What are aids?

'Aids' are simply a means by which the rider / trainer communicates with the horse. It is a way in which the horse can be asked to perform transitions, turns or movements that he already knows but needs to learn to perform upon the rider's request - these requests being conveyed to the horse through the rider's aids.

There are two main categories of aids:

1. Natural:

- Voice - more used in lungeing but also with the young horse
- Leg - direct on the horses side
- Hand - via the reins or lunge line
- Seat - through the saddle to the horses back

2. Artificial:

- Whip - schooling whip or lunge whip
- Spur - on the riders leg

There are plenty of reference sources informing people of what aids to give to achieve a specific response from their horse but I feel that there is seldom enough talk on how these aids should be given. The rider might have understood the theory of what they are meant to be doing but most riders start to have problems when they ask the horse a question, at whatever level, and the horse says 'no'. This is when the rider resorts to varied or stronger tactics to obtain a result but by the sheer fact of changing technique they have already sown the seeds of failure.

Comment:

- How many times do you hear people saying that they need stronger legs to ride their own horse - why not get the horse to go off a lighter leg aid?

Therefore before going into the actual aids to give to ask a horse to perform an exercise the rider should understand and grasp the following concepts. The rider must understand that an aid is a signal, an indication to the horse that you want a change from that which the horse is already

giving, for example, this could be something as straightforward as a walk to trot transition, or latter on it could be a request to the horse for more collection. For my purposes here what the request is for is irrelevant. The concept here is that you give one signal and the horse responds with one change. After you have given that one signal, or aid, you must stop giving signals unless you want the horse to change more.

So often you see riders, in any discipline, using arms and legs at nineteen to the dozen whilst trying to get the horse to perform a task. The negative points of this are that the horse is trying to listen to a barrage of signals - has no hope of understanding what the rider is actually asking for - and so decides that until the rider makes his or her mind up as to which signal they want the horse to listen to the horse goes into self - preservation mode and does not listen at all, which in turn infuriates the rider who doubles their efforts to get the horse to listen and so the viscous circle continues. The end result is a horse that has become insensitive the aids and a rider that is exhausted and purple in the face from the effort that they have put in.

When you give an aid there must be a difference in the horse. In the early days of training this will be a basic response but as the work progresses the reply to your request will become more refined. You must be sure to give a clear, singular signal and then feel what response the horse offers. If there is no change from your one aid you must teach the horse to listen to that singular aid by a process of repetition until you gain the response that you were looking for originally. You must then reward the horse by ceasing any further signals. For example, you only press once to obtain a dialling tone on your telephone. You do not expect to press it continually. It is the same concept with your horse.

If you do not take time to assess whether the horse has listened to your aid and are again giving a barrage of signals then it is probable that you will miss any response that is offered by the horse. Try thinking about it this way - every time you give a leg, rein or any other aid that does not invoke a reaction from the horse then you are actually teaching the horse to ignore the aids or to become 'deaf' to them.

Comment:

- How many times do you see a rider on a lazy horse giving so-called leg aids practically every stride with absolutely no change in the way that the horse is going? The only result here is that the horse has stopped listening and has become 'dead to the leg'.

The only strength that should be used in connection with the giving of aids is the rider's strength of mind to adhere to the above principles. Clarity of thought and good self-control will help the rider progress well with their horse.

The inside and outside aids.

Firstly we need to define what we mean by the inside and outside aids. Just to state the obvious, when riding a horse the rider has two legs and two hands. Each of these has a separate job to do, depending upon whether they are on the inside or outside of the horse. Most people think that the rider inside leg is nearest the middle of the school and the outside leg is nearest the fence. For the most part this is true but there are some occasions, e.g. counter canter, when this definition does not hold true. The riders inside aids are those that are on the inside of the bend of the horse, the outside aids being therefore those that are on the outside of the bend of the horse, i.e. if the horse has left bend, the riders left aids are on the inside, the right aids are on the outside. This is the case irrespective of which direction you are travelling in. Now we have set which aids are inside / outside the following is what the aids should be:

i. Inside leg : This asks for impulsion
ii. Outside leg : This controls the hindquarters
iii. Inside rein: This asks for flexion / positioning to the inside. A very minimal aid.
iv. Outside rein :
    - Controls the amount of impulsion
    - Controls the amount of flexion / positioning
    - Controls the horses outside shoulder.

Hopefully, you will now know which aids start and stop the horse and which aids are responsible for bending the horse.