

Lunging 101 & Basic Riding Position  
Clinician Kristin Hermann speaks at  
Horse Around Acres Midland, Pa.  
[www.horsearoundacres.com](http://www.horsearoundacres.com)

Correct lunging and riding is an art which requires skill. Applying these skills to train a horse is even more complicated. When asked to do a clinic, Kristin Hermann decided that rather than do another riding clinic if riders could develop good lunging skills and learn about what is required for a good basic riding position, then their dressage could become that much easier. The hardest part of dressage is getting the horse to be on the aids, thus lunging in side-reins can help to develop the horse's correct top-line and having the correct riding position enables the rider to put the horse on the aids to keep it "on the bit."

Too often equestrians think of lunging as a means to get extra energy out of the horse and not as a training tool. Lunging is a training tool that can help to develop relaxation, rhythm, and the horse's top-line to be round. These are the first three requirements on the United States Dressage Federation's (USDF) Training Scale of Training that can be developed under saddle and while lunging. Lunging, however, is not just running a horse in a circle. Lunging to train the horse requires skill and finesse, as does riding. The ability to coordinate a twenty foot line with a horse on the end and coordinate walking in a small circle is quite a feat! Kristin believes that being able to lunge a horse will help all riders develop better aid coordination, which is required for riding. She recommends lunging horses that do not challenge the lunge to develop the required skills, such as a horse that will not turn in and face the lunge if she gets in front of its withers. If a rider practices developing good lunging skills on a horse that knows how to lunge and does not act up, it will help to train his or her lunging skills. Only start using training aids when you can lunge comfortably without fearing the horse or making the horse nervous. In other words, be comfortable lunging a horse before you attempt to lunge a horse with the purpose of training.



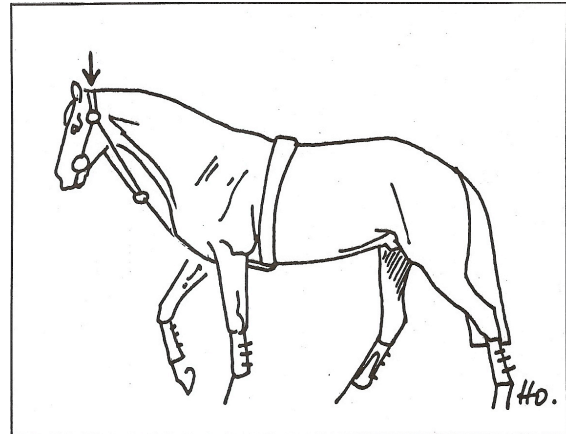
The lunge line is attached over the poll, encouraging the horse to stretch down. The lunge line needs to be butterflied into her hand to be more organized and safe.

Lunging is similar to riding in that the lunge whip is the legs asking the horse to go forward, and the reins are the lunge line only about twenty five feet long. The lunge line is held the same as the reins with a ninety degree bend in the elbow. This enables the elbow to be elastic going forward and back if necessary. If a rider does not know how to lunge, it is recommended they get some lessons and practice on trained horses.

During this clinic, Kristin handed out an article entitled "The qualities of a Good Lunging Horse," that she wrote in 1992 and was published in the USDF Bulletin Vol XIX, now called USDF Connection. Here is a link to that article: <http://blythdale.tripod.com/coventryequestriancenter/id26.htmls>

Using this article as an outline for the demonstration auditors learned what to look for at the walk and trot. Kristin said leaving the canter alone was a good idea until the lungers has mastered their skills at the walk and trot. While lunging a horse, participants observed whether a horse was tracking up, under tracking, and/or over tracking. They also learned why a horse should track up and use the back. Then each participant came out and gave lunging a try while Kristin assisted them to hold the line, use the whip forward and back as opposed to up and down, and to move the whip behind them if the horse got nervous at any point. She showed them how to use the lunge line to spiral a horse in and out on the circle, teach downward transitions while incorporating the voice and body language without having to pull on the horse's mouth. "The mouth is sacred," stated Kristin "you want your horse to accept the bit and be soft in the jaw; never punish its mouth by tugging." She recommended only using training tools such as side-reins, the Chambon, and/or sliding side-reins after only being able to proficiently lunge and keep the horse relaxed and rhythmic on the lunge.

