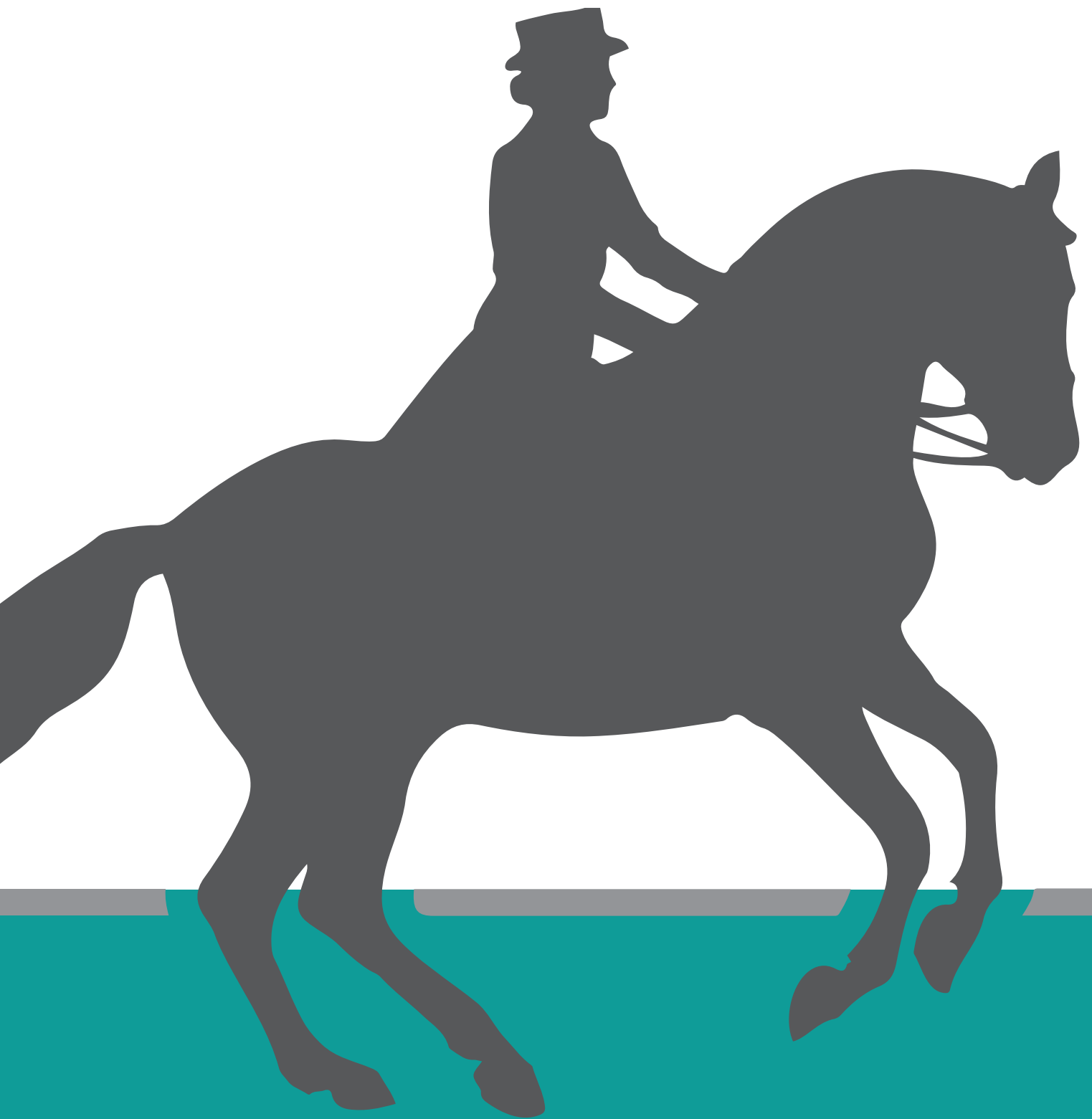


RITTER



DRESSAGE



Arena GPS  
*Canter Special*



## **Welcome to the Arena GPS** ***Canter Special***

Since many riders and their horses find the canter rather challenging, we have decided to put together a canter special edition of the Arena GPS. It contains a mixture of previously unreleased, brand new exercises and a few exercises that are scattered throughout earlier Arena GPS editions that we have included here to make them easier to find.

**We have sorted the exercises into three different chapters:**

- Exercises to prepare and improve the canter depart
- Exercises that you can ride in the canter itself in order to improve the quality of the gait
- Exercises for practicing the counter canter

Exercises that you can use for training the flying changes or the canter pirouettes are not included here. They will be the subject of later Arena GPS special editions

A comprehensive theoretical discussion of canter work would also go beyond the scope of this Arena GPS edition. However, we offer online courses on the canter and the flying changes on a regular basis. You automatically receive information about all current courses when you subscribe to our e-mail list [www.artisticdressage/courses](http://www.artisticdressage/courses).

