



Equibalance

Equibalance Part 3: Bolts

with Julie Leiken drawings by Ann Hayes

In this installment we will use the idea of two sets of bolts to help you learn to sit evenly in the saddle. Imagine a six-inch bolt. Running your hand down the side of your pelvis from what you would call your “hip,” you will find a pivot point. That is where you are going to screw in one imaginary bolt; then find that dip on your other side, and screw a bolt in there. Think about screwing the bolts down far enough so that their ends almost touch, deep inside your pelvis. Then you will take a second set of bolts. One goes right above the pubic bone and the other goes right in the center of your sacrum, and you want to have the same idea of tightening them down so that they almost touch as well. They should all come together and touch the imaginary rod that runs through the center of your body. If you were to drop a plumb line from the end of each of the bolts, there would be equal distance from the bolt to the floor, and if you were to bend your knees and ankles and do a plié, there would still be equal distance from each of the bolts down to the ground.

Imagine a level sitting on top of the bolts. What we are really looking for is for that bubble in the level to stay in the middle, to start and end each exercise with a level pelvis.

Most of us have a pelvis that is not level. It's hiked up on the right or left or rotated forward or back. This blocks our effectiveness as riders and the comfort of our horses under us.

Imagine that you were going on a backpacking trip and you took your backpack and packed it really well and it was balanced left to right. You are probably going to get through that trip in comfort. But if you accidentally put all of your water bottles on one side, think about how you are going to feel at the end of the day. Think about what direction your body is going to lean, and how your muscles are going to react to that. You will shorten and lean to compensate for that imbalance, and that's what we do unintentionally to our horses by not having a balanced pelvis.

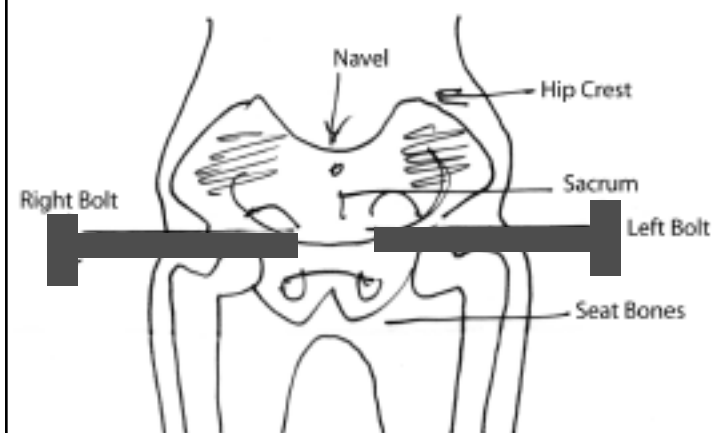
The following exercises are to find out where you are—hiked up on the right or left? tipped forward or back?—and then working on correcting it.

Looking Back

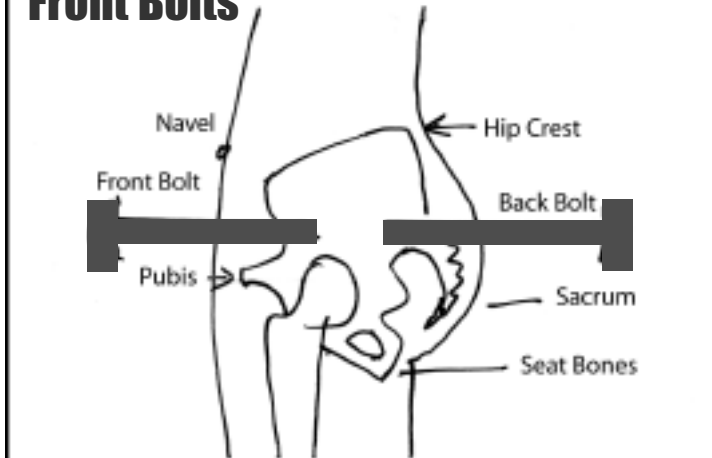
In the introduction to this series I outlined the 7 cues, and I want you to understand that every cue builds on the one before it. So every exercise that has come before this series, starting with the feet (EH #20), for all the standing exercises, first you added the magnets last issue, now when you do those previous exercises, take your fist and place them on your side bolts and pay attention. Does one lift higher than the other. Go down into the plié. What do you see? Look into a mirror: does the front bolt lift and tighten up, or does it drop backwards? Those are things that you can look at. The other thing is all the standing movements that we did with stepping out and pulling back in. Now think about stepping out and pulling back in while keeping your side bolts level. Do they lose level as you step out or pull back in? Work to maintain your bolts.