Learning how to use these training aids, was an important part of the clinic. Lunging your horse in side-reins or sliding side reins will accelerate the development of the horse's top-line for dressage. Each training tool has a different use and is used individually for whatever a particular horse may need. For instance, if your horse has no top-line all tools will help, however, sliding side reins and the



## Das Longieren

Fortsetzung

Andere als der Ausbindestiel gestattet die Chambon dem Pferd, die Nase weiter vor die Senkrechte zu nehmen, den Hals fallen zu lassen und ihn zu strecken. Gibt man dem Pferd hinreichend Zeit, sich über ein länger verhaltenes Chambon an die Arbeit zu gewöhnen, dann werden sie bald den manchmal mit Störungen im Bewegungsablauf verbundenen Widerstand (oben) aufgeben, werden sich vorwärts-abwärts strecken und dabei den Rücken lockern und mit den Hinterbeinen weit durchschwingen (unten).

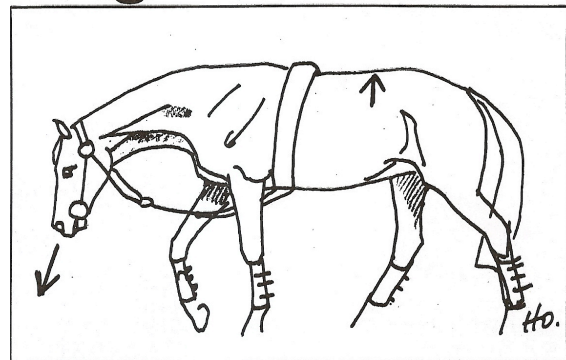


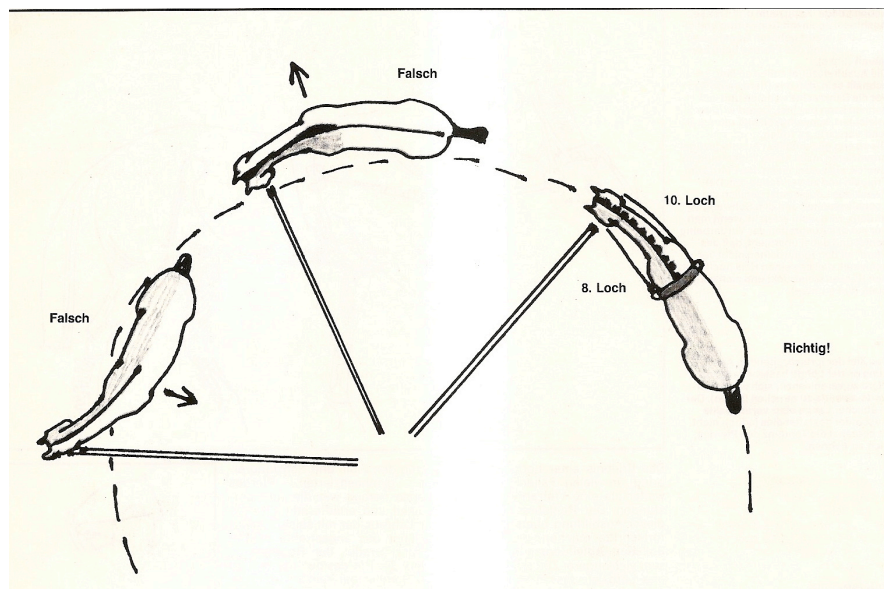
Illustration of the Chambon and how it works to lower the horse's head and neck resulting in the back coming up.

