

Snippet 6: Cracking the Half-Halt Code

For a seemingly long time I thought that that the words half halt meant that you were to bring your horse halfway to a halt. This difficulty with words is so prevalent in dressage, but this is the biggest Code Word” and it needs “cracking”

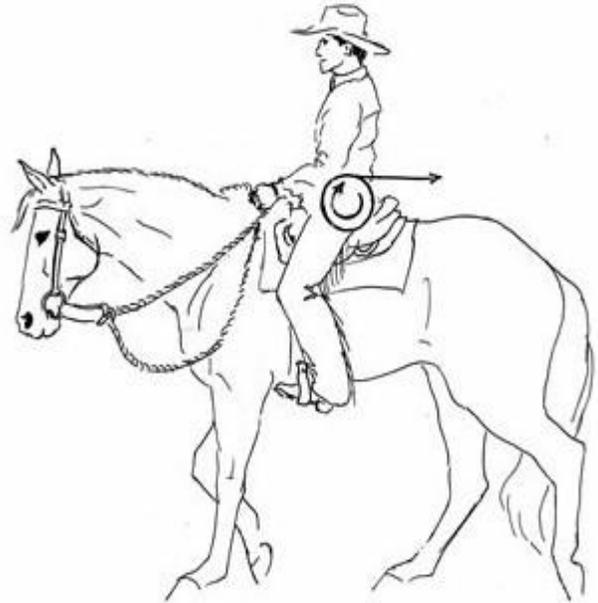
Who would guess that a half halt actually describes a set of muscular contractions and releases done by a rider to communicate with her horse?

Who would guess that horses can figure out an amazing number of combinations of those moves and Remember that each set means something specific that he is to do? The first one is that when a rider presses her lower legs on the horses’ rib cage, it is supposed to go forward. How do young horses ever figure that out? Later the moves come in combinations and series that the horse understands and produces a half pass or a side pass.

Not only do the riders’ body parts make requests of the horses’ body, but also, through the reins to the bit in the sensitive mouth to horse’s head, neck and brain. It is best to think of any bit as having two side by side parts. I refer, then, to the right bit and the left bit. That works for riders who are used to using two hands. Look for a Snippet about rein aids in the future.

So how does a rider use her body to produce what is called a half halt?

1. She must be able to move the bottom part of her pelvis forward, backward, sideways and to some degree diagonally.
2. To move the pelvis there must be something farther down in the body to move against. When standing, it is the feet, but in riding we use the stirrups as a place to rest our feet, not as a place to brace against. Therefore, the riders’ thighs roll inward and stay closed around the upper part of the horse’s rib cage until her



pelvic move is completed.

3. How long that lasts and how strongly the thighs stay closed depend on the reaction of the horse to this application of the upper leg aids.
4. The low back muscles help to move the lower part of the pelvis by a down and under push so the tail bone curls under the rider's body.
5. The front line of the body both lengthens and widens to bring the pelvic action upward and send energy right out the top of the rider's head.
6. In summary, the body usage called a half halt directs the rider to close her thighs, keep them closed so she can tilt the bottom of the pelvis and send energy both forward and upward through her body as well as asking the horse to join her with the exact same movements in his body. When he does, all of the above contractions and movements cease. The half halt is over.

Now the Dressage Code word of Half Halt no longer is a secret code, but something you and your horse can do. Well, of course, there is more. There always is in dressage!