

# DEVELOPING YOUR RIDING SKILLS

By Khaled Assem

A RIDER WILL FEEL MORE AT EASE IN THE SADDLE ONCE HIS BASICS ARE STRONG AND INTACT, A SUPPLE AND CORRECT CENTRE OF GRAVITY LEADING TO A SUPPLE BALANCED RIDER, A GOOD POSITION WILL DRIVE MORE EFFECTIVENESS BECAUSE THE RIDER WILL COORDINATE HIS LEG AND REIN AIDS INDEPENDENTLY AND EVENLY.

AS THE RIDER DEVELOPS HIS FEEL FOR THE MOVEMENT OF THE HORSE AND HIS STATE OF MIND, HIS RIDING SKILLS WILL DEVELOP PROGRESSIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY.

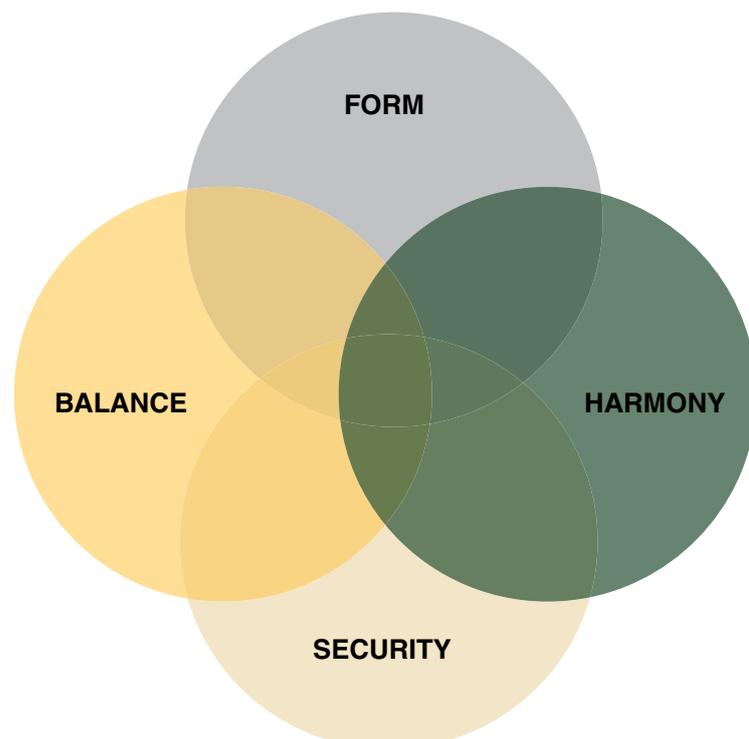
## ACHIEVING A GOOD POSITION:

**Maintaining balance:** A balanced position allows you to ride without gripping tightly or using great strength. It also leaves your legs and arms free to signal effectively to the horse. As the stirrup leathers are shortened for jumping and cross country, your weight will be concentrated more through the legs.



**Staying secure:** Good balance and harmony, combined with keeping your lower leg in a consistent position, will aid your security in the saddle. It takes well-toned muscles

to hold a good position for long periods, so building your strength and stamina will help you to remain secure as well as keep an even rein contact.



**Keeping a good shape:** Form refers to the shape of the rider's position – the body, legs, arms, hands, and fingers. Every activity requires a slightly different form, but a neutral alignment of the spine is essential for all. This allows greater control and ease of movement as well as efficient breathing.

**Moving with the horse:** You must be in harmony with your horse if he is to respond to your aids without his movement being restricted. Your legs should go with the movement of the horse's sides, your seat with the horse's back, and your hands with the horse's mouth. This takes physical flexibility and supple joints.