I would like to preface the practical exercises in the main part of this Arena GPS edition with a few check lists that answer some of the most frequently asked questions and may help you decide whether it makes sense to do serious canter work with your horse yet, or if you need to do more preparatory work before he is able to canter well. These lists also provide a certain theoretical framework for analysing your canter issues and choosing or building suitable exercises.

## Check List: Prerequisites For A Good Canter

- The horse is well balanced at the walk and trot
- The horse moves through his back
- The horse is on the bit
- The horse is relatively straight
- Half halts go through
- You can turn the horse's shoulders
- The hind legs are able to cross

## Check List: When Does It Make Sense To Canter?

### You can start canter work

- when the horse is well balanced in the walk and trot
- when the horse is on the bit and through the back
- when the horse is able to shift his weight from one side to the other
- when the half halts go through
- when the horse is familiar with leg yielding
- The horse should be able to perform a turn on the forehand in motion
- The horse should have started working on turns on the haunches
- It's a big advantage if the horse is familiar with the shoulder-in

The movements mentioned above don't need to be perfect by any means, but the horse should be familiar with them in principle and possess a "working knowledge" of them. The better the horse is able to perform them, the easier and better the canter depart will be. Horses with a good natural canter need much less careful preparation than horses with a poor, flat, scratchy canter. The better the natural canter is, the sooner you can begin working in



the canter. The poorer the natural canter is, the more time and effort it will take to prepare the horse. In extreme cases it can be best to teach the horse trot half passes and piaffe before starting the canter work.

### **It's better not to canter, if...**

- the horse is on the forehand
- the horse is above the bit
- the horse is rushing in the trot
- the horse is very crooked
- the horse is very stiff or tense
- you can't transfer the weight onto the hind leg that is going to be the outside one in the canter
- the half halts don't go through

If these factors are present, the chances for a good, round, uphill canter depart are drastically reduced. In that case it is better to eliminate these problems in the walk and trot before asking for the canter. As the old masters used to say "The trot work develops the canter."

By the same token, it is more efficient and more pleasant for the horse and the rider to return to the walk or trot if the quality of the canter deteriorates too much as a result of the horse falling onto the forehand, getting crooked, becoming rushy, leaning heavily onto the bit, curling up, or inverting.

When the quality of the canter deteriorates, you can try for 3-6 canter strides to save the situation and to fix the problem in the canter itself. However, with each canter stride in poor quality the chances of a successful correction within the canter are lowered. There is usually a "point of no return" where the quality has deteriorated so much that it is clearly too late, and the rider has no choice but to return to a lower gait.

## Check List: Qualities Of A Good Canter

- A good uphill canter feels like UP – 2 - 3.
- The canter motion contains an up-and-down component and a forward-backward component. In the uphill canter, the upward motion the rider feels in her pelvis is the dominant one.
- The croup stays lowered, and the withers rise above the croup.
- The haunches flex enough under the horse's body, so that the rider's torso stays straight and quiet and is merely lifted by the horse's back.
- A good canter is almost noiseless because the supple joints of the hind legs absorb the impact when they touch down.
- Even in high collection the canter feels like a series of little jumps.
- When the degree of collection is smaller (so-called Campagne School canter), it is a clear three beat rhythm (OH, IH + OF, IF, suspension phase)
- When the degree of collection is very high, the IH touches down slightly before the OF (so-called school canter, pirouette canter).

## Check List: Qualities Of A Poor Canter

- A poor downhill canter feels like 1 – 2 – DOWN.
- The dominant movement the rider feels in her pelvis is the forward motion.
- The withers stay down, while the croup is raised above the withers.
- The hind legs often stay far behind the horse's body.
- When the canter movement rocks the rider's shoulders forward and backward, the hind legs are stiff and unflexed so that the rider gets tossed forward with every stride.
- The footfall is often very loud because the stiff legs touch down very hard.
- The three beat rhythm is compromised; for instance, if the outside front leg touches down before the inside hind leg, if the lateral pairs of legs are synchronized in a lateral canter, or if the front legs are trotting while the hind legs are cantering, or vice versa.

# The Canter Depart

The outside hind leg lifts the horse into the canter. The farther it steps underneath the body before the depart and the more it flexes its joints, the rounder and more uphill the canter will be. It makes sense, therefore, to think of exercises that transfer the weight onto the hind leg that will be the outside one in the canter depart. It is often most effective to engage this hind leg through a lateral movement first and then to flex it like a spring by riding a turn or half halting. The canter depart then feels like releasing the spring. These principles structure many of the exercises in this Arena GPS edition.



