

## Snippet 7: Engaged

You now know that the words half halt mean that you close your thighs, tilt the bottom of your pelvis forward and stretch your front line. This tells the horse to do the same with his body.



The tilt of the horses' pelvis and the increased articulation (bend) of the 4 joints in his hindquarters is called Engagement.

Other signs that engagement has happened that one can see from the outside are: The cannon bones are more angled when the hoof under it hits the ground: the rear hooves come father under the horses' body as they touch the ground; the croup may be seen to lower; the back behind the saddle may be seen to rise; and the hocks stay more underneath the body and do not come as far behind the point of the buttocks during the weight bearing phase of the

stride. An observer cannot see all of these manifestations at once but will learn to spot them as they become apparent. Different horses will express them differently.

**THIS IS IMPORTANT.** Half halts with the rider's body, heard by the horses' body, are the first part of every transition either up or down.

The second part of any transition, up or down, is the responsibility of the rider's rein system and speaks to the front limbs and the thoracic sling (interior chest muscles) of the horse.

To repeat. The rider's body controls the horses back end, the arms and hands control the front end.

The Rein system starts between the rider's shoulder blades, continues down the backs of both arms, flows through the elbows, the outsides of the forearms and wrists and hands, down the reins and through both side of the bit itself. Energy flows through the rein system constantly in larger or smaller quantities and can fluctuate from one direction to another.

When holding the reins, the rider should feel the bit through her elbows as that joint should be the first to recognize a need for a firmer feel or a lighter feel.

If a rider's forearms bounce up and down, the cause almost always is that her shoulder blades have lifted and probably locked there. "Heavy shoulder blades followed by heavy elbows" almost always will stabilize the forearms. The upper arms of the rider should find a "home" where they hang down the middle of the torso/rib cage. After leaving this spot, they should return until the next need to leave this "home base".

If more contact is needed, a slight drawing back of the elbow will work. When doing that, notice that the muscles along that side of the back of the torso become firmer all the way down to the seat bone on that side. This is one way in which the arm/hand aids connect to the pelvic aids.

If less contact is needed the rider probably should start with a softening of the tension in her ring finger, then in the hands, wrists, forearms and elbows which give forward as needed. With each give along her arm, she listens to the horses' response. That is, did he get it, or does he need more room?

**THIS TOO IS IMPORTANT.** In general, a half halts lasts as long as the limb of the horse is in the swing phase or in the air. That is the only time he can answer with a longer or a shorter step as required. The most important part for the horse is the moment of release. Then he knows if he understood. If he did not, another half halt surely will follow.