

## What a Half Halt Is (and Isn't)

**This essential riding aid can be elusive to learn. Understand first what a half-halt is not in order to master it.**

*By Sharon Biggs*

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A half-halt isn't: pulling the reins. To start out, riding instructors often teach beginners very simplistic aids to take the place of certain skills until the rider's balance and body control improves. This is particularly true of the half-halt. Since one of the requirements of the half-halt is having the ability to "ride along" or move your body along with the horse's motion, you can understand how making a proper half-halt is nearly impossible to the rank beginner who is concentrating on so many things—holding the reins, sitting up, learning the rhythm of the rising trot, turning. Therefore, for a little while, the beginning rider may have to rely on pulling the reins to slow down or stop. Unfortunately, this aid often continues to become the rider's way of half-halting forever. This way of braking eventually creates problems. Constantly having the bit pulled in his mouth is an unpleasant experience for the horse, which often leads to his resistance. If a rider's answer to the problem is changing to a stronger bit or using training aids such as draw reins, it becomes a vicious cycle. Instead, master the subtle skill of the half-halt.

A half-halt is: the rider slowing his or her body down while gently squeezing the reins, which causes the bit to halt in the horse's mouth. Rather than pulling the horse to a stop, a rider has to communicate to the horse that he needs to slow down. This is accomplished by either using your voice (saying whoa) or using your body (using a half-halt). With the half-halt, the communication to the horse is this: "when I move along with you, keep going. When I don't, slow down."

Further Reading  
Two Half-Halt Exercises  
Half-Halt How-to

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