## Down Transitions Canter - Trot

In the tradition of the old Spanish Riding School you ask for the canter - trot transition at the highest point of the canter stride, when the outside hind leg is on the ground. This increases the chances of maintaining an uphill balance during the transition. You execute the transition by applying three half halts in three consecutive canter strides. The half halts can be supported by stepping into the outside stirrup. On young horses you can half halt into the inside front leg for the trot transition if the outside hind leg is not yet strong enough to support the weight in the transition. In this case, you step into the inside stirrup at the lowest point of the movement while simultaneously half halting on the outside rein. Three half halts in three consecutive canter strides bring the horse back to the trot. These half halts unite the secondary diagonal (inside front leg + outside hind leg) that touches down separately in the canter, which creates the transition into the trot.

# Transition Canter - Walk/Halt

In the tradition of the old Spanish Riding School, the transition from canter to walk or halt is ridden into the inside hind leg, which means that you half halt when the inside hind leg is on the ground. The rider feels this moment when her pelvis is pulled forward in the saddle by the motion of the canter stride. As an aid you can use a stirrup pressure into the inside stirrup together with a half halt on the outside rein that is repeated in three consecutive canter strides. These half halts can be amplified by closing your thighs and knees and keeping them closed. If the horse's back is stable enough and the hind legs are flexible enough, you can also apply a downward pressure with your pelvic floor to hold the inside hind leg on the ground with your weight, so that trot or canter strides become impossible.

# Lengthening The Stride In Canter

The aid for lengthening the stride is a seat aid, not a leg aid, since the effect of the lower leg is to ask the hind leg on the same side to lift off sooner or faster. Lengthening the stride, on the other hand, means that the grounded hind leg has to push more. A suitable aid for this is a forward pressure of the rider's back muscles, perhaps supported by a short forward impulse of both thighs and knees. A prolonged pressure of both thighs tends to have a slowing down effect, whereas a quick impulse can have an invigorating effect. In the canter you can apply this driving seat aid either when your pelvis is pulled forward (i.w. when the inside hind leg has touched down), or at the highest point of the canter stride (i.e. when the outside hind leg is on the ground). Driving when the seat is pulled forward can push the horse onto the forehand. Driving when the withers come up makes it easier to maintain an uphill canter.

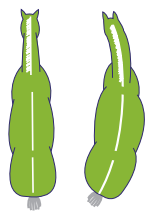
# Returning From The Medium Canter

Returning from the medium canter or the extended canter to a more collected canter is often more difficult than lengthening. The danger here is that the rider tries to slow the horse down by holding him back with the reins, which brings the horse onto the forehand, blocks the hind legs, and destroys the horse's permeability. You can avoid these mistakes by lifting the forehand with your seat so that the thrust of the hind legs is redirected from a horizontal more and more into a vertical direction. Then you half halt with your outside rein at the highest point of the canter stride accompanied by a stirrup pressure into the outside stirrup. On the stiffer side it sometimes makes sense to use the inside rein toward the outside hind leg instead to prevent the horse's shoulder from escaping toward the inside. In between half halts you can activate the hind legs with your calves, if necessary, so that the horse doesn't break from the canter to the trot or walk.

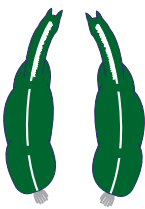
# Legend



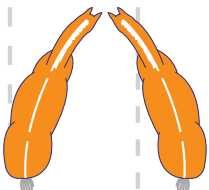
**Red and blue lines:**  
they show the line of travel.



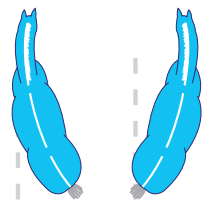
**Green horse:**  
the green straight and bent horses show the horse going forward or backward.



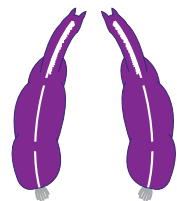
**Dark green horse:**  
shows the horse in sidestepping exercises, turn on the forehand and turn on the haunches.



**Orange horse:** shows the horse in shoulder-in/counter shoulder-in.



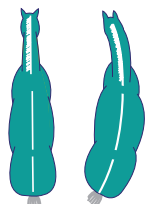
**Light blue horse:**  
shows the horse in haunches-in (travers)/renvers.



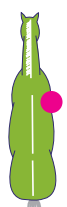
**Purple horse:**  
shows the horse in the half pass.



**Pink horse:**  
shows the horse in a pirouette, passade.



**Turquoise horse:** shows the horse in the canter.



**Magenta dot:**  
shows a stirrup step when the corresponding leg is on the ground.

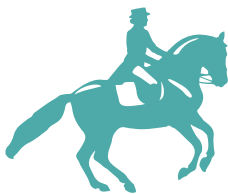


**Magenta line:**  
shows a half-halt or rein aid.

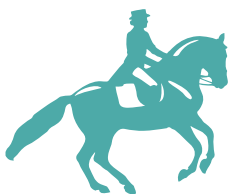
**Magenta Squares:**  
Indicates a driving leg aid.



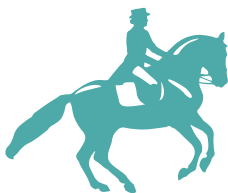
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