

RS Riding
BY DRESSAGEPRO



FUNDAMENTALS CHECK

Four exercises to check if you have set the right foundation in your training

RSRIDING.COM

99% OF ALL TECHNICAL RIDING PROBLEMS ARE RELATED TO NOT HAVING A SOLID FOUNDATION

You need to have a solid foundation. It's something we can all agree on. Without a solid foundation you can't train your horse in the right way. Without a solid foundation you won't progress to higher levels and you'll get stuck. Without a solid foundation you'll run into all kinds of problems like having an unsteady or heavy connection, not having forwardness or having difficulties with collection.

Chances are you're also running into problems and that you want to know if the problems are related to the basic foundation of dressage. Well, I can tell you that it's very likely that's indeed the case.

According to Rien van der Schaft 99% of all technical riding problems are related to not having the right basic principles, the foundation, in place.

But what exactly are these basic principles?

In the online training program 'Solid Foundation Course' Rien talks about the three basic principles. The three basic principles are relaxation, forwardness and that your horse trusts your hand and finds the contact pleasant.

This is what you want to have all the time. No matter if you're just in walk or if you're doing a movement like shoulder-in. To find out if you have these basic principles in place, together with Rien van der Schaft we have a number of exercises for you that you can do when training your horse. You'll find them in the following pages.

Good luck and have fun!

Conny Loonstra

Founder DressagePro and co-founder TRTmethod





MEET RIEN VAN DER SCHAFT

At the moment, Rien is the national coach of the Finnish dressage team (formerly of the Dutch dressage team) and guides students all over the world.

Besides the fact that Rien can be found abroad a lot, he runs his own stable 'Sprengenhorst' together with his wife Inge and daughter Romy. Here they train their own horses, but also horses of owners.

From 1979 to 1983, Rien was part of the Dutch dressage team and he also participated in the Olympic Championships, two European Championships and the World Championship.

The training method of Rien van der Schaft is known as a very friendly, logical and effective training method. With not only the focus on the horse's head, but on the entire functioning of the body.

FORWARDNESS WITHOUT LEG AID

You don't want to have the feeling that you have to keep giving your horse leg aids to get forwardness. Instead, you want to have forwardness even if you don't give any leg aid. Of course, your horse won't stay forward for eternity after giving one leg aid, but you do want to have the feeling of forwardness as long as possible before repeating your leg aid. In the first exercise below, you'll find out how long it will take before the effect of your leg aid wears down and you have to repeat your aid again. How long will the forwardness last?

EXERCISE 1

Go in walk, tracking right and once you pass the letter "K" in the arena, you don't give any leg aid anymore. How many steps, how many meter or feet or until what letter do you get before you feel you have to repeat your leg aid? Try this in walk, trot and canter and do the same when tracking left.

TRACK RIGHT

Walk _____

Trot _____

Canter _____

TRACK LEFT

Walk _____

Trot _____

Canter _____

Do you have the feeling your horse stays forward? Is there difference within the three gaits and on the left of right track?

TIP

The transition from trot to walk is also a good exercise to test whether your horse has enough forwardness. Because if your horse doesn't have forwardness, the transition won't go smoothly and it will feel like you'll lose (partly) the connection from back to front.

HALT AND RESPONSE

Not only do you want your horse to have forwardness, you also want your horse to respond in the right way when you give a leg aid. So when you give the leg aid that you feel the energy, the activity, flowing through your horse's body from his hind legs all the way to his mouth. What you don't want to feel is some kind of blockage in your horse's body or that he doesn't respond at all. There's a simple way to check if your horse responds in the right way and that's by riding the transition halt to walk and the transition halt to trot.

EXERCISES 2A

Go to halt on the long side of the arena and make a transition to walk. What aids did you have to give and to what extent to get the desired response? Do the same for the transition from halt to trot.

	How much and what aid?	How long before response?
Transition Halt - Walk	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Transition Halt - Trot	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Do you have the feeling your horse responds quickly without having to give too many aids? Can it be improved?



EXERCISE

2B

Repeat the transition halt to trot a few times in a relatively short period of time. Do you feel your horse is learning to respond quicker and on less aids?



“It’s very nice to review all the videos. My trainer has also noticed that my way of riding has positively changed.”

-
Christel Deugd (NL)



STEADY CONNECTION

When your horse has relaxation in his body and you ride him with forwardness towards your hand, you can get a good and steady connection. This is something you can't accomplish with your rein aids or by making a certain frame. Even if you do it in a 'friendly' way. With the next exercise you check to what extent you try to influence the head-neck frame with your rein aids instead of it being a result of having relaxation and riding from back to front with a horse that trusts your hand.

EXERCISE 3

Go in walk, tracking right and once you pass the letter "K" in the arena, focus on keeping the contact with your horse's mouth in a friendly and relaxed way without trying to influence the frame. How long does it take until the head-neck frame changes? Try it all the three gaits and do the same when tracking left.

TRACK RIGHT

Walk _____

Trot _____

Canter _____

● TRACK LEFT

● Walk _____

● Trot _____

● Canter _____

Is there a difference within the three gaits and on the left or right track?

HOW DO YOU GET THE RIGHT CONNECTION?

It all starts with what Rien calls the 'contact rein'. With the contact rein you take the rein and you try to keep a **steady and soft connection** to your horse's mouth. So if your horse moves his head up and down, you just continue to keep the same contact and you try to be as **independent and relaxed** as possible.

At this point, it doesn't matter what the head-neck frame of your horse is. Because if you ride your horse in this way, your horse will learn to **trust** your hand.

Important! You don't want to influence the head-neck frame. You first want your horse to be **forward, relaxed and have a steady contact rein** with your hand. You'll first ride your horse in his natural preferred balance with a steady contact rein. Once that's established, you can take the next step.



ÜBERSTREICHEN

Another way to find out if you're not trying to influence the head-neck frame with your rein aids is to see what happens when you let go of the contact. You can do this with an exercise called überstreichen. It will also show you if your horse carries himself or if he's using your reins as support. Make sure to do this exercise only when the contact between your hand and your horse's mouth is established and your horse trusts your hand. With überstreichen you bring both hands forward and you 'break' the contact with your horse's mouth. Your reins become loose. The desired result is that your horse continues with the same rhythm, tempo and frame. You can do this a few steps in trot or canter, on a straight line or on a circle.

EXERCISE

4

Try to do a few steps of überstreichen in trot and canter and see what happens to the rhythm, tempo, head-neck frame and balance of your horse. Write it down below.

Überstreichen in trot

Überstreichen in canter

Do you have the feeling your horse carries himself or do you feel you need to control the head-neck frame with your hands?



TIP

When your horse lifts his head during the exercise, this is often a sign of your horse not trusting your hand. If your horse brings his head down it's often because your horse uses your rein for support and doesn't carry himself.



“Rien makes everything very simple and divides the training into small steps.”

- Francesca Newman



RESULTS

You've now done four exercises to test your horse's foundation. What are your conclusions? What do you need to work on?

1

RELAXATION



2

FORWARDNESS



3

TRUST IN THE HAND





“This way of training is so important if you want to keep your horse fit and healthy.”

Mirjam Riet (NL)

