

George Morris,
Clinic 2007, Chilliwack, BC

George Morris is a long-time member of the USET, an Olympic medalist, coach of Olympic medalists, columnist for 'Practical Horseman', developer of the American System of jumping, and author of the classic text Hunter Seat Equitation.

The American System of Jumping

The American System of Jumping emphasizes *riding with the motion*.
Riders must **produce impulsion from the leg, not the seat**. The seat **reinforces** the leg.
The stick is the strongest lesson to reinforce the leg; the spur is less strong.

Position determines function; if the position is flawed, the function will be flawed.

Riders need to use a flatwork seat to school.

The **knee should be at a 110 degree angle**.

Many riders mistake speed for impulsion:

Speed for walk should be 4 mph

Trot 8 mph

Canter 10-12 mph

Hand gallop 16 mph

Posting with the motion – 30 degrees in front of the vertical – is correct.

Posting behind the motion can be correct in some limited situations

Posting ahead of the motion can never be correct.

Let the fences teach your horse (**use lost of poles and gymnastics**).

Use a system of low jumps:

- *teach them to do it right*
 - o continue with that until it is completely right
 - - **what's important is not the height of the jump, it's the technique**

Self carriage is the ultimate goal.

- have the horse carry you

Don't hit a horse that has animation (that's fussy) – hit a horse when he stops.

Q and A

Hangers: hangers are not good for hunters; better for jumpers (they'll often overjump)

- if you have a hanger, you must be careful and ride to a particular distance
- a more experienced horse can be schooled without ground rails to improve his form

George prefers a horse to be good behind; you can do lots to help the front end, not a lot for the hind end.

- use a slightly wider square oxer, or a rampy oxer. Hope for a rub in your warm up so the horse is more careful in the course.
- There are new, weighted, tall, stiff boots that one can put on a horse to improve this problem

Jumping ahead of the motion: the continental style is to ride behind the motion. That is a 'warmblood problem'.

- 'with the motion' riding: the Germans and Dutch are now riding with the motion (although they wouldn't admit it!) due to the addition of thoroughbred blood to the warmbloods.
- **You must ride according to the horse** and the situation (never ride ahead of the horse; with and behind are okay)

Being nervous: George is always nervous. He's nervous before he rides, before he shows, and before he teaches. Having a little mental fear will allow you to do better, and encourage you to try harder.

- if nervousness is a problem, expose yourself/your horse to many different situations

Riding emphasizes backwardness more now. Rings are smaller. The forward system is based on impulsion.

Hands and Reins: The 'American disease' is 'inside rein-it is' – George claims to be to blame for this, as he has emphasized the dominant inside rein.

- George Morris has stressed the indirect rein for use in corners to get horse off the shoulder/prevent it from falling in
- He has neglected the outside rein, which is used to keep the horse on the rail and to make transitions
- George Morris has stressed the use of the crest release
- Lately he notices that the automatic release is being neglected by young/upcoming riders. He considers this a bad thing.
- inside rein and outside leg create a diagonal frame
- use half halts to check and rebalance
- to lengthen a horse, maintain contact with the hands
 - o a loose horse (one with no contact) will back off and set himself (chip)

What to do with a horse with Big Ability who is a chicken:

- needs a good rider, someone who's accurate
 - o good, accurate eye
 - o strong leg
 - o balance
 - o be gradual and progressive in your training
- timing is everything
- a bad spot will result in a loss of confidence for the horse

The Apprentice System:

- George lamented the loss of the apprentice system in the USA
- You should be paying for knowledge
- Problems can be fixed using someone with a long-term education
- Most young professionals don't know their stable management

The Pony Club Manual

- George is currently re-reading the latest edition of the Pony Club Manual (US version by Susan Harris)
- He said that most young professionals don't know enough of what's in the Pony Club Manual

Releases:

