



# CONNECTED JUMPING

## Mastering movement and jumping with Peggy Cummings and Connected Riding®

**W**hy are riders taught to sit up and sit still on a moving horse? Why are riders encouraged to push, squeeze, and drive with their bodies? These methods usually lead to inconsistent performance, bridle lameness, injuries and discomfort in both horse and rider due to the effects of bracing and compression. I encourage riders to synchronise with the movement of their horse by addressing fundamental questions:

- How do my riding habits affect my horse's movement?
  - What is key to connecting to my horse's movement?
  - How can I help develop my horse's weight-bearing posture?
- Regardless of discipline, it is

optimal for horses to move from their hindquarters when under saddle. The impulsion generated from the hindquarters should be allowed to travel forward through a swinging back to the shoulders, neck, poll and mouth, where the energy is received through the reins. To create this 'throughness' of energy, the horse's body is shifting weight from back to front, side to side, and up and down.

What happens to the horse's movement when the weight of a rider's body is added? As riders, we have 'worked hard' to contradict the laws of physics; unconsciously undermining the principles of motion by learning to brace against the movement of the horse to find our balance. These riding habits actually inhibit the very things we seek

as riders – connection, lightness, ease and being with our horse. Bodies in alignment move with minimum effort. When muscles are braced with tension, our joints are stiff and our bones cannot move with ease. The muscles work harder to create movement.

If, for example, the rider squeezes her knees on the sides of the saddle, this blocks free movement of the knee joints and inhibits movement in all of the corresponding joints – hips, ankles, and other joints throughout the body. Such blockage, caused by bracing or compression in the rider, puts additional load of dead weight on the horse's back and joints. This is compounded even more when a rider is jumping and maintains her balance by squeezing the knees and pushing the heels down. This braces the body and prevents the leg joints from being shock absorbers to receive the movement over the jump. This makes for very concussive landings

**Heading photo (left)**

**A teenager with Connected Riding® experience but no jumping experience, learning to jump.**

**Photo right**

**As the jumping lesson progresses, the teenager shows good balance in a more challenging situation.**

for horse and rider. When the rider is connected and has neutral posture with free moving joints, the horse is free to balance himself more easily because the rider is not bracing against his movement. In connected jumping riders remark how much safer and more stable they feel in this position, yet looser in their bodies. Also, the approaches and landings of their horses are smoother and softer. As riders learn to continually unlock and sustain the freedom of movement in their own bodies, they consequently free up and maintain the flow of movement in their horse's bodies.

From years of research and experimentation, Peggy has come to know that a neutral pelvis position is key to balance in motion. In neutral pelvis the hips are free to move independently, core muscles automatically rebalance the rider's upper body in movement, and there is no work in finding balance in motion. Neutral pelvis is the only posture where the rider's extremities do not have to 'hold on' to find balance. Once a rider's body is able to rebalance freely each stride, the horse is carrying the rider as live weight, allowing him to engage his hindquarters and lift his back without restriction.

An arched or slumped riding posture compresses movement in the rider's spine and prevents the pelvis from oscillating freely during motion. This creates a downward cycle of resistance, compression, and restricted movement in both horse and rider. Then mechanical and compressive aids are used to handle evasions and fix issues.



Horse and rider become stiffer; ease and enjoyment get lost.

If the force we undertake with our own body goes against the movement of the horse, we block the horse's movement. Our objective is to learn to ride with our bones and joints, free to be in constant movement. Riding becomes effortless and we appear to become one with our horse. A dynamic, free-moving posture is the key to the mystery in our riding. It is the difference between learning a rote method with mechanical cues, or riding in harmony with the biomechanics of

the horse. This promotes safety, welfare and longevity for both horse and rider.

We can become conscious of how our movement affects the horse, and how to change the ways we have of using ourselves that block free movement in horse and rider. With Connected Riding® we become the change that makes the difference!

Connected Riding® is used to train and retrain horses and riders in all disciplines. The photographs below show the changes for a dressage rider at a demonstration in Spain

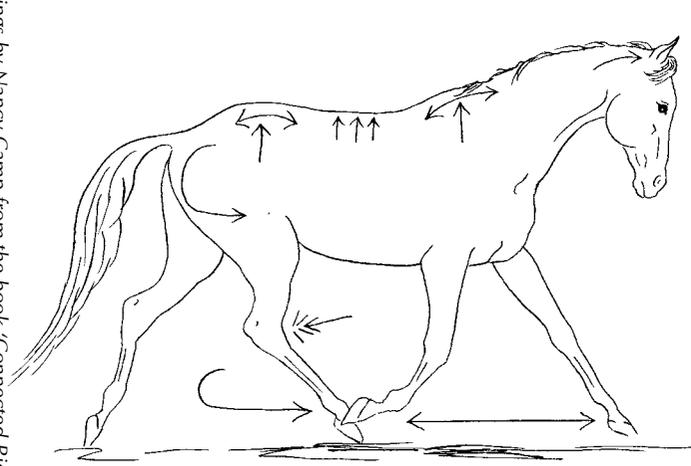
**Demo dressage rider in Girona, Spain asking his horse through in his habitual way.**



