

# The Positive Riding System

## Leg Yielding

By Henrik Johansen



Leg yielding is a suppling sideways movement, usually ridden on the diagonal or from center line to the track. It is normally ridden in walk or trot. In this movement, the horse's body should be straight except for a slight lateral bend at the poll between the second and third vertebra. The horse should be bent away from the direction of movement just enough so that you can see a little of his eye and nose.

When leg yielding, the horse moves sideways by moving the inside legs forward and over, in front of the outside legs. The outside legs move almost straight ahead. The rider should feel that the horse remains balanced vertically, not leaning or falling in one direction. Tempo and impulsion must be maintained.

The most important part of riding a leg yield is the preparation. Often there is a corner or turn before the leg yield and the horse must execute these correctly in order for the leg yield to turn out well. Read the chapter, [Riding Through Corners](#).

The success of the movement depends on how well you start it. Keep in mind you will be asking the horse to change direction, and he will always, just like you, follow his weight. Even if you ask your horse to remain parallel to the track it is still the forehand that leads the way. You can almost think of the forehand and shoulders as if they are the front wheels of a car. The forehand should be moved over first. How far or how much depends on the horse's level of education, but too much is better than too little. Once the forehand, and as a consequence, the horse's weight, is placed in the direction of movement, the horse's body can be straightened so he becomes more parallel to the track. Normally,

the forehand should be about a hand's width in the lead.

Before asking the horse to execute a leg yield, decide where the movement should start and end. Draw an imaginary line in the footing between these two points and avoid stepping across it. If this happens, do not use your hands as a brake. This would cause the horse to feel that you are working against him, and to lean into your hands and fall onto the forehand. The horse is not disobedient if he moves in a direction that is more straight ahead than sideways. He has no choice but to follow his weight. His ability to move more sideways requires that the combined weight of the horse and rider is shifted back and off of the forehand, that the "see-saw" is adjusted so that the horse's balance is more uphill. It may also require that his shoulders are moved more into the direction of movement. Read the chapters, [Balance and Equilibrium](#) and [Harmony](#).

### The Aids

We will assume that the horse has learned to organize his body so that his center of gravity is directly under the rider; that there is one common center of gravity. If this is not the case, you should wait before working on this movement. We will also assume that horse and rider know how to go through a corner correctly. Read the chapter, [Riding Through Corners](#).

During a leg yield, the side of the horse that we refer to as the 'inside' is the concave side (the side toward which the horse is bent), and is opposite to the direction of movement. Begin by looking up and in the direction of movement, toward that point or letter where

you want the movement to end. As you begin the movement, several things must happen simultaneously. Stretch upward and squeeze the new outside rein, and if necessary use it to lead the horse in the direction you want him to move. Move yourself in that direction as well but without leaning over the side of the horse. You should have your weight in the direction you want the horse to move his legs – just the same as when you move your weight to walk in the direction you want to go. This causes your legs to take you in that direction. It is often enough to tell the horse the direction of movement just by stepping down a little more in the stirrup on the side of the direction in which you want to go.

Now horse and rider are on the way across the diagonal. The horse should be straightened so that he becomes almost parallel with the track he just left. This is accomplished by sitting as if you want to ride straight forward, catching the energy from the inside driving aid with the outside rein and leg, and perhaps opening the inside rein which will support the inside leg. The inside leg is usually placed a little further back than its normal position. A slight turning of the inside wrist asks the horse to position his neck. Horse and rider are now on their way into the leg yield. The inside leg acts to move the horse sideways, creating energy which moves diagonally out to the outside rein and in the direction the horse is moving. Pressure should be applied with the inside leg at the moment when the horse lifts his inside hind leg, just as he starts to move it forward in under his body. The inside rein positions the horse. The outside rein acts to adjust or limit the positioning. Any resisting aids are given with the outside rein. The outside leg is usually placed in its normal position and acts to drive the horse forward. It also acts together with the outside rein to give resisting aids, in order to contain the energy, and to regulate the speed.

You should sit straight over the horse, go with

him in the direction of movement and position yourself to sit more on the inside seat bone. Sitting more on the inside seat bone is a signal to the horse to move his inside hind leg more in under himself. It is primarily the inside hind leg that pushes the horse forward and to the side. In order to carry the weight required to adequately push off with his inside hind leg, the horse must move this hind leg fairly far forward in under his body. If he does not, he is forced to move his weight onto his outside shoulder.

