



## The Shoulder-In, First and Last Movement for Training and Refinement

Remember your Mantra: Direction, Rhythm, Bend, Lightness. It applies to everything we do with our horses and it is the first thing we return to when we get into trouble (experience a lack of clarity).

As we introduced the shoulder-in during our work-in-hand, your horse has the feeling and understanding of what it is like to cross his legs with a correct bend through his head and neck flowing into his back. The quality of your work-in-hand will be reflected in the ease in which you can recreate your shoulder-in while riding.

Position yourself correctly (see *Dressage for the New Age* and the *Barbier Training Companion* for greater discussion), and know your direction. With your shoulders parallel to the horse and looking in the direction you want to go, with your inside shoulder back, ask your horse to move forward. Remember, we are thinking position, not action. Of course in the beginning, as we are refining our communication and introducing a new movement, we might be obliged to modify the length of rein or adjust our position in the saddle. But the greater clarity you have while asking for the movement, the easier it will come. This is why it is a great idea to sit on a horse that knows the movement, perhaps on the longe, so that you only need to experience the feeling. Do this as often as you can or is necessary for you to be able to transmit that vision with clarity of intent to your horse. They 'see' our visual messages. Greater clarity in your visualization translates to greater connection for the two of you.

Lets go back to the longe and work in hand. Was there impulsion in the work? If not, you will probably experience a lack of impulsion while on top. So, what to do? Wake up! Put some energy and sparkle into your walk. THEN ask for the shoulder-in. Be careful not to come to a halt here. Carry on while searching for the crossing and correct bend. Lack of impulsion is deadly for creating a fluid, suppling shoulder-in.

Why is the Shoulder-in the first and last movement for training and refinement? Because each time we want to achieve greater refinement in our trot or piaffe or passage, we must return to our shoulder-in to search for another dimension of relaxation and brilliance.

Wherever you have weak points in your movements or gaits, return to your work-in-hand to see where the tightness originates. Use this tool to deepen your seeing, deepen your mental connection with your horse. He will tell you where the problems are and how he wants to be trained. One day he will hold his head in relaxation in one spot, another day it will be lower, or higher. One day he will be able to offer a big crossing with the neck at a certain bend, and the next day that position will change a bit. Why? He is discovering his own body, strengthening and accessing new muscles, letting go of old contractions from mental or physical trauma.

Be with him. Use the shoulder-in under saddle and during your work in-hand to listen to your horse.