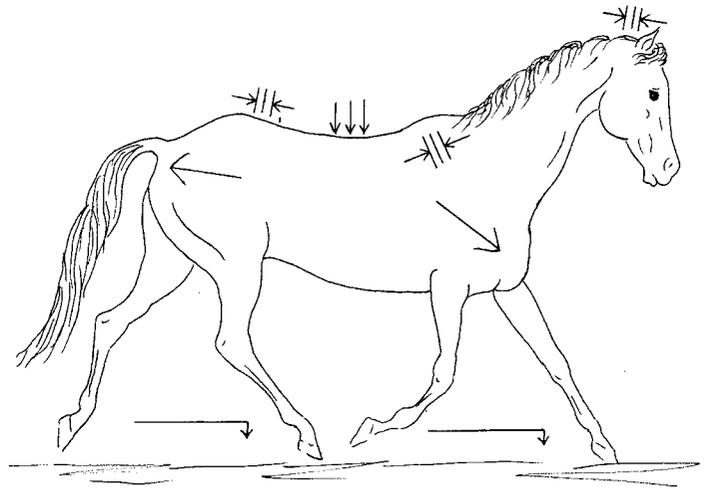
**Change of body use. The rider released in his body and commented that he had never felt his horse this way, and the horse felt forward and not lazy at all.**



Drawings by Nancy Camp from the book 'Connected Riding: An Introduction' by Peggy Cummings



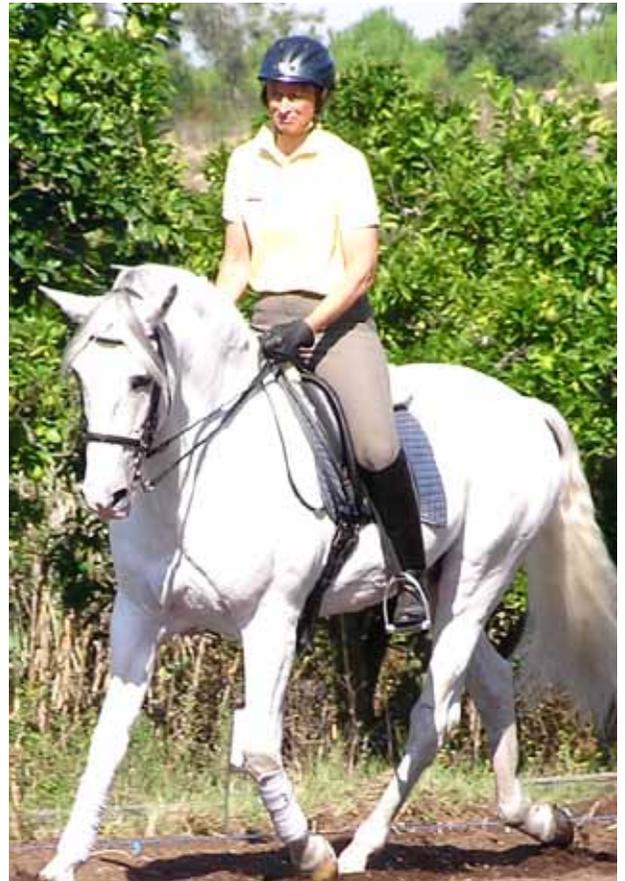
**Figure 1: The correct cycle of movement.** The engagement of the hindquarters, the rounding of the back, the lifting of the withers and consequent free movement of the shoulders and telescoping of the horse's head and neck down and forward, are consequences of release of the topline and engagement of particular muscle sets of the horse. In this posture the horse has the most freedom in his movement, while carrying the weight of the rider.



**Figure 2: The movement is inhibited by compression.** At a quick glance this horse may seem to be the same one as in figure 1, but he is actually falling on the forehand. This picture illustrates a horse with a tightened topline. The hindquarters are not engaged, the back is hollow, the withers are dropped and the neck is inverted. This posture results in lack of free movement and compresses the horse's spine.

Figures 1 and 2 above show free movement of the horse, and movement inhibited by compression. In order for the horse to be able to use his hindquarters and back freely and naturally, he must be able to move with the rider's weight, and the rider must be aware of the use of his or her own body. A horse who has not yet learned to carry himself or to be weight-bearing may be illustrated by figure 2. When jumping, the concussive

pressures on joints and limbs will be severely debilitating. Show-jumping horses quickly break down under these conditions. Connected Riding® groundwork and training for jumping horses develops the correct cycle of movement, as in figure 1, without the use of any gadgets. A horse working in this manner will have a longer and happier sporting career; and be a more willing and comfortable partner.



**PEGGY CUMMINGS IN THE UK**

13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> May 3 day clinic, 21<sup>st</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> May 5 day clinic, Devon demonstrations and private lessons  
 Contact Katherine Harberd  
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 website: www.connectedriding.com

In addition to improving the biomechanics of the horse, Connected principles provide an excellent foundation of self-awareness for handlers and riders. Learning to be responsible inside of one's own body makes the bodywork, groundwork, and riding exercises of Connected Riding® far more effective and subtle.