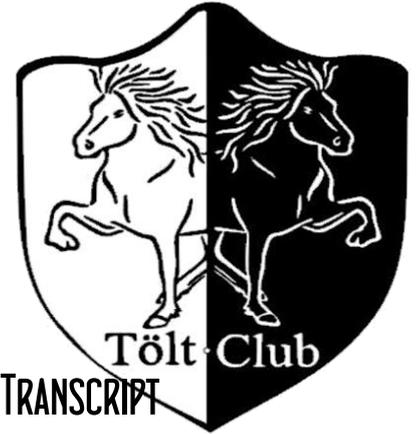


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## NATTFARI PODCAST IN ENGLISH JOHAN HÄGGBERG NO 2 EXERCISE—DRAFT TRANSCRIPT

Please note, this is not a direct transcript but has been reviewed and edited by Nick Foot to allow for different technical language usage between Swedish translated English and English technical terms, we have also identified some terms which are not clear (identified in italics) we have forwarded a copy to Johan and will update the draft when we receive a reply.

To listen to the podcast please click [here](#)

### Why do we use exercises in our training?

- to make the training more effective
- to have tools that are structured and work in a system
- to make our communication with the horse more precise and results more predictable

### Where should we exercise?

Everywhere. We can talk about exercises in many different ways. For me, everything we do is the horse is an exercise but we want to use the sort of exercises that are pragmatic and useful for our aims.

I went through a period as I was developing my own riding where I measured my success in terms of how many and how complicated the exercises were that I could complete. It was good for me as a rider, but it wasn't very good for the other goal, which was to develop the gaits of the horse, especially those of the Icelandic horse.

I strongly advocate a system based training of the horse, that we use exercises in order to expand the horse's competence, how he learns to use his body etc, but we need to focus on what is important. We have an Icelandic horse, it is a gaited horse, and we really need to develop its gaits.

This is why I say we really need to think about what we are doing because sometimes we are bringing exercises in that are technically demanding and interesting to teach yourself and your horse but are not beneficial. An easy example, flying change in canter. It's a really important exercise in a show jumping horse but I would never teach an Icelandic horse. As a four or five gaited horse that we want to show at its optimum in canter, this sort of exercise will increase the risk of a fault as we increase the risk of lead change in canter when want to increase the energy in canter. This is just one easy example of an exercise which is not producing anything of value for an Icelandic horse displaying its gaits.

Nattfari Podcast (English)



## What sort of exercise for which type of horse?

Younger horses need easier exercises, but the basis for performing exercises are the same, we need to teach every horse good reactions for the aids. We need a horse that responds correctly to the hand, leg and seat.

What we are looking for is a horse that goes forward easily from the leg aid, that *rounds* easily from the leg aid, that yields when you close your hand and stretches when you open your hand and follows the seat. A horse that waits for you when you stretch and goes forward when you release with the seat, then performing exercises is easy! That is when the exercises have real value.

### Exercise Types

It may vary from country to country and culturally, but what I see too much of around me is that we try to apply dressage based evaluation of good training on our horses.

I don't think that is correct for an Icelandic horse as we measure the horse's development by it's' performance in its gaits. Each horse has different aptitudes and capacity for producing tempo, movement or whatever is required.

If you develop the Icelandic horse in the correct way it should develop its gaits. It should produce the best gaits possible for that particular horse, if you don't reach that from the dressage based training then we are doing something wrong and we cannot claim that the horse is well trained regardless of whether the horse can do "shoulder in" or "hindquarters in" if when asked for a particular gait the horse produces "piggy pace".

Effective Exercise should lead to development in the gaits it should be part of our aim to produce better gaits which will produce a better riding horse. This may not happen immediately.

### What are the Basic Exercises?

The basic exercises are circle, riding on **???** tracks, hindquarters out, leg yielding, shoulder in, & backing up.

### Easy (ier) Exercises for the younger horse

We (sort of) use the same exercises regardless of the stage of development of the horse. I will go back to the example of the dressage horse. The whole development programme is designed to expand the horse's knowledge until the point where the horse can ride a dressage grand prix. I don't think it's quite the same with Icelandic horses. We use the basic tools repeatedly for the development process, the same exercises but asking for more precision and better results. The circle can be everything for the four-year old from a simple exercise to follow the seat, hand and leg, up to an exercise you use to really develop the precision of the horse's movements later on.

It's not what you do it's how you do it that is the key thing. I want to put as much energy as possible into the horse without creating negative tension or losing the elasticity or communication with the horse.

### What should you keep in mind when performing exercises on an Icelandic horse?

I am more influenced by the methods of dressage teaching that focus on elasticity and bending sideways (suppleness might be a word we would use in the UK) rather than straightness and evenness. We need to make the Icelandic horse more flexible I think. The training of an Icelandic horse starts with softness and the quality of softness. Softness is created I think with the quality of bending from the leg, the quality of sideways movement in the horse. We want the sort of exercise that creates softness. This means I want to introduce these exercises very early in the horse's training career.