- the best reference book is Gordon Wright's Learning to Ride, Hunt and How (now out of print, but you can get it on the internet)
- **Long release:**
 - o **Elementary release:** the *hands are resting half way up the horse's crest*
 - Used by professionals riding hunters
 - Used on green horses
 - Beginners need to use this release
- **Short release:**
 - o Intermediate release: the *hands are resting on the crest* just in front of the withers
 - Used by the advanced rider who has more control
 - Gives freedom to the horse
 - Gives upper body support
- **Automatic release:**
 - o For use only by advanced riders
 - o George Morris has noticed that this release has been neglected lately by young riders
 - It gives no support to the rider
 - Must have a *straight line from the hand to the mouth*
 - Contact is required (no loose rein)
 - For use when turning in the air, especially in jumper classes

Aptitude and Attitude

- for a horse, rider or trainer: if you have to choose, take attitude
 - o he cited both himself and Norman Dello Joio as riders who lack some aptitude but made up for it in attitude
- today, to get to the top of a sport, you still will need 80-90%ile aptitude (as well as attitude)
- George Morris claims that he does not have aptitude; he has attitude. He is a life-long learner (at another point in the clinic, he encouraged people to read lots of books; said that watching a DVD is too fleeting).
- **Knowledge is the trump card**

Hunters:

- showing hunters today – hunters are a beauty contest
 - o look for an appealing head, attractive topline.
 - flashy is good!
 - o Then: beauty is as beauty does
 - The horse has to move/stroke well
 - Be tight and square in front over his fences

Chronic Cross Canterer (disunited):

- don't buy it.
- You need a horse with a natural canter

Don't buy a problem horse: you can buy the perfect horse and he will still develop a problem.

- buy a good horse, don't buy problems.
- Then take beautiful care of him.

Late behind with changes: *turn on forehand* is the initial lesson to range the haunch. Use a subtle aid (one hand's breadth). Laterally move – the 1st exercise for flying change. Keep neck straight.

- leg yield, travers, renvers at walk and trot
- simple changes on the rail
- counter canter
 - o these get the horse lighter to the leg
 - o most people neglect the leg. George Morris overestimates the leg because everyone underestimates the leg.

George Morris has a French training background (dressage).

Starting horses:

- back a horse late in its 2 year old year. Work for about 10 days
- turn out for about 5 months.
- As a 3 year old, start over poles, crosses, 2' fences 1-2 times a week.
- In August, turn out until next spring
- Europeans will loose jump their young horses to look for/at the jumping mechanism
- Young horses should go to very, very few shows; **you shouldn't show 4 year olds much**
- Regarding concussion, **consider a 5 year old as a baby still**
- A horse's prime years are 8 to 12
- **The better the horse, the slower you should go.** Anything else is exploitation. *Protect the talent.*
- *A good horse lasts to the back end of his career because of what you did not do at the front end of his career.*
- 15 horse shows a year is enough
- A great horse should only be taken to the biggest shows.

- **Manage your horse carefully**
 - o *Feed quality hay and quality feed*
 - o *Select a vet you trust or a top horseman*
 - o *Supplements and vitamins: work with your vet on this; don't overdo it.*

Saddle Placement:

- Harvey Smith will put a saddle back near the loins. George Morris prefers a saddle forward near the shoulder. This allows the saddle to stay over the strong part of the bridge – the shoulder. Exaggerations become a defect.

A Horse Getting Strong on Course:

- the strategy to use for a horse who builds (gets strong) on course:
 - warm up early, then cool down 2-3 horses before entering the ring
 - allow the horse to be behind the leg; your second line will probably be your best
 - **bit according to how your horse usually is at the END of the course.**
 - --George Morris has found that a double jointed snaffle with a small port is a good bit for horses like this.

Today, horseback riding is a recreation; previously, it was a way of life.

You have to have hours in the saddle. That will give you security, balance, feel and timing.

The best thing for a young rider is versatility, not specialization. Previously riders would compete in hunters and jumpers; now they specialize in one. Klimke was an Olympic level three day event rider before he started his career in dressage; George Morris has a firm background in dressage as well as hunters and jumpers.

George Morris – Part 2 – Flatwork in Jumping

Check your girth three times: *when you first tack up; 5 minutes into your ride; before jumping*

EXERCISE: eye control

Riders trotting around in ring. He asks riders to look and see (him in the middle of the ring) – this gets the horse turning into the middle of the ring.

