

MARVIN SMINK
— DRESSAGE —

*Better
Riding
Happier
Horses*

Position Creates Possibility

FROM BEND AND BALANCE
TO THE FLYING CHANGE

1

Clear Principles

Flexion rein up.
Shoulder rein down.
Simple principles that help you influence the horse's body more clearly and keep your aids effective.

2

Lateral Work

Understand when the bend and flexion change – and when they don't.
The rein position should reflect what actually changes in the horse's body.

3

Transitions

Maintain the uphill posture, keep the back engaged and ride from the seat.
Think of asking the horse's forehead to face the sky to maintain access to the poll without compressing it.

4

Flying Changes

Prepare, activate and release.
Make the outside hind more active, free the ribcage and allow the new inside hind and front to come forward into the new lead. The aim is to make the change feel like a natural continuation of the canter, rather than a movement that needs to be forced.

“The better the preparation,
the less we need to manufacture
the movement.”

Marvin Smink

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Position Creates Possibility: From Bend and Balance to the Flying Change

Sometimes the biggest improvement in a movement comes not from adding another aid, but from changing the position from which we ask for it.

We can easily fall into the trap of trying to *make* things happen: more inside rein for bend, more outside rein for balance, more leg for a flying change. But if the horse is correctly positioned and the rider understands what each part of the body needs to do next, many movements become less about forcing a response and more about creating the conditions that allow the response to happen.

This idea connects everything from basic lateral work to simple changes and eventually flying changes.

A principle I use regularly is:

Flexion rein up. Shoulder rein down.

The rein responsible for flexion can be carried slightly upward, giving access to the poll and helping position the neck without simply pulling it inward. The rein influencing the shoulder can be carried slightly down, giving the rider better access to the positioning and balance of that shoulder.

The important distinction is that flexion and bend are not the same thing. The inside rein can influence flexion, but it shouldn't be expected to manufacture the entire bend. The bend comes through the horse's body, from the inside leg into the outside rein.

Lateral work is a great way to make this principle much clearer.

When moving between **haunches-in and haunches-out**, the flexion and bend change. Because the horse's positioning changes, the rider's hand and rein position need to follow that change.

Now compare this with riding from **travers into shoulder-in** while retaining the same bend. The exercise changes and the horse changes its relationship to the line of travel, but the bend itself remains the same. Therefore, the flexion rein can remain in the same position.

An even more interesting example is a **half-pass to leg-yield zig-zag** where we deliberately retain the same flexion and bend.

The direction of travel changes, but the horse's bend doesn't.

That means the rein position doesn't need to change simply because we are travelling somewhere different. This is an important lesson for the rider because we can become far too busy with our hands whenever we change exercises or direction.

The question should always be: *What has actually changed in the horse's body?*

If the bend hasn't changed, why change the rein responsible for that bend and flexion?

The same attention to positioning becomes important in the **simple change through walk**.

Here I sometimes use the image of asking the horse's **forehead to face the sky**. I don't mean literally riding with the nose in the air. It is a way of helping the rider maintain access to the poll and an uphill posture while still allowing the horse to remain round.

Roundness should not come from compressing or locking the poll.

Through the transition, I want to feel that the back stays up and engaged and that I can still feel the hind legs underneath me. That gives me the ability to ride the transition from my seat rather than depending on the reins to put the horse into a position.

If the downward transition causes the back to disappear, we have lost much of the energy and connection we need to ride forward again.

This same concept becomes even more relevant when we reach the **flying change**.

Instead of thinking, *Now I need to ask for the flying change*, I want to think about preparing the hind leg that will actually take the horse into the new lead.

The current outside hind is about to become the **new inside hind**.

Before the change, I can make that outside hind more active with my outside leg. This doesn't only create activity in the hind leg; it also helps free that side of the ribcage.

That matters because the horse needs room through the ribcage for the new inside hind and front leg to come forward into the new canter lead.

So rather than immediately switching my legs and asking for a change, I first activate the outside hind. My outside leg is back and that hind leg is working underneath the horse. I am creating and containing the energy before I release it.

Then my outside leg comes forward.

The old outside leg has now become the **new inside leg**, and I can think of that movement almost as releasing the hind leg I have just activated and allowing it to come forward into the new lead.

Another way of visualising it is that when my leg comes forward, it almost **pulls that hind leg forward with it**.

There is another important part of this: when I bring that leg forward, my pelvis changes position too. My new inside seat bone moves into the position of the new canter lead.

As the horse becomes more established in the changes, that positioning of the seat can gradually become more of the aid and the obvious leg movement can become less important.

The flying change then starts to become less about throwing the horse from one lead to another and more about preparing the body, activating the correct hind leg and then allowing the new canter to come through.

Sometimes, of course, a horse has an existing imbalance that needs to be considered within this process. If a horse tends to fall down through the left shoulder or become stuck on the left rein, for example, I may temporarily maintain a **slight right position through both changes**.

That isn't necessarily where I want the finished flying change to remain. It is a training tool that prevents the horse from repeatedly falling into its preferred imbalance.

Sometimes the route towards straightness involves temporarily positioning the horse away from the pattern it keeps returning to.

All of these exercises ultimately come back to the same question.

Instead of asking, *How do I make this movement happen?*, ask:

What position does the horse need to be in so that this movement can happen?

Consider the flexion and the bend. Feel where the shoulders are. Notice whether the back is still underneath you and whether the hind legs remain available. Feel what is happening through the ribcage. Then consider your own pelvis and whether your seat is already preparing the horse for what comes next.

The better the preparation becomes, the less we need to manufacture the movement with our aids.

Position the body. Create the energy. Then allow the horse to use it.

That is often where a movement stops feeling like something we are making the horse perform and starts feeling like the natural next step in the stride.

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