

# **British Horse Society**

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## **Riding and the Alexander Technique**

**By Daniel Pevsner F.B.H.S**

The Alexander Technique is not a method for learning to ride, but it is an invaluable preparation for doing so. It is a basis for all the skills needed in equitation, as for other activities in life. It is a mind-body technique, i. e. it is concerned equally with physical aptitude and mental attitude, the two being inseparable. On the physical side, its objectives are the attainment of poise, balance, healthy functioning and effective neuro-muscular co-ordination', on the mental side, calmness, rational choice and decision, control of reaction and, particularly, the prevention of inept habitual patterns of action and response.

Of what use is the Alexander Technique to the rider?

Body control, balance, good limb co-ordination, regular and easy breathing, presence of mind and a calm and collected attitude are among the acknowledged prerequisites of equestrian efficiency. Due to modern economic and social condition it is virtually impossible to develop these properly by conventional work in the riding school. A long apprenticeship starting at an early age would be necessary. Not only is such an apprenticeship impossible for most people, but there are scarcely any places left today where it could be served.

To make up for this, it is recommended that riders work to improving themselves when not actually in the saddle so that their level of general functioning improves. Learning and practicing the Alexander Technique could be most valuable for this purpose.

It should be repeated that the technique is not a substitute for actual riding experience, especially for correct work on the lunge, but these procedures complement and enhance each other.

As their understanding and experience of the Alexander Technique increases, riders will also find special interests in the fact that the processes and considerations involved are very similar to those employed in schooling horses.

Also, more specifically, riders will be interested to know that the Technique can be very effective in reducing and eliminating back problems which seem to afflict so many riders nowadays.

### **HOW IS IT TAUGHT?**

The Alexander Technique is not a form of manipulative treatment, as is physiotherapy, osteopathy or massage, although the teacher uses hands to impart the necessary experience of balance and co-ordination whilst monitoring the behaviour of the pupil. Thus, the guidance of a properly qualified teacher is virtually indispensable; it is not possible to learn the Technique unaided, e.g. from a do-it-yourself book.

About 24 - 30 lessons, taken in close successions, are usually needed to establish a solid foundation. Afterwards, depending on the pupil's individual needs, the rate of lessons can be reduced almost completely, although it is always advisable to keep up with one's teacher, and take an occasional lesson to reinforce what has been learnt.