Cornerstones to riding: there are 4 main parts of the body –

- leg from the knee down
- base of support (upper leg and seat)
- upper body
- arms and hands
- the 5th part is equilibrium (balance)

EXERCISE: the two point position

Bridge outside left rein. Put stick in left hand. Bite (bight?) on side of bridge. Two point position.

When he says “up”, riders reach with right hand. The contact is in the lower leg. Weight is in the heels.

Two point position: there are just two points of contact. The seat is slightly out of the saddle.

Three point position: there are three points of contact. The crotch is (lightly) in the saddle, too.

EXERCISE: the rein back

There are two ways to back a horse:

One with leg

One with no leg

- using only hands, just keep horse straight with the legs

Don't back a horse up every time you stop your horse. Alternate halting and backing.

- do this from the trot

- from rein back, forward to canter

Flying change: approach the flying change – use an indirect rein, don't bend the neck. Use the outside leg.

When using a short release, have the hands resting just in front of the withers.

If you're too quick (with anything) the consequence is always rough. Be smooth.

Don't throw the hands/reins away; rest them on the neck. Keep the position consistent and even.

Quick in half halt – outside rein, half halt, up.

For an aggressive horse, jump, then use the corner to stop the horse.

George Morris – part 3 – flatwork in jumping

EXERCISE – pulley rein

The pulley rein is the saver of the horse's mouth.

This is not seen a lot anymore; it is mainly the pervue of the educated rider.

Gaits can have different speeds within the gait:

- medium (ordinary)

- slow (collected)

- fast (extended)

two poles on the ground set at 48'

Each exercise was repeated 2-3 times before rider progressed to the next one:

1. ride both poles on a line at regular rising trot
2. ride both poles on a line at slow sitting trot
3. lengthen the trot stride over the poles – let him lengthen, don't make him lengthen
4. ordinary canter – 4 strides between poles. Riders need to use their eye, have a sense of a distance.
5. collect to 5 strides – slight release needed. Most people do too much with the inside rein = horse swapping leads.
6. collect to 6 strides – take and give, give and take. Don't hang on the horse's mouth.
7. 3 strides, in jumping position, don't chase, just allow horse to go forward. Don't sit too deep; this will restrict the back.

Don't get flexible, hinged stirrups. You think your ankle is flexing, and it's not. This is more of a hindrance than a help.

EXERCISE: drop hands over fence (like an automatic release, but even lower). Don't touch horse's neck; keep a light contact; straight line from elbow to bit. Finish by doing turn/half circle into wall, or use wall for full halt.

Progression: don't lower hands so much

This exercise develops balance, introduces automatic release.

EXERCISE: two point contact on rail, turn to fence, three point contact (sink into saddle), to and over fence (Liverpool)

EXERCISE: jump Liverpool straight, drift (incorporating low, wide hand) to corner, angle fence 2, straight to triple (6 strides)

If a horse stops: never back up. Use your stick. Do a little circle and re-present.

George Morris rarely schools whole course; rather, he *schools pieces of courses*.

Every step of a course is specific. *Every step is planned.*

Passive leg: in correct position, in contact, not exerting pressure

Active leg: squeezing

- some horses are passive leg horses

Rough and strong (riders) are different.

- use discipline, not punishment

Self carriage is the holy grail of riding (where the horse carries himself).

The aids are imperceptible (e.g., Nicole Uphoff, Rembrandt) – the horse apparently does it all himself. (e.g., Ian Millar, Beezy Patton).

George Morris – part 3

EXERCISE:

What stops the horse is the fence, not your rein

Trot around the ring, turn to fence at 45 degree angle, then go straight ahead. Don't be too quick.

Canter, same exercise.

- soft legs, wait for horse, use tact, not muscle

You must address 'stable freshness' BEFORE you can think of teaching the horse something.

- get into the arena you'll be riding in – that's good preparation
- there has to be preparation for execution
-

EXERCISE: leading rein

- open inside rein, press with outside rein on the shoulder, push horse over
- rock horse 1-2-3 steps left and right. Quarters stay fixed.
 - o Once you lighten a horse off his shoulders, he goes back to his hocks

EXERCISE: serpentine

- serpentine in half arena (he called it broken line – said it wasn't a serpentine)
- leg yield through diagonals
- keep neck straight
 - o lightens horse's shoulders
- progression:
- canter, but just one loop. Counter canter the middle loop. Don't need a lot of bend. Ride the back end of the horse. Keep it slow.

