

March/April 2011 Issue #11

# THE COMPETITIVE EQUESTRIAN

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# The Dressage Training Pyramid to Develop Hunters and Jumpers Part II

## Impulsion, Straightness, and Collection

By Greg Franklin

The Dressage Pyramid is an excellent training tool for hunters and jumpers with its roots in classical dressage. It is a basic visual aid that can be used when schooling young horses, flattening a more experienced horse, or teaching all levels of riders from beginner to advanced.

In the first part of this series, I discussed the base of the pyramid focusing on Rhythm, Relaxation, and Connection. In the second part of our series, I will be talking about the final three phases of the Dressage Pyramid: Impulsion, Straightness, and Collection. For the purposes of training the hunter or jumper, we are not looking at these movements for competition dressage, but rather as ways of schooling the horse so it has impulsion, goes straight, and has self-carriage.

**Impulsion:** Impulsion is the fourth level of the Dressage Pyramid. The definition of impulsion for our purposes is “The horse thinking forward” or “The horse’s desire to go forward.” Impulsion should not be confused with speed. One can be going quite fast with minimal impulsion, as well as have a tremendous amount of impulsion at the walk. Impulsion starts with the brain of the horse, not the legs.

Along with the other parts of the Pyramid, impulsion takes time. It starts at the walk. A horse that does not think forward at the walk will not be able to do it at the other two gaits. One of the ways I like to work on impulsion is doing transitions within a gate, or more simply put, collecting and lengthening. As the horse progresses, circles, figures of eight, and lateral work can also aid in creating impulsion with the horse.

**Straightness:** The fifth level of the Dressage Pyramid is Straightness. This focuses on the longitudinal axis of the horse. The horse is traveling straight when the inside hind leg follows behind the inside front leg, and the outside hind leg follows behind the outside front leg, whether the horse is on a curve or a straight line.

Straightness, like most things with horses, is an ongoing process. Horses, like people, have a dominant side, so it is naturally easier



Impulsion starts with the brain of the horse, not the legs. Photo by Collin Pierson Photography

for them to go one way. Also, the horse is wider in the hindquarters than it is in the front. This can lead to a horse being crooked. A crooked horse will put more wear and tear on its legs as more weight will be put on a particular leg.

We teach horses to go straight by teaching them to bend to the left and to bend to the right, not by making the horse go in a straight line. Exercises that I like to use for this are circles, figures of eight, serpentines, shoulder-in, Travers, Renvers, and even counter-canter.

**Collection:** At the very top of the Pyramid we have Collection. When the horse is collected, he will shift his weight from the front end to the hindquarter and the horse’s poll will become the highest point while the horse achieves flexion at the jaw and the poll. This creates a horse with uphill balance, which we prefer.

When talking about the different exercises in collections, we must differentiate between collecting



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The horse is traveling straight when the inside hind leg follows behind the inside front leg, and the outside hind leg follows behind the outside front leg. Photo by Jump Media

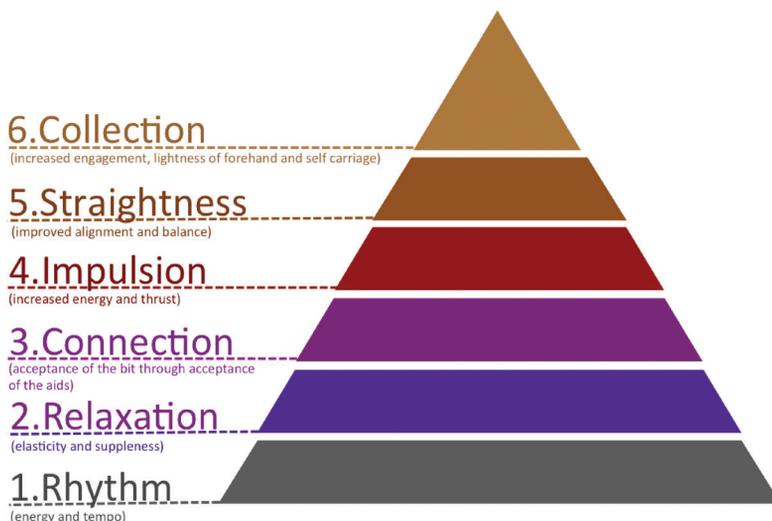
exercises and collected exercises. The main difference is the balance of the horse. In collecting exercises, the balance of the horse is lower to let the horse use his back more, while in collected exercises, the poll is the highest point of the horse while the horse has self-carriage.

Collecting exercises can include any exercise that helps the horse shift its weight from front to back, such as a half-halt, rein-back or shoulder-in. Collected exercises can be collected variations at each gait, including collected walk, collected trot, and collected canter, along with some upper level dressage movements, such as piaffe, passage, and canter pirouettes.

I hope after reading this, you too can see the value in following the Dressage Pyramid. Whether you are riding in the Adult Hunters, Big Equitation, or Grand Prix Show Jumping, you and your horse can benefit from following these techniques.



Collection creates a horse with uphill balance, which we prefer. Photo by Jump Media



### About Greg Franklin

Greg Franklin is the head trainer at Canterbury Farm in Hampshire, IL. For over 35 years, Franklin has ridden hunters and jumpers to numerous championships nationally and has brought home numerous Zone 5 'Horse of the Year' awards. Franklin has qualified horses and riders for the Pennsylvania National, Washington International and the National Horse Shows including the Medal and Maclay Finals. He has also shown internationally at Canada's Spruce Meadows in the 1.40m and 1.45m divisions and is a certified trainer with USHJA. Additionally, Franklin holds his 'R' card in Hunters, Hunter Seat Equitation, and Jumpers, and judges throughout the country. For more information, visit [www.canterburyfarmchicago.com](http://www.canterburyfarmchicago.com).

