

## The Elusive Flying Change By John Smith

Probably the most misunderstood, easy to mess up, overly ridden movement out there.

Recently I have had to help a huge range of different horses within a diverse range of breeds to learn or correct the flying change. And all of them have boiled down to the same thing. Lack of lateral suppleness and ineffective response to the leg aid.

Here is an effective brain dead easy way to fix a disunited or non existent flying change, but by no means the only way to teach the change.

What a lot of riders are allowing is the ineffective listening to their aids. They ask for something and their horse responds a year later. Make no mistake, this is not the horses problem, but that of the rider and trainer for not insisting that the horse is A: paying attention to the rider and B: reacting when asked a question or for a response. This is of course something that has to be taught from day one and kept up with consistency from the rider. If you as a rider have allowed the horse to lose focus while riding or have allowed him/her to respond to an aid five strides after you have given the aid, then the chances of a flying change has crept further and further down the rd.

Ok now that we are on the same page and you sleepy riders have been chasticized, lets get to the solutions.

First and foremost we start at the walk. What I like to do is test the leg response on a turn on the forehand continuously. Ask for the turn by pushing the quarters out with the leg on a one-meter circle. Slowly ask for an increased reaction by tapping the horse with the whip on the side of the quarters till he/she starts to trot by throwing the quarters out quicker and quicker. This must be done on both reigns.

Next we move to a leg yield in the walk with as little flexion as possible, making sure that our lateral aid is Effective. If the horse is staying balanced we can move to a Zig Zag leg yield from one direction to the other, making sure the horse is changing direction in ONE stride from one to the other. To help the rider achieve this, make sure the horse is coming Off the new outside rein when changing direction and thus coming off the new outside leg. If this is going well, you can smile be proud of yourself as you are half way their.

Moving to the canter...

The most important part of the horse learning the change is if the canter is balanced. There is no point in asking, if when asking for the canter the horse goes from 0 to 100 in 3.2 sec and keeps accelerating. This might help when drag racing your friends bakkie or new BMW but not when getting ready for the change. It also doesn't help if while in the canter you are unable to keep him\her in a good rhythm with a little impulsion or 'sit'.

If the horse is able to do a balanced canter and you have prepped him/her in the walk with the above mentioned exercises then the change will come quite easily for the horse. Keeping the canter together and with some 'sit' ask for a

short leg yield and then change leg yield direction.  
IF the prep was done correctly the flying change will come automatically as part of the movement from one side to the next.  
But if you have over thought it like most riders do then the horse probably did nothing or tried to bolt with you as you tried to throw him/her off balance and only thought of the change and Not the new leg yield.

This is one of those times that you as rider must pretend to be Buddha and have an UUUOOOOHHHHHHMMMMMM moment and clear that over thinking brain. Don't try and ride a change, instead focus on the reaction of moving the lateral from one side to the other and the change will be a BY product of the movement. When the horse is consistently off the leg and achieving the change every time you ask for the lateral change of direction you can work on the individual flying change and get it straighter and with more impulsion.

Now onto BREED reaction. Yes Breed reaction, as many breed types have different problems athletically. Your smaller lighter boerperd, arab, saddler types will gently skip under and change. You will ask yourself what was all the fuss about. Your Iberian probably will veer violently from one direction to the other almost leaving you in the dust next to him/her, with no thought of a problem with the change and all the time wondering where is this invisible bull that you assume is there.

The Friesian has out of all of them a misunderstood reaction. On changing lateral balance he/she will most definitely give you what you might think is an enormous buck in defiance, but the truth is that because they are tighter in the stifle they need more room or Airtime to allow the back legs to come through and change. Hence the buck or croup high change. It takes the Friesian a considerable amount of time to develop the suppleness in the loin to just lift the forehead a little and take a slightly larger stride for the change to happen easily.

The newer lighter warmblood tend not to have a problem at all and will happily comply with an easy change.

The older heavier type warmblood might just react with a huge leap, making you think you just entered an open cross country course. If this is the case then go back to getting the canter stride shorter, but be careful not to allow the rhythm to slow as you shorten the canter stride as this will defeat the purpose and the horse will not have enough impulsion to complete the change.

Hope this has given you some idea on fixing any current problems you might have..... Happy Riding