no impulsion in the walk because there is no moment of suspension; therefore, in walk we talk about activity.

Impulsion is about the desire to go forward with the energy and carrying power that is produced from behind and goes to the bridle through a supple and swinging back. Impulsion allows the horse to move in a powerful and athletic way and to show elastic and expressive movement.

The impulsion is of a good quality if the hocks are carried energetically forward and upward immediately after the feet leave the ground, rather than being carried only upward, or being drawn backward. The movement is absorbed by the horse's back muscles, so that the rider can sit softly and go with the movement.

Impulsion is a question of training. The rider uses the horse's natural pace and adds looseness, forward thrust and suppleness to it.

If the horse is pushed so hard that it quickens its steps, the moment of suspension is shortened because it puts its feet down sooner. In this case, even if the regularity is maintained, the tempo is too fast and the impulsion will suffer as a result. Speed, itself, has little to do with impulsion; speed results in more often a flattening of the paces.

The desire to go forward with hind legs that push actively and clearly overtrack in extensions is necessary. The horse covers more ground in medium and extended trot and canter, the hind legs swinging through and forward in the moment of suspension.

The development and improvement of the impulsion is of fundamental importance. It is important in the development of the forward thrust and the carrying power of the hindquarters. It is also a prerequisite for straightening the horse and for collection.

5. Straightness – Equal Bend on Both Reins

The development of impulsion and straightness is essential to prepare the horse for collection and to make it more supple and through.

Straightening the horse is a never ending task, since every horse has some degree of natural crookedness.

The horse is straight when its forehead is in line with its hindquarters, that is, when its longitudinal axis is in line with the straight or curved track it is following.

Straightening the horse means also that the horse has to be able to be bent and flexed on both reins equally.

The main reasons for straightening a horse are:

- To help the horse stay healthy and sound through the hind legs being used in the same way so that the horse's weight is distributed evenly on both sides to prepare the horse for good collection. Only a straight horse can push and collect effectively using its hind legs equally and having an even contact in both reins. Only if the horse is straight can it be supple and 'through' equally in both directions.
- If the horse is straight, the hind legs will push towards the centre of gravity.

6. Collection – Engagement and Balance

The aim of the collection is:

- To further develop and improve the equilibrium of the horse, which has been more or less displaced by the additional weights of the rider.
- To develop and increase the horse's ability to lower and engage its hindquarters for the benefit of the lightness and mobility of its forehead.
- To add to the 'ease and carriage' of the horse thereby making it more pleasurable to ride.

Collection is developed through the use of half-halts and the use of lateral movements shoulder-in, travers, renvers, and half pass.

Collection is improved by the use of the seat and legs and containing hands to engage the hind legs. The joints bend and are supple so the hind legs can step forward under the horse's body.

However, the hind legs should not be engaged so far forward under the horse, that they shorten the base support excessively, thereby impeding the movement. In such a case, the line of the back would be lengthened and raised too much in relation to the supporting base of the legs, the stability would be impaired and the horse would have difficulty in finding harmonious and correct balance.

On the other hand, a horse with an over-long base of support, which is unable or unwilling to engage his hind legs forward under its body, will never achieve acceptable collection, characterised by 'ease and carriage' as well as a lively impulsion originating from the activity of the hindquarters.