

The Airs Above the Ground



This section of the guide will describe the exhibition of what are called "***The Airs Above the Ground***" or "***School Jumps***". These are a series of higher-level dressage movements where the horse leaves the ground. These movements are not included in competitive dressage and are typically trained in private schools or academies including; the **Spanish Riding School** in Vienna, the **Cadre Noir** in Saumur, the **Royal School of Equestrian Arts** in Spain. These movements are for demonstration or exhibition only. The entertainment value of such displays is very high and spectators gather in great number to watch these performances. The horses trained to perform the "Airs Above the Ground" have typically been trained through all the High School Movements required within the top levels of competitive dressage. Training beyond the competitive levels requires special teaching/training and a very special horse.

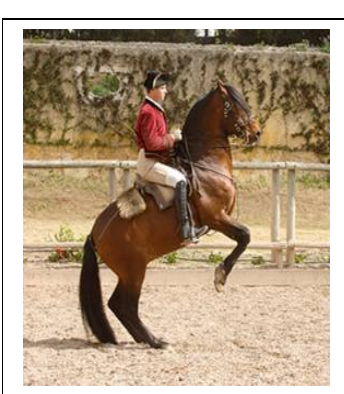
These movements are typically for the purposes of show, exhibition or entertainment value only. When displaying your model horse for a live event or photo show please state the movement being performed as it correlates to the movements discussed within this guide. Your display does not require a fenced arena of any type. All of the movements that will be discussed within this guide can be shown mounted or unmounted. You may use an English saddle & bridle (full or snaffle) or any of the Baroque or Spanish type tack shown in this guide. There are no restrictions on the type of bit or bits to be used (though western bits would be improper and bits with shanks longer than 5" would be punitive). The angle of the curb bit should be no greater than as shown within this guide. The brow band and cavesson arrangement on the bridle itself is without restriction. The horse may be displayed unmounted using only a surcingle, side reins and lunge cavesson with or without bits. Saddle pads can be of any material, breed logo's or farm logo's are popular and are not restricted in anyway. Stirrups are optional for mounted displays while unmounted displays the stirrups are tied down in some fashion or removed. Whips of various lengths are used, spurs are also sometimes used. Breast collars and croupers are also allowed. Wraps on the legs of the horse are often used and vary in color and type though leather boots are not used. The mane, forelock and tail can be braided or tied as desired; accessories in the mane and tail are also allowed without restriction. There are no restrictions on attire of the rider which may be historical, ethnic or modern in style. Auxiliary handlers or grounds persons may also be added to the display as desired to demonstrate a particular movement.

Typically used for such movements are the Baroque horse breeds which consist of the Andalusian, Lusitano and the Lippizan. Their ancient roots trace back to the Iberian Peninsula; modern day Spain, Portugal, Andorra and Gibraltar. This group of breeds, called "Baroque" takes their name from an extravagant baroque style of art and architecture. These groups of horse breeds have an amazing floating and elevated action and are highly intelligent, majestic in appearance and possess an exceptionally trainable nature. These breeds are felt to be best suited to this work due in part to their powerfully-conformed hindquarters, which allow them the strength which is required to perform the "Airs Above the Ground".

There were originally seven Airs Above the Ground movements, these include; the **Capriole**, **Courbette**, **Mezair**, **Croupade**, **Ballotade**, **Pesade**, and the **Levade**. Currently only the **Capriole**, **Courbette**, and **Levade** are demonstrated at the Spanish Riding School in Vienna as well as the other three well known schools. The **Mezair**, **Croupade**, **Ballotade**, and the **Pesade** are used as teaching steps to reach the others which are considered the most difficult to achieve. Horses are usually taught each air on the long rein without a rider, which is less strenuous for him. However, each movement is meant to eventually be performed under saddle which would be the highest level of difficulty of each of these movements. The ability of a horse to perform any one of these movements is considered a gift. A horse that is able to perform more than one, one in a million, since the percentage of horses with the strength, ability and aptitude to accomplish these movements is very, very low. There are several other movements that may be included in the training steps category such as the **Lancaide**.

The original intent of training a horse to perform these movements was to protect his rider during battle. The threat and danger to foe created (real or implied) by a horse performing one of these "Airs Above the Ground" would make him imposing to say the least and far too dangerous for a warrior on foot to approach. This would generally leave his rider in a safer position free from the fear of being attacked. Higher level commanders and the leaders of an army would typically be excellent horsemen and their mount would be able to protect him from danger by using the "Airs Above the Ground" against his attackers.

The **Pesade** and then the more difficult levade are the first airs taught to the High School horse, and it is from these that all others 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.



Pesade: where the horse tucks his forelegs evenly, carrying all his weight on his hindquarters, to form a 45 degree angle with the ground. The photo on the far right is the most correct display of this movement among these four.