For More Info: www.ronfletcher.com or
www.julieleiken.com

Side Bolts



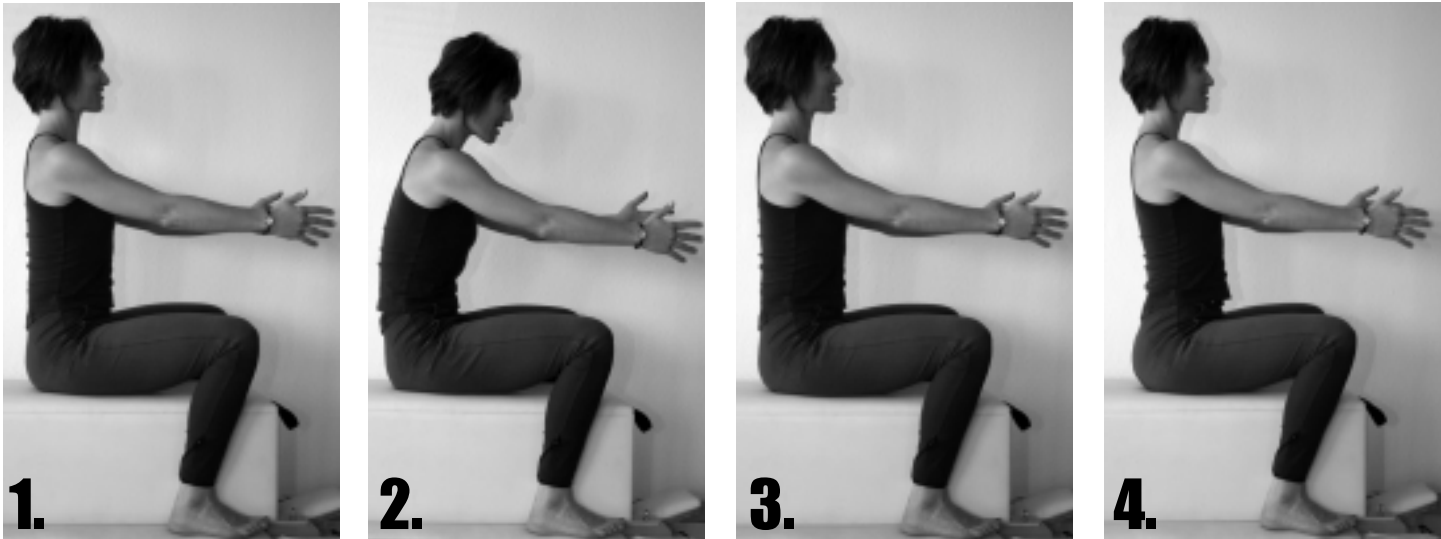
Front Bolts



A Level Pelvis



Finding Your Bolts



1. Sit up nice and tall with your arms reaching forward. 2. Imagine that there is an electric fence in front of you and you want to reach something on the other side, but at the same time really pull your belly back so you don't touch it. This is a contraction and you will notice that your front bolt goes forward; you open up your low back. You are muscularly moving your lower spine. Don't tighten your butt; that will lift you out of the saddle. 3. Then, when you come back to center, imagine that the electric fence is still there and you want to place yourself back in the center by lifting your belly and straightening the spine. 4. Keeping the belly reaching up, slowly lengthen your back out and reach your sitbones backward and then again lift the belly up and come back to center. (When you are riding your horse, I hope I never see you in this position, but your body should be able to go there with your abdominals turned on and lifting up and in not by just dropping forward. This is a position that we are trying to get away from when we ride. It's important to know where this position is and how to get out of it.)

Sidebend

1. Start by placing your bolts so that they are level. Lift one arm up, making a straight line from your pelvis all the way up to the tips of your fingers. Inhale. Lengthen your torso on both sides. 2. Exhale and bend laterally, thinking again about reaching up and over as if there were a fit ball at your side that kept you from collapsing over as you reach. 3. Inhale, return to center keeping the length you have gained on either side.

Checklist: Did your bolts move? Which ones? Can you prevent them from moving the next time? If you had trouble keeping a particular bolt in place, the following exercise will help you lengthen your shortened side.



Sidebend With Hip Lift

1. Sit in the diamond position (the distance from your pubic bone to your heels is greater than the distance from knee to knee). Same as in the sidebend above, you are going to come up and over, placing your hand on the floor in order to help you increase your sidebend. Have the feeling that someone is holding on to your hand, with an oppositional force as you lift your left sitbone and then lengthen it down to the floor, leaving your reaching hand where it is. Repeat this four times. With each repetition, try to increase the stretch. Return to center and repeat on the opposite side. 4. This shows what you can imagine.