### How early to start introducing these exercises?

The horse needs to have the basics of forward going. It needs to have learned the basics of leg and hand aids before we start trying to do anything complicated that requires the combination of the leg, hand and seat aids. The horse needs to be able to go forward and sideways from the leg aid, respond to the hand by rounding the

neck and respond to the seat, waiting and being released to go forward. This is standard training for a young horse and developed more in a more advanced horse.

## **How do we let the horse know we are about to begin an exercise?**

It depends on which exercise we want to do. The normal answer would be to do a half halt, but for me the exercises are the half halt. I don't think of the half halt as an entity in riding, I think more of the exercises as a fluid process where one follows another. What we need as preparation mostly is that the horse responds correctly to the aids. If it does that then of course we need to tell it that something is happening by straightening ourselves up but it is a combination of the exercises and the response to the aids that is the half halt.

## **Hindquarters Out**

This is the basic exercise to teach a young horse about going sideways. I build my system from the circle and the sideways movement on a circle, so the first sideways movement I teach a young horse is to bring its hindquarters out from the circle.

That means we have the inner front leg on the circle and the hindquarters outside of the circle bending at an angle that corresponds to what we want to achieve, with the horse pointed towards the centre of the circle bending around the inside leg. This is such a good and simple exercise to learn to communicate a desire for softness on the inside leg with the horse. For me it is a logical development. We start with an easy circle; introduce the sideways movements to perform a soft bending sideways movement.

The first thing we teach the horse is to go straight forward with the neck from the leg. Once the horse has learnt this so it responds to the aids down both hands it's easy to ride straight forward so we have to teach the horse to think differently.

Some people want to start teaching the horse to do straight leg yielding. That is not wrong, but we want the horse to be able to do both. As with all exercises, if you do too much bending on a circle, you can end up with a horse that can lose the ability to go forward but if you always use exercises that require the horse to be straight you can lose the capacity for the horse to be flexible. It's the kind of thing you need to have in mind with training, it's always checks and balances. You need to think and pay attention to the horse, if it's not going forward, you need to work on that, if it's too stiff then introduce suppleness exercises. If there is too much bend in the neck without a connection to the hind legs then we need to focus on straightness exercises. For me it is a process. Once the horse has learned the basics of going forward, then we move on to the circle, then hindquarters out and the sideways movements then we move on to straightness exercises.

## **What if the horse is softer or stiffer on one side or another?**

You need to know your horse. Most horses are weaker in the right hind leg and stronger in the right side so they want to put the right shoulder out. We often need pay specific attention to this so if we want the horse to ride to the left we need to make sure we activate the other hind leg enough. When we ride to the right we need to focus on the inside shoulder. It is something that is very important and individual to each horse. You need to get to know your horse to know what aids work best with them in each exercise and analyse where your horse has weaknesses and how it responds to the aids you give.

## **How to ride for Hindquarters out**

I start from riding the circle. I already sit with my inside leg forward and my outside leg back, my inside shoulder back and maybe my inside hip a little forward but I don't focus on the hips so much. My aim is that it should be easy for me to move the hindquarters out just by putting my inside shoulder back. As I put my inside shoulder back I engage my inside leg more at the same time so without moving I should be able to move the hindquarters out from the circle as much as I want to. Your body should be straight; you shouldn't be leaning in any direction.

It's a very good tool. One of the main aims of the exercise for the rider is to produce suppleness and good bends

from the horse. It's a way of overriding tension in the horse with a specific command, that whenever we want to we can get the horse to move its hindquarters sideways. If it is pushing forwards too much with its hindquarters, we can easily get the horse to move to the side, changing the energy pattern in the horse so that it pushes less. With practice it becomes a tool for the rider that creates suppleness in the horse so that we can move to the side whenever we want to. If we find there is conflict between the hand and the leg aids, we can put the inside shoulder back a little we can achieve a bend which makes the horse more supple.

### **What is a good bend in the horse?**

A good bend for me is when I feel my inside leg has a good contact with the inside shoulder. In the end I will be able to lift the shoulder with the input from my inside leg. It is important the horse stretches his back evenly under me when it bends to either side and it stretches the outside rein but keeps contact on the inside. The important thing for me is the feeling of softness that should come from bending. It is the contact with the horse.

### **What about when you feel that you are losing the outside shoulder?**

If you have a good enough control that the horse wants to flex from the outside rein it's easy to control the outside shoulder. I think many riders put too much focus on the outside shoulder rather than the inside leg. It's not the outside shoulder which pushes the horse into a bigger circle, it's the inside hind leg. We need to control that with training the correct reaction using the hindquarters out exercise. Train and practice the reaction so that we can always put the inside hind leg in the correct position with our inside leg, then we won't have so much of a problem with the outside shoulder. It's about the connection. I think focusing on the outside shoulder and the outside hand creates stiffness sometimes.