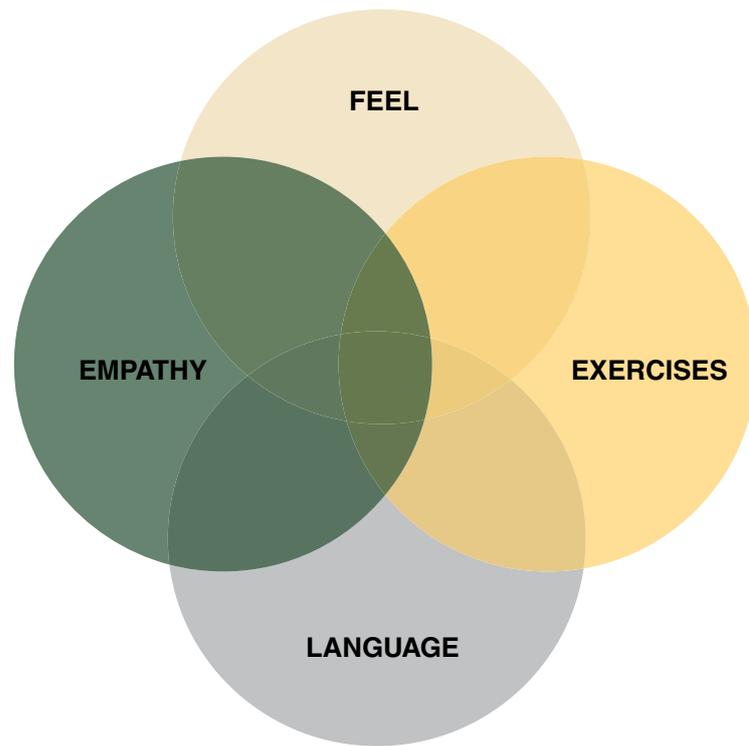
### BECOMING MORE EFFECTIVE:

**Understanding your horse:** Empathy means being in tune with your horse so that he will perform with confidence and ease. Try to see your surroundings from your horse's perspective, and be aware of his state of mind so you can anticipate his reactions. A sound working knowledge of equine psychology and physiology is necessary if maximum progress is to be made.

**Good communication:** To communicate with your horse you use the voice, legs, and hands, as well as your weight. This language can invite, encourage, persuade, or at times, demand that the horse does any of a multitude of exercises, according to his abilities and the courage of both horse and rider. Gradual refinement of his language will improve your partnership with your horse.

**Being aware of your horse's movement:** To do the right thing at the right time, you need to be able to physically feel what the horse is doing so that you can move in harmony with him. Practical experience gained from riding different horses and doing different activities will help you develop feel.

**Doing exercises:** As you progress, you will do an increasing range of exercises in training and competition. At each level, an understanding



of the purpose and relationship of these exercises, including their advantages and disadvantages, is essential if you are to achieve your full riding potential while developing your horse humanely.

At this stage, effectiveness becomes a major factor that the rider has to incorporate in his plan.

### PHYSICAL EFFECTIVENESS:

As the rider develops he gains better feel of the movement, speed and balance of his horse. He is able to identify the strengths and deficiencies of his horse and accordingly he could choose the more suitable and complimenting type of exercise. The rider could incorporate exercises to elongate the pace, develop transitions, add more agility through various forms of gymnastics, create more precision with straightness and bends and eventually grow more in tune with his horse and his own abilities and skills.

### MENTAL EFFECTIVENESS:

Riding is like a complete picture that needs more feel to it and this is successfully attained when

the rider has an open mind to details. Successful riding needs as much positive mental attitude as everything else, it needs self control and discipline to achieve your goals and get the most of your horse.

Being mentally ready and able is about identifying your goals and creating short and long term plans, accessing situations well and being flexible to change. Yet it's mostly about setting a routine and working on polishing and refining it every day. It is about being observant, compassionate and able to cope with imperfections. Mental effectiveness is in itself a plan, not just for riding but for life in general reflected through riding. 

*Reference:  
Complete Horse Riding Manual*

*About the author:  
Khaled Assem is a certified Level 2 FEI trainer. He has been training for 15 years, competing internationally for 10 years and locally for 25 years.*