The ***Levade*** asks the horse to raise his forehand off the ground, tucking his forelegs under himself tightly and evenly and to then hold the position at approximately a 30-35 degrees angle 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 used as a transition movement between work on the ground and the airs above the ground. Both of these movements are not equated to rearing, since they require precise control, balance, and a great deal of strength. They are instead a result of correct training and are performed without resistance. Rearing on the other hand is an evasion of and resistance to training.

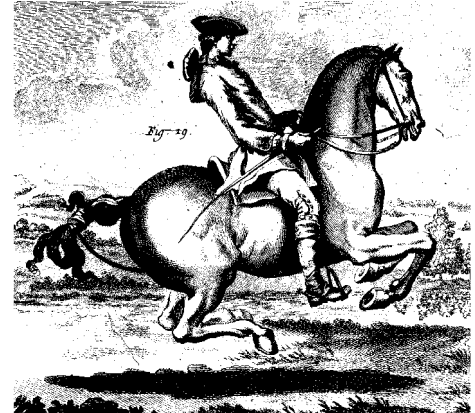


Levade- The horse must maintain a haunched position at a 30 to 35-degree angle to the ground, requiring muscle control and perfection of balance that is quite difficult. The top three photo's here are the most correct of these six, though the Breyer model is very close.

The horse is asked to enter the ***Pesade*** or ***Levade*** from the *Piaffe*, which asks the horse to increasingly place weight onto his hindquarters, lowering them toward the ground which will be his pivot point and center of gravity. This gives the viewer the impression that the horse appears to be sitting down on his hind legs while raising his front legs and holding them off the ground. The position is held for a number of seconds, and then the horse gently puts weight back onto his forelegs and either stands at a halt or proceeds at a walk as requested. The Levade is considered to be

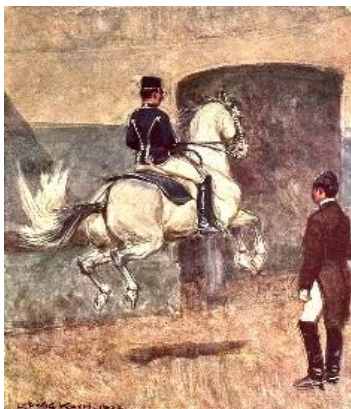
the ultimate level of collection, since he is carrying all of his weight on his hindquarters and shows a high level of tucking and coiling of the loins and hindquarters.

In the **Croupade** the horse begins from the Levade position and jumps up off the ground with the front legs tucked under and the hind legs tucked under. In this movement he is higher off the ground with his forehead than with his hindquarters. He lands with the hind legs first, then the forelegs. It is similar to the Courbette except that he does not leap forward, just up.



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. Photo's one and three are most correct for this movement.

The horse is then taught the **Ballotade**. In this movement, the horse's hind legs are tucked fairly tightly beneath him with much bend in the hocks. The hooves are positioned so one can see his horse shows if looking at the movement from behind. The forelegs are not as tucked as in the Croupade and the horse is more or less horizontal to the ground. In this movement however the horse is not asked to kick out with his hind legs at the highest elevation of the jump. This movement may appear to be very much like the croupade, but with the horse starting this movement with his hind legs less underneath himself in the Pesade position. This is part of what makes the Ballotade much more difficult than the Croupade. The other aspect of this movement that makes it more difficult for the horse is that the horse must land on his hind legs to save his front legs. When the horse demonstrates proficiency in the Ballotade, the Capriole is introduced.



The Ballotade: I was unable to find many photos of this uncommon movement.

In the **Jumping Capriole** the horse jumps from a raised position of the forehead (such as that of the Levade) straight up into the air, tucks up his hind legs and then he kicks out with his hind legs to near full extension keeping

his forelegs tucked tightly beneath him. He then lands more or less on all four legs at the same time. The correct Capriole requires an enormously powerful horse, 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 more or less parallel to the ground. In the capriole, the horse leaps high into the air, first raising his forehead off the ground, then kicks out behind himself before landing on either the hind legs or all four legs, never just the front legs.



The Capriole: Considered the "Crown Jewel" the most difficult and dangerous, photo's two, three and five are the most correct of this group.

The less common variation of this movement is known as the **Standing Capriole** in which the horses forelegs remain on the ground but his hind quarters are completely extended as he kicks out with both hind legs. The Standing Capriole is a teaching step to the Jumping Capriole and was also used as defense in battle.



The **Standing Capriole** shown below: Both are correct, the second picture shown more height than does the first.

In the ***Courbette***, the horse raises his forehand off the ground, tucks up his forelegs evenly under himself then leaps forward into the air, tucking his hindquarters under himself. He leaps up and forward again and again 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.



The Courbette: The most correct is photo one, showing the correct angle of the jump, placement of and flexion of the leg joints.

In the Mezair, the horse rears up and strikes out with its forelegs. It is similar to a series of Pesades 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.



Mezair - A series of successive Pesades in which the horse lowers its forefeet to the ground before rising again on hindquarters, achieving forward motion.

