

Retraction and Protraction of All Four Limbs of The Horse

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If your horse has received the gift of Equine Hanna Somatic Education® over the last few months he is ready to learn the next movements assisting his body in becoming more mobile. For those reading about Equine Hanna Somatics for the first time, please read previous articles on the Elite Equestrian website beginning with the May 2022 issue and/or on my website, www.HechterEquineMobility.com.

The Initial Pick-ups, Protraction and Retraction of your horse's limbs assist in lengthening 12 muscles in each of your horse's forelimbs and 18 muscles in each of his hindlimbs. This adds up to be 60 superficial and deep muscles directly impacted; many more muscles are indirectly affected by the use of these exercises.

Begin your EHS session by taking photos of your horse, both sides, front, back and down the spine. Use your photos to observe how your horse is standing. Palpate his muscles using a flat hand applying light pressure then releasing repeating as you begin just behind his ears gradually traveling over his entire body, noting where you sense tension or elasticity.

Picture two imaginary plumb lines -the first from the top of the shoulders to the ground and the second from the top of the hips of your horse. Ideally his legs will line up with this line, creating a "square" stance. Many horses do not naturally stand this way. With the legs that are forward of the plumb line begin by protracting these limbs. Start with retraction of the legs that are behind the plumb line. For the horse who stands fairly square you may choose either protraction or retraction for all four limbs, once the first set of movements is complete follow with the movement not completed.

Before asking your horse to extend and retract his limbs warm his muscles with Initial Pick-ups. For your safety while working with your horse follow these simple instructions.

Stand on the left side of your horse facing his tail. Envision your horse performing the exercise, mentally send the pictures to him. With a flat back bend at your hips, place your right leg slightly in front of your left leg that is placed slightly behind your hips as you invite your horse to lift his limbs. Reverse your stance when working on the right side.

As you work with your horse have your hands around his joints/bones rather than his tendons



My left hand is gently supporting the back of the horse's knee while my right hand supports the front of his ankle as I guide his leg forward in EHS Protraction of the Forelimb.



Sometimes horse take a moment to fully weight their foot after an EHS movement. This mare rested her foot on her toe for three minutes before fully standing on it.

The new movements of your horse's limb begin with an Initial Pick-up of all four legs. When protracting the limb gently guide it forward encouraging his foot to be ahead of his chest or further under his tummy. Often the leg does not come too far forward especially the first day, remain within your horse's comfort level. When you sense resistance to the leg moving further, pause, then begin to slowly return the leg under your horse's body with him placing his fully weighted foot back on the ground.



My hands are gently supporting his ankle as I invite my horse to be guided into EHS Protraction of the Hindlimb

There may be times when your horse says, "Oh you want me to stretch," moving further forward or back than may be ideal. As he moves into a stretch he may pull his limb back quickly and slap his foot to the ground. SAFELY, follow the movement with your hands as best as you can, breathing slowly to maintain a calm demeanor. Ask for a smaller movement during the subsequent lifts. Repeat a total of three to five times. EHS is about lengthening not stretching muscles.

Some horses who have particularly contracted muscles in their hind quarters will lift their limbs high, jerking forward and back leading people to believe this is bad behavior. Mostly, it is an example of Sensory Motor Amnesia. His muscles have forgotten how to move smoothly due to contractions in his body, it can cause discomfort. When this happens allow your horse's leg to quiet while your hands safely and gently follow the action, remaining connected to his leg, before asking it to be gently guided.

When retracting your horse's limbs, the leg moves in a backward direction. Follow the same practices as when you are protracting the limbs while gently guiding the foot and limb back.

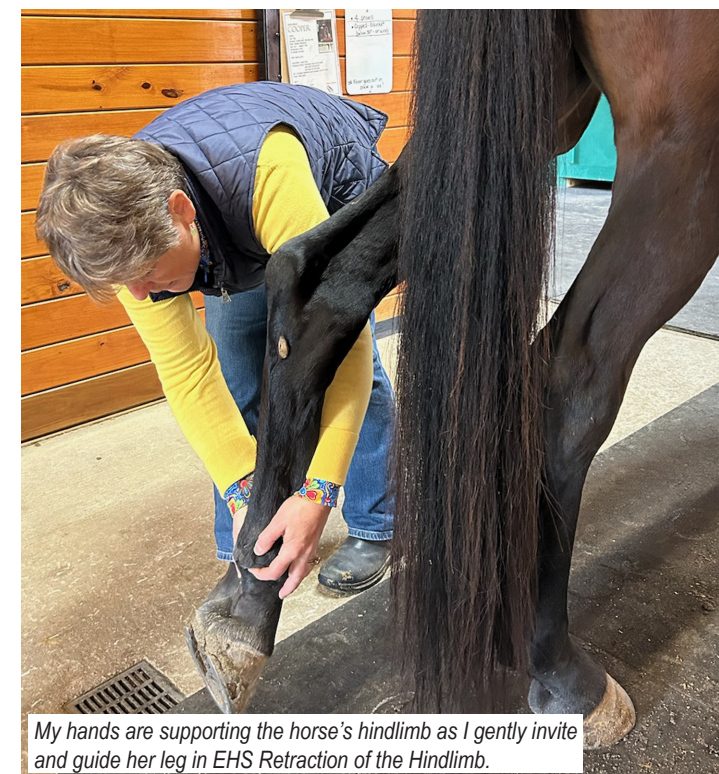
Protraction and Retraction movements balance the muscles being worked within your horse's body, they are two segments of a unit. When all four limbs have completed one of the movements, protraction or retraction, finish with the component not done first.

Once you have completed the three movements with all four limbs, take a new set of photos to compare. Palpate your horse's body to compare the changes in loss of tension and more elasticity.

Trish Hechter grew up riding and working with her mother in Maryland who was renowned for working with "problem" horses. In the mid 90's Trish earned her Reiki 1 and 2 certificates becoming a Reiki Master in 2020. After meeting Ryan Moschell, a Certified Hanna Somatics Educator® (for humans), in 2015, Trish turned her focus to Equine Hanna Somatics® and will be a Certified Equine Hanna Somatics Educator in 2023. For more information about Trish's work and clinics educating people how to improve their horse's posture and mobility, please visit www.HechterEquineMobility.com. Trish Hechter and Ryan Moschell, CHSE have created a partnership working with equestrians and their horses. Dates are available for their workshops and clinics in 2023.



My left hand is gently inviting my horse's knee back as I support his pastern with my right hand in EHS Retraction of the Forelimb.



My hands are supporting the horse's hindlimb as I gently invite and guide her leg in EHS Retraction of the Hindlimb.

To contact Ryan Moschell and learn more about his work, please visit, www.GetOutOfShape.com. To purchase a video introduction of EHS please visit, www.HechterEquineMobility.com/video.

To learn more about Equine Hanna Somatics, and to find an equine educator near you, please visit www.EquineHannaSomatics.org.