A book has been written about the Chambon called Understanding the Chambon....it has lots of photos about the top-line. A good saying would be "no top-line no dressage."

chambon's main purpose is to train the top-line to stretch. Side-reins, the most popular training tool, if used properly, will develop the top-line (longitudinal balance) plus lateral balance (keeping the horse straight side to side) and train the horse to give at the poll, soften at the jaw, and accept being on the bit. Side-reins are the preferable and most common training aid used to train the horse. However, each training aid has a purpose and knowing how each training aid is used to develop the horse is a valuable learning experience for all equestrians to learn.

During the clinic, it was explained why the top-line of the horse is important. Some horses come with good top-lines such as most warmbloods, but maybe an owner has an off the track thoroughbred where the top line may need developed. The top-line is the back muscles that connect the horse from back to front to lift and carry the rider. As it was pointed out by Kristin, first we train the horse to stretch down and round in order to develop the top-line and locomotion muscles to carry the rider (Training Level) and then we train the horse to step under and up using exercises like lateral work. (First Level on up.)

Using side-reins or the chambon should never be attempted by a novice who is not comfortable with lunging a horse. Placing side-reins on the horse can be a touchy situation and one must be sure not to over face the horse. That means placing any of the training tools on too tight too fast. Horses do not particularly like being boxed in, they get claustrophobic quickly. So gradually allowing them to accept the pressure of these training aids is highly recommended. If there is any doubt about lunging, ask your trainer, Kristin cautioned.



Horse to right is straight with side-reins, middle horse is 'popping its shoulder and not straight,' the horse on left is counter bent on the lunge line.

The illustration above of the lunging horse shows how lunging in side-reins keeps the horse's shoulders in alignment with the haunches. This, of course, helps to train the horse's lateral and longitudinal balance. Learning to use side reins for lunging will assist all aspiring dressage rider that have a problem keeping his or her horse straight or controlling the horse's shoulders? To help train balance in the horse, Kristin recommended lunging the horse after you acquired the skill, in side-reins at least twice a week, or as a warm up prior to riding. "If a rider lunges the horse at least seven minutes in side-reins, in each direction prior to mounting, I



suspect she will have an easier time getting the horse on the aids and giving to the bit. The side-reins train the horse, now it is up to the rider to learn how to apply her three natural aids to keep the horse soft at the poll and straight back to front,” stated Kristin.

Part two of the clinic was on the Three Natural Aids, how they are positioned on the horse and how they work to influence the ring of muscles of the horse. Several of the participants mounted, and Kristin worked to position their aids - legs, seat and hands. Handouts were provided illustrating a good position, and she shared another article she wrote that was also published in the USDF Bulletin in the eighties “Fundamentals of Basic Position.” Here is the link: <http://blythdale.tripod.com/coventryequestriancenter/id18.html>.

The basics of riding position have not changed over the years and are the same whether riding hunt seat, dressage, or western. Alignment of the ear, shoulder, hip and ankle keep the rider in balance with the horse enabling the rider to go with the horse and not ride behind the action. (See printout above.) She explained the ‘neutral pelvis’ and illustrated that only if your pelvis or seat is correctly positioned with the rider on the sitting bones and not the tailbone (which causes the back to round) will the rider’s limbs (arms and legs) be positioned correctly. All these basic position faults and corrections were illustrated.

Kristin explained that if a rider can maintain jumping position without using the hands on the horse’s neck for balance then the rider will have a good balance and be able to use the reins independent of the body. Also, practicing jumping position with no hands helps to develop good shock absorption in the hip, knees and ankles for going with the movement of the horse. The joints of the rider are supposed to work like hinges, and not grip. Gripping with the legs inhibits the rider from flowing with the horse. The

### BODY MECHANICS

In a standing position (Figure 1), the ideal Vertical Gravity Line passes

- through the ear lobe
- through the tip of the shoulder
- through the hip joint
- behind the knee cap
- in front of the ankle joint

The ideal Vertical Gravity Line of the balanced riding seat (as in Figure 1A) also passes through the ear lobe, tip of the shoulder and hip joint. However, the flexed position of the hip, knee and ankle brings the Vertical Gravity Line (or weight line) behind the ankle joint and through the heel.