My research also leads me to believe that there is one additional movement called the ***Lanceade***, in which the horse starts from the levade and jumps forward. This jump is low and long. We will add information about this movement as it becomes available, but I believe this is what it may look like prior to the horse actually leaping forward. Starting

from the Levade position which is lower to the ground than the Pesade, the horse lowers his front quarters somewhat and pushes forward with his hindquarters leaping forward.



Photo credits:

The Capriole: <http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=PICTURE+CAPRIOLLE&qpv=PICTURE+CAPRIOLLE&FORM=R5FD4#focal=68369754d8d5bb32169105fbd2f3306c&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lipizzaner-maestoso.de%2Fspanis4.jpg> and also: <http://www.marsel.no/Bilder/capriole.jpg>,

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The Standing Capriole:

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also a picture of porcelain:

Porcelain figurine of a Lipizzaner horse and rider from the famous Spanish riding school in Vienna Austria.

Made by Augarten Wien porcelain manufacturers of Austria

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The Mezair: [http://www.bing.com/images/search?](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=PICTURE+levade&form=QBIR&qsn=&sk=#focal=bce5cddf0f78d5345291c2fd72f7767b&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.shezphoto.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2009%2F03%2Fflippizanblog003.jpg)

q=PICTURE+levade&form=QBIR&qsn=&sk=#focal=bce5cddf0f78d5345291c2fd72f7767b&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.shezphoto.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2009%2F03%2Fflippizanblog003.jpg

The Croupade:

[http://isntso.wordpress.com/2009/08/10/463/,](http://isntso.wordpress.com/2009/08/10/463/)

and also:

[http://www.bing.com/images/search?](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=PICTURE+croupade&sk=&cbir=vw&mid=AF40C7002FEDC6783E14A83B37F9F66C6471A08E&ru=%2Fimages%2Fsearch%3Fq%3DPICTURE%2Bcroupade%26go%3D%26form%3DQBIR%26qs%3Dn%26sk%3D%23focal%3DDebbd0bb3c9138494922ea1d200fefca4%26furl%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.lessing-photo.com%252Fp3%252F170401%252F17040105.jpg#focal=c6b766925bd67a343571b330a52ce804&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lessing-photo.com%2Fp2%2F170401%2F17040105.jpg)

q=PICTURE+croupade&sk=&cbir=vw&mid=AF40C7002FEDC6783E14A83B37F9F66C6471A08E&ru=%2Fimages%2Fsearch%3Fq%3DPICTURE%2Bcroupade%26go%3D%26form%3DQBIR%26qs%3Dn%26sk%3D%23focal%3DDebbd0bb3c9138494922ea1d200fefca4%26furl%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.lessing-photo.com%252Fp3%252F170401%252F17040105.jpg#focal=c6b766925bd67a343571b330a52ce804&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lessing-photo.com%2Fp2%2F170401%2F17040105.jpg,

and also:

[http://www.bing.com/images/search?](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=PICTURE+croupade&form=QBIR&qsn=&sk=#focal=0dc86cb43496bdd24d185ca0a7ca43e8&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fimage.absoluteastronomy.com%2Fimages%2Fencyclopediainages%2Fc%2Fcr%2Fcroupade.gif)

q=PICTURE+croupade&form=QBIR&qsn=&sk=#focal=0dc86cb43496bdd24d185ca0a7ca43e8&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fimage.absoluteastronomy.com%2Fimages%2Fencyclopediainages%2Fc%2Fcr%2Fcroupade.gif

The Lancaide: [http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=pictures](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=pictures%2C+levade&sk=&cbir=vw&mid=F93FB2F214EB7C87332B060EA9A66EB3E71FAC22&ru=%2Fimages%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dpictures%252C%2Blevade%26form%3DQBIR%26qs%3Dn%26sk%3D%23focal%3D6712f959c17f25be28588eb8580ed3af%26furl%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.horsespre.com%252Fbacknet%252Fupload%252Fimages%252Fp4139479.jpg#)

%2C+levade&sk=&cbir=vw&mid=F93FB2F214EB7C87332B060EA9A66EB3E71FAC22&ru=%2Fimages%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dpictures%252C%2Blevade%26form%3DQBIR%26qs%3Dn%26sk%3D%23focal%3D6712f959c17f25be28588eb8580ed3af%26furl%3Dhttp%253A%252F%252Fwww.horsespre.com%252Fbacknet%252Fupload%252Fimages%252Fp4139479.jpg#, and also: http://andalusiansdemythos.com/culture/index_files/page3.htm

LINK TO VIDEO OF CAPRIOLE, LEVADE, COURBETTE AND MEZAIR AT:

[http://www.bing.com/images/search?](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=PICTURE+levade&form=QBIR&qsn=&sk=#focal=115c56d48f5e08869f264168b30b8525&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fflipizzaner.com%2Fimages%2Fmezair.jpg)

q=PICTURE+levade&form=QBIR&qsn=&sk=#focal=115c56d48f5e08869f264168b30b8525&furl=http%3A%2F%2Fflipizzaner.com%2Fimages%2Fmezair.jpg