What's important in riding:

- *your seat is in the centre* – if you can sit a horse, that'll take care of itself.
 - o **LEGS: both legs = impulsion;** outside leg controls the haunches, both legs straighten
 - o **HANDS: controls the front of the horse.** *Be perfectly versed in the rein aids.*

It's what you learn after you think you know something – that's what counts.

If you want to be an athlete, you have to be **mentally and physically fit**.

Cornerstones:

1. **position:** sitting up/back down hinders the horse. It's too popular today to get behind the horse. Have a forward jumping position (30 degree angle).
2. **control of eyes:** Can you ride a line to a point? Practice doesn't make perfect: *perfect practice makes perfect.*
3. **releases:** long/short/automatic
4. **heels:** heels down, ankles flexed, leg on horse.

- a. #3 and 4 are critical cornerstones

Teach one thing at a time.

Repetition creates the habit.

John Whittaker and Ian Millar: use the American system, riding with the motion. When necessary, they will get back/behind the motion.

- this is easier for the horse.

Release:

- weight of upper body in the hands
- weight of body is in heels
- short release just in front of withers; long release is half way up; do half a stride out

Explanation – Application (practice) – repetition (gives you the habit if the teacher is good about correction) – demonstration

EXERCISE

Jump one fence, look to point, straight up to GM, Halt for 6 seconds. Keep horse straight in the head and neck.

Horses have to be **disciplined** – *not abused*. **Consistent discipline**. Don't get emotional about riding.

Halt transition: sink into saddle, raise hands, sit up. Repeat 3-5 times for horse to start to do it himself.

EXERCISE:

- ride through corner to Liverpool. Watch leg position. Keep heels down. Tests the fourth cornerstone.
- Repetition: keep heels down

Critical cornerstones:

Are you able to:

- *keep with the motion?*
- *ride a line of sight?*
- *Ride with a variety of releases?*
- *Take a jump with your heels down and heels in position?*

Learn to follow a horse to a fence: sit still. Let horse take you. Learn to wait for a distance, don't get anxious

Use very low fences to introduce techniques.

EXERCISE

- fence one, left opening rein; skip fence two; ride fence three on an angle toward the fence; left opening rein over top; ride straight to liverpool, stop on straight line
- if horse hesitates, be positive. He who hesitates is lost.

EXERCISE

- jump straight through fence one and two, opening rein over fence two and skip fence three. Jump Liverpool on an angle and ride forward to stop at fence still on an angle.
- Don't get stick happy. Use cluck or spur instead

EXERCISE

- ride straight through fences one and two, opening rein left over two, skip fence three, roll back turn to line using lots of outside left leg, ride straight through all three fences, use fence to stop on line at the end.
- If horse wobbles/is green, jump straight through both ways

Horsemanship

1. *be very grounded.* Have control of the horse
 - have good basics: management (feeding, shipping, etc.)
 - *What this is all about is the horse.*
 - All exercises are for the benefit of the horse.
2. select horses for:
 - a. *structure*
 - b. *soundness*
 - c. *athletic ability*
 - d. *form to function*

Be very grounded with dressage and flatwork.

- incorporate elements of dressage
- incorporate elements of tactical dressage
- be educated to flatwork

Perfect practice makes perfect.

Work a lot over low fences to develop perfect position and technique.

Rub shoulders with your betters. Don't be a big fish in a small pond.

Up and down transitions: balance.

- get up in front – head is heavy, head low = weight in shoulder

- engagement (tactfully) of hind
- get a better feeling

Be with the motion

- sometimes behind the motion is okay in certain, infrequent circumstances

Jump without stirrups = tightness in seat.

Watch your biting – don't let the horse run through the bridle.

If a horse hesitates, *you can't hesitate*. Don't let a horse get behind. Attitude. Be bold. Almost as bad, is when the horse gets in front.

Let your attitude colour your riding.