

**WORLD TRAINERS TIP #3**  
**Slowing down a speedy horse**  
**Rate vs. Softness**

We had a horse in the barn that was a chronic fast canterer. He was always in a hurry, especially at the canter and would swap leads. My immediate reaction was to slow him down with both reins, trying to bring him back to me squarely. This only made him more tense, and made the cross cantering worse. He did however, slow down a bit and I began to feel as if I may be making some progress, as long as I sat just right and held my mouth slightly to the left.

As some time passed, I began to see that I really was not doing so well. By slowing the horse down straight back, I was shortening his stride and he was not moving through the bridle. So, while I had slowed him down, I had lost his follow through in stride, and thus had not helped his swapping leads behind.

I obviously had to reevaluate what I was doing. It seemed to me that the two issues at work here were: 1) rate and 2) softness. Rate, allows me to slow my horse down and softness, allows me to push the horse into the bridle and develop better form and stride. These two always seem to contradict each other to me. Rate, slowing one down, indicates that the bit inhibits forward motion, and the body does not push past the bridle. Softness, indicates that the horse gives to the bridle, but also continues to go forward with its body through the bridle. This is not to be confused with a horse "pushing through" the bridle in a negative connotation. Let me explain. A horse that "moves through" the bridle is pushing forward from behind, meeting the bridle and has a continuous flow of motion and energy that is not interrupted by the contact of the bit. Horses that are not moving through the bridle have telltale signs. At the trot they may skip behind, they may use one leg higher than another, or stab both feet in the ground as they trot. At the canter the most common problem is lead changing, but could be as subtle as a shorter than desired stride.

A horse that "pushes through" the bridle has a major difference between one who is "moving through" the bridle. The horse that moves through the bridle is not pushing on the bit, (though they may not be light), they are driving from the rear end and moves past the bit. The horse that is pushing through the bridle is pushing against the bit and the motion and energy is stuck, because that is the focal point of the horse, (pushing against the bit).

So then, we know that the horse must be soft or supple enough to move into the bridle and must also rate. It makes sense that the horse should move into and through the bridle before we rate it. If we rated the horse first, in other words, taught the horse to inhibit forward motion using the bit, it will be hard to teach it to move through the bridle if it

thinks that when it meets the bridle it should slow down. We will never get it to go forward enough to go through the bridle. So, it makes the most sense to move into the bridle before we spend too much time rating. Likewise, while undertaking a rating challenge like the one I spoke of, it is important not to lose sight of how well the horse is moving into the bridle.

How I got this horse to rate, while continuing to go into the bridle, at the same time, was to push him forward while rating. The obvious way to do this is to continue to push the horse forward, while slowing down, with legs or a crop. But, this horse challenged me a little more than that, so I had to get a little more creative. I took a smooth hold of the right rein and softened him, while pushing him forward and across his body with the corresponding leg (right rein-right leg). This positioned him so his head was slightly back and to the right, and his shoulder was pushing to the left. I then gently slowed him with the left rein. I never tried to slow him in a straight line, always at some kind of an angle while still pushing him through one shoulder at a time. By softening him with the one rein and making sure he is moving through the bridle, and then adding the other rein to rate; it gives you the ability to add the rating rein as he needs rating, or take it away if he needs to soften or follow through with his stride better.

This seemed to help this horse considerably. More importantly it helped me to intermingle the two concepts of softening and rate without one overtaking the other.