

# AIRS ABOVE THE GROUND



The "school jumps," or "airs above the ground" are a series of higher-level dressage maneuvers where the horse leaves the ground. These include the capriole, courbette, the mezzair, the croupade, and levade.

None are typically seen in modern competitive dressage, but are performed by horses of various riding academies, including the Royal School of Equestrian Arts in Jerez, Spain, the Spanish Riding School in Vienna and the Cadre Noir in Saumur. Horses such as the Andalusian, Lusitano and Lipizzan are the breeds most often trained to perform the "airs" today, in part due to their powerfully-conformed hindquarters, which allow them the strength to perform these difficult movements. There were originally seven airs, many of which were used to build into the movements performed today.

Horses are usually taught each air on the long rein without a rider, which is less strenuous for the animal. However, each movement is meant to eventually be performed under a rider.

The pesade and levade are the first airs taught to the High School horse, and it is from these that all other airs are taught. In the **pesade**, the horse raises his forehead off the ground and tucks his forelegs evenly, carrying all his weight on his hindquarters, to form a 45 degree angle with the ground. The **levade** was first taught at the beginning of the 20th century, asking the horse to hold a position approximately 30-35 degrees from the ground. Unlike the pesade, which is more of a test of balance, the decreased angle makes the levade an extremely strenuous position to hold, and requires a greater effort from the horse. Therefore, many horses are not capable of a good-quality levade. The levade is also a transition movement between work on the ground and the airs above the ground. Neither of these movements are equivalent to rearing, as they require precise control, excellent balance, and a great deal of strength, and are the product of correct training, rather than resistance from the horse.

The horse is asked to enter the **pesade** or **levade** from the **piaffe**, which asks the horse to increasingly engage his hindquarters, lowering them toward the ground and bringing his hind legs more toward his center of gravity. This gives the viewer the impression that the horse appears to sink down in back and rise in front. The position is held for a number of seconds, and then the horse quietly puts the forelegs back on the ground and proceeds at the walk, or stands at the halt. The levade is considered to be pinnacle of collection, as the horse carries all of his weight on his back legs, and has an extreme tucking of the hindquarters and coiling of the loins.

In the **capriole** ('*leap of a goat*'), the horse jumps from a raised position of the forehead straight up into the air, kicks out with the hind legs, and lands more or less on all four legs at the same time. It requires an enormously powerful horse to perform correctly, and is considered the most difficult of all the airs above the ground. It is first introduced with the **croupade**, in which the horse does not kick out at the height of elevation, but keeps his hind legs tucked tightly under, and remains *parallel* to the ground.



The Four Major Classical Schools of Equestrian Arts perform:  
**Les 4 Ecoles d'Art Equestre**  
 Paris - Bercy 25 Novembre, 2007

*The Spanish School of Riding, Vienna, Austria*  
*Le Cadre Noir, Saumur, France*  
*Real Escuela Andaluza del Arte Ecuestre (Royal School of Equestrian Arts)*  
*Portuguese School of Equestrian Arts*

The horse is then taught the **ballotade**. In this movement, the horse's hind hooves are positioned so one can see its shoes if watching from behind, but the horse is not asked to kick out. When the horse demonstrates proficiency in the ballotade, the **capriole** is introduced.

In the **courbette**, the horse raises his forehead off the ground, tucks up his forelegs evenly, and then jumps forward, never allowing the forelegs to touch down, in a series of "hops". Extremely strong and talented horses can perform five or more leaps forward before having to touch down with the forelegs, although it is more usual to see a series of three or four leaps. The courbette, like the capriole, is first introduced through the easier croupade.

In the **mezzair**, the horse rears up and strikes out with its forelegs. It is similar to a series of levades with a forward motion (not in place), with the horse gradually bringing its legs further under himself in each successive movement and lightly touching the ground with his front legs before pushing up again. The mezzair was originally called the courbette by the old dressage masters, and it is no longer practiced at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna.



See Photo Gallery for exciting images of Airs Above the Ground



This article can be viewed in its entirety at Wikipedia.org