### **What is the difference between Hindquarters out and leg yield?**

There are minor but significant differences between hindquarters out, leg yielding on a circle and straight leg yielding. A good trainer uses a combination of these exercises. It's not a competition to say one exercise is the correct one in training Icelandic horses. We use the most appropriate exercise as required or a combination of them all. We want a practical, pragmatic approach. When we bend, we bend as much as we need to. When we go straight, we go as straight as we need to.

## **Leg Yielding**

Leg yielding is an extremely important tool as well to train the horse's coordination, achieve better transitions and help relieve tension in the horse.

### **How to ride for Leg Yield**

The same aids, but used differently. Sit straight on the horse, keep contact with both reins and increase pressure with the inside leg a little where it is appropriate depending on where the horse has a problem. It can be a little further forward or a little further back. I think it's very important to keep straight rein contact. When you read about leg yielding it generally says you should flex a little towards the inside with the inside rein but I think that if you have a correct reaction from the inside leg this small flexion will come anyway. I wouldn't focus on the rein in leg yield.

I don't see training exercises as something to follow dogmatically. I see it as a tool, something to improve the communication with the horse and the carriage and the gaits of the horse. They are meaningful only in what they achieve with the horse. For me it is less important to achieve the exercise the correct way than to get the horse to do what you want. The horse needs to be able to cross its legs, to be soft in the mouth etc. I often use it myself and with my pupils to help improve communication between them and the horse. I almost never do the exercise by itself, but in combination with transitions mostly.

Every exercise I use is only as good as its result and how accessible it makes my horse

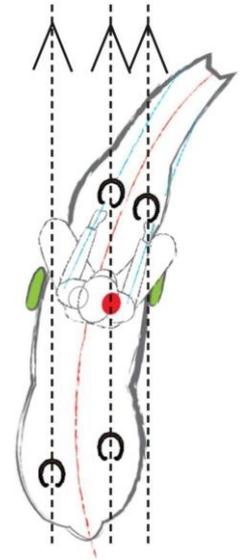
## What is Shoulder In

*(editors note; this is not simple to describe, I have added an illustration that demonstrate the idea of “three tracks” as I understand it, this means where the horse’s foot falls (the inside hind should fall in the same path as the outside front which induces a small bend) it is an important idea to understand when training a horse to move as you would like it to, I hope Johan will clarify this further at a later date.)*

It’s an exercise where you ride a horse round the inside leg on three tracks. It’s a transition exercise between suppleness and collection. It’s another really important exercise. It is one of the most basic exercises.

### How should the horse move its body in Shoulder-In?

In shoulder in the horse should be on three tracks, flexing around the inside leg, flexing around the outside rein. To be efficient in most horses the angle must be small, it should be on three tracks. You can go on four tracks if you want the horse to be looser but generally it’s good to think you should only be on three tracks. It’s a good exercise for accessibility, for improving the carriage before tölt and it’s so also very good at developing coordination for the rider and the horse if you can make shoulder in operate in a good, soft way. We need the softness from the inner circle. The ability to control the bending with the outside rein because we have those two things together then it is easy to get a good shoulder in.



## Hindquarters In

Hindquarters in is slightly more complicated and can also be useful but it has drawbacks and needs using with thought. It can be useful if you want to collect your horse. If you use it too much it can make the horse unsteady in its hindquarters. I have never known a horse that can flee into shoulder in but horses start fleeing into hindquarters in to avoid collection. That is the danger of it, they wiggle their arses when you don't want them too which is not a good thing.

### How should the horse move in Hindquarters-In

It is also three tracks but instead of keeping the outside hind leg in as it is on shoulder in. It keeps the outside front leg on the track we are riding in.

## Focus your Exercise

The key thing with exercises is to focus on what you want to achieve with them. When I ride on a circle with a pacey horse in tölt I will ride it differently than when I ride a trotty horse. When I want access to a stiff pacey horse I am not so careful about controlling the hindquarters to achieve a more supple horse, but if I am riding a trotty horse it’s really important that I have control of the outside hind leg to make sure it stays on two tracks. I need to make sure that I have control of the outside hind leg because it will make the horse even more trotty if I let go of the hind legs. These are the things you need to think about when you use the exercises; you need to focus on the goal you are aiming to achieve.

### Are there some exercises that are useful for both trotty and pacey horses?

Of course, it depends on how you do it, generally I can say with a pacey horse I want to make it looser, I don’t control the position of the bending so much, I don’t control the hind legs so much, at least in the beginning. With a trotty horse it’s very important to keep the hind legs under control because it wants to slide out of using its hind legs, then it’s really important that I keep control of my inside leg to my outside rein so it is always tracking.

*Uncertain use of terms which we have asked Johan for clarification with: Stretches back/ Round neck/Round in the leg.*