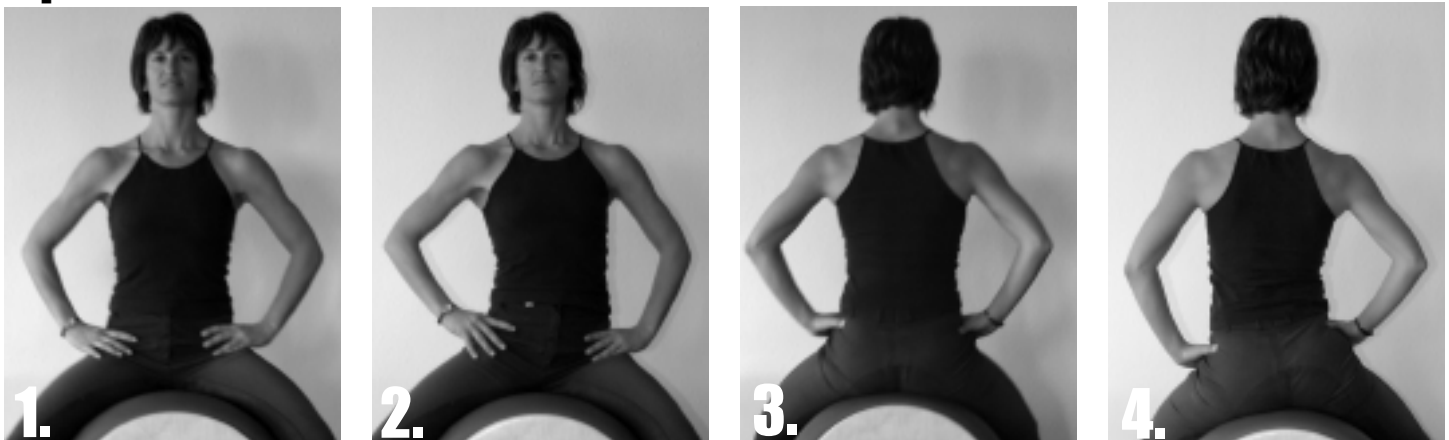
Rotation for Turning Your Horse



When you turn your horse, you need to be able to rotate the chest and keep the bolts in place. Your horse will turn because of the rotation, not because you've lifted your seat up and out of the saddle. **1.** Start in the center; imagine a pole running from the crown of your head, straight through your spine and coming out through your pubic bone. Place your bolts and keep them centered as you begin. **2.** Rotate to the right. As I rotate, I have the feeling of oppositional force of pressing my left bolt back and down. Your pelvis will want to turn with you. **3.** Center. **4.** Rotate left, keeping your head in alignment with your chest; don't let it turn farther than your chest.

Checklist: Did your bolts remain in place? Was it harder to keep your left bolt or your right bolt? Did your head turn more than your chest? Did you feel that you stayed on the pole as you rotated, not leaning left or right?

Hip Lift to Loosen Lower Back Muscles



If it was difficult to keep your bolts in place in the rotation, you may have tight lower back muscles on the difficult side. The exercise will help you. This exercise can be done either in a diamond position with one leg extended out to the side or sitting as above. **1.** Center your bolts. **2.** Inhale. Staying on the pole, chest forward, press your right bolt forward, opening the front of the hip. Exhale. Lengthen through your back and reach your bolt back down to center. **3.** & **4.** Shows the same sequence from the back.

Mini Pelvic Tilt for the Sitting Trot



Do any of you have trouble with the sitting trot? This exercise will help. **1.** Lie on the ground, feet sitbone-width apart, as close to your "hindquarters" as you can without losing your bolt. Inhale, pulling your abdominal muscles toward your spine, and allow your pubic bone starts to lift up toward your nose. Exhale. Continue lifting through the sacrum to your waistline. Inhale. Exhale as you place each vertebra back down onto the floor, until your bolts are back in place. As you lower, keep your abdominal muscles turned on so that each vertebra stays on the floor once you have placed it there.



Tilt to the Side for Canter

Do you find one canter lead more difficult to pick up, or shorter? Do you have difficulty with your flying changes? This means that you have less motion on one side than the other. This will help. **1.** Find your mini-tilt. Inhale; deepen your contraction. Exhale; reach the right bolt to the floor, keeping the left bolt up. Inhale; center. Exhale; reach the left bolt down, keeping the right bolt up. Repeat. This exercise can also be done sitting up, in the diamond.