



The Driving Rein

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The driving rein is a schooling tool used for training students how to properly follow the horse's mouth over fences. In classical riding it is encouraged and rewarded when the release in the air follows the direction of the reins to the horse's mouth alongside the horse's neck – not on the top of the mane (known as the crest release). I really like using the driving rein technique when teaching students how to jump, as it properly teaches the riders to follow the horse's mouth and maintain proper balance when jumping.

How To Do It:

Turn your hands over on the reins so that your thumb and index fingers are holding the reins and are pointing towards the horse's mouth. Allow the slack of the reins to go through your palm and down the side of the horse's neck. This will look similar to how a driver in-hand controlling a team of horses will hold their reins.

On The Flat:

With the driving rein, practice transitions, steering and going over poles at the walk, trot and canter.

Over Fences:

Since the rider will feel slightly out of sorts holding their reins this way, allow them to practice jumping first through a gymnastic. The gymnastic will allow the rider to mainly focus on their position and balance. A trot-in gymnastic usually works best to manage control.

The Gymnastic:

Set the gymnastic down the centerline of your arena so you may approach it from both the right and left. Set 3 trot poles approximately 3'6" feet apart. Set a cross rail 9' away, with no ground line. From there, measure 18' (1 stride) to a small vertical, followed by 21' (1 stride) to one final vertical, each with a ground line on the front. After the last vertical, place a landing pole 10' away. Distances should be adjusted so that each horse can comfortably go through the exercise. The maximum height of the fences should not exceed the horse/rider competition height.

The Goal:

As the horse and rider go through the gymnastic, encourage the rider to follow the horse's mouth with their arm. To do so the rider must be well balanced in their heel, with slight contact from the calf through the thigh on the horse's side and saddle. The rider's seat should be off the horse's back, in the two-point position. The hip angle should remain closed with a flat back while maintaining an eye level that is forward and parallel to the ground. As the horse jumps through the gymnastic, the rider will feel the horse pull gently on the reins, and in response, the rider should follow the contact towards the bit. In doing so, the rider should slightly lower their hand and allow the arm to go forward. Practice this a few times, gradually increasing the fence height, as the increased height will further demonstrate this training technique. Once the rider feels comfortable have them try the release holding their reins the proper way.

The Result:

The rider is now properly following the horse's mouth over fences and thus allows the horse to jump to the best of its ability.



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Continued Training:

Once a rider is comfortable using the driving rein it can be used as a training tool in all aspects of riding. Use of the driving rein in transitions is always beneficial. Also, using the driving rein on course helps to teach the rider how to properly release on course and in the show ring.