The Center of Gravity of the human body is located within the pelvis, approximately two inches below the navel (Figure 2). Its location is influenced by the body build and weight of the various body parts. The body continually reacts to maintain its gravitational center.

The Base of Support in a standing position is determined by the size of the feet and the distance between them (Figure 2). One can reduce the Base of Support to a minimum by standing on the toes of one foot, thereby requiring the body to perform a coordinated effort to maintain balance. One can increase the Base of Support to maximum stability by spreading the feet apart. In the ideally balanced riding seat, the Base of Support is provided by the two seat bones, the inner thigh and the balls of the feet (as in Figure 3). This base offers a good stable position from which to contend with the forward motion of the horse.

### STANDING POSTURE SKELETAL ANALYSIS




Figure 1

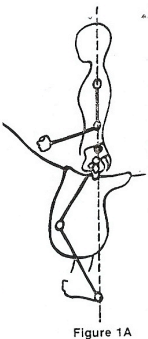


Figure 1A

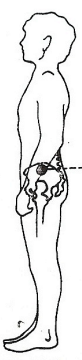


Figure 2




Figure 3

#### INCORRECT

Analysis:

1. Increased upper back curve, decreased low back curve
2. Pelvis tilted back
3. Incorrect Vertical Gravity Line, head and shoulders forward, upper trunk rounded back

**CORRECTIONS:**

Correcting the head and shoulder position usually corrects the flat back and returns the pelvis to a correct neutral position.

#### INCORRECT

Analysis:

1. Increased curve in low back area, decreased curve in upper back
2. Pelvis tilted forward
3. Forward Vertical Gravity Line upper body and head shifted back to compensate

**CORRECTIONS:**

Tilting the pelvis back to the correct neutral position will also correct arching in low back area, and usually corrects the Vertical Gravity Line.

FROM 'BODY MECHANICS OF A CORRECT RIDER'  
USDF PUBLICATION 1983

rider should be relaxed enough to feel the horse's rhythm, go with its movement but not sit like an unstructured sack of potatoes. The rider has to be able to feel and listen to the horse as well as aid or signal the horse in timing with the horse's rhythm. Kristin also taught the riders how to use their rein aids with clarity using something as simple as an 'opening rein.' Riding with clarity and not muddling the aids with unclear signals is a gift to the horse and makes for a harmonious communication between horse and rider.

Mastering all of this certainly cannot be accomplished in one clinic. A rider with a good basic position will talk to and signal the horse clearly. "It is like learning how to play a musical instrument," Kristin explained. "At first a rider needs to learn the scale of the notes or where to put the aids then as she learns how to use them to play the horse, at first being out of tune, she will eventually, with perfect practice, be playing the instrument, the horse, in tune and harmony!"

Lunging is a vital part of the rider and horse's education and training. Knowing how to lunge and use training tools will accelerate the sometimes frustrating journey of training of the horse. Being able to better acquire the Fundamentals of Basic Riding Position and understanding how the aids work to influence the horse and where and how they should be positioned is helpful for all aspiring riders. Lunging and riding correctly will benefit the training of all horses and riders.

To schedule a similar clinic at your barn, contact Kristin from her web site [www.CoventryEquestrianCenter.com](http://www.CoventryEquestrianCenter.com). Kristin has been training horses and riders for over thirty years and teaching still remains a passion. This year she ranked 203 out of thousands of USDF professional and amateur dressage riders in the United States. As an AARP member, who has not shown in 23 years, Kristin is very proud of her 2012 accomplishments with her Spanish Norman horse, Bracchus. Also, in 2012 Brach and Kristin were the USDF ALL Breed winners for the Spanish Norman Registry. In 1989, 23 years ago, Kristin was USDF Region 1 Champion at Training Level.