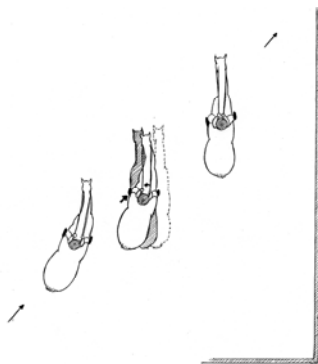
The rider's seat acts to drive the horse forward, more or less in the same manner as when riding in a straight line. When you are training a leg yield you must make sure that you and your horse are moving in harmony, with one combined center of gravity, and that the horse understands how to follow the rider's weight and respond correctly to a leading rein.

One of the first things we teach a young horse is to travel on a straight line following the track. He learns that the track is where he should be. We can take advantage of this when training leg yielding. One way is to turn onto the quarter line. The young horse that has learned that his place is on the track will feel a little unsafe here. Therefore it is natural for him not to resist when you ask him to follow your weight and leading rein out to the track.

Choose a point along the track and influence the horse by making a decision to go there yourself. If the horse's center of gravity is under the rider's, he will follow the rider out to the long side. The horse does not need to be parallel to the track. Once the horse has learned to follow the rider sideways, he can be asked to straighten his body so that he is more parallel to the long side. Little by little the horse can be asked to leg yield for a longer distance, such as across the diagonal.

## Tips, suggestions and warnings:

- If the horse has a tendency to trail with his haunches don't try to move them over only by pushing more with your inside leg. If you do, the horse will only continue leading with his outside shoulder. Instead try to get the horse to rotate around his own axis. You can do this by leading the forehand in the opposite direction of movement while using your inside leg to move the haunches in the direction of movement.



- If the horse finds it difficult to move sideways or easily loses impulsion, try the following: start by riding straight across the diagonal. Then leg yield a short distance and return back to tracking straight by moving the forehand back on the diagonal. This makes it easier for the horse, and little by little you can increase the distance of the leg yield without losing impulsion.
- You can also alternate between leg yielding and riding straight ahead toward the short side. This is a good exercise for horses that have a tendency to move sideways too much, since this will teach them to respond to the aids that regulate the speed.
- Leg yielding can also be ridden on the track. In this case there should be very little cross-over. This is a good exercise for a horse that falls over his outside shoulder in shoulder-in.
- Leg yielding is also a good exercise for teaching the horse to lengthen his strides.

For example, leg yield from the corner to center line, ride straight on center line towards the short side and ask the horse to lengthen the stride. This exercise will encourage him to take longer strides instead of just speeding up.

- We should not forget that leg yielding is a suppling exercise that does not require a lot of collection, so it can be introduced early on in the training of the young horse.
- Leg yielding should not be ridden for long periods of time. Make sure the horse is in good balance and relaxed, so he doesn't overstress his joints. This applies especially to the front legs, so if he has had any injuries here, please wait until he has healed before working on leg yields.
- There are many advantages to leg yielding. But exercises such as shoulder-in and haunches-in do more for the horse in furthering his education, since they lead to increased collection and self-carriage.



Here is something to think about. The expression 'the horse should move away from the leg' is often grossly misunderstood. Many riders think they can push the horse over with their leg, but this is impossible. Someone that believes this can try to prove it by lifting themselves up by their own hair. This is totally contrary to the laws of nature. Someone standing on the ground can move a horse sideways by pushing on his shoulder, but someone sitting on top of a horse is part of their combined weight. Try to put your hand on your own side

and push yourself over. This is the same thing that happens when a rider tries to move the horse over by using his leg. Since this does not work, we often see riders hanging over the inside of the horse trying to make their inside leg stronger. This causes the rider to place his weight in the wrong direction (the direction opposite of movement) and he doesn't understand why the horse cannot execute a good leg yield when he is using so much power. Sometimes I think that the horses 'shake their heads' at us. If we want to work with the horse and not against him, we must understand the laws of nature and take them into account as we train our horses.

**Some common mistakes when executing a leg yield:**

- The rider does not understand the theory behind the movement
- Lack of harmony between horse and rider
- The horse has too much bend which causes him to fall on his forehead
- The rider tries to push the horse over with his inside rein
- The rider thinks he can move the horse over with his leg
- The rider looks down causing the horse to fall on his forehead
- Loss of tempo
- The rider forgets to look in the direction of movement
- Leading haunches make the horse croup high