

EMA

Equine Massage Academy Ltd

Therapy Education Research

The Real Reason Your Horse Won't Engage from Behind



“Get them more engaged.”

It's one of the most common instructions riders hear...
and one of the most misunderstood.

Because the truth is simple:

👉 If your horse isn't engaging from behind, it's often not because they won't... it's because they *can't*.

What Does “Engagement” Actually Mean?

True engagement is not just about “more impulsion” or “more leg.”

It is a **biomechanical process** where your horse:

- Steps actively underneath their body
- Carries weight through the hindquarters
- Engages their core and lifts through the back
- Transfers energy up and forward through the whole body

This requires:

- ✓ Strength
- ✓ Mobility
- ✓ Coordination
- ✓ Comfort

Without all four, engagement cannot happen correctly.

Why Horses Struggle to Engage

1. Lack of Strength

Engagement is physically demanding—it’s closer to a *strength exercise* than most riders realise.

If your horse lacks strength, you may see:

- Trailing hind limbs
- A tendency to fall onto the forehand
- Head raised with a dropped back
- Difficulty maintaining rhythm or balance

👉 This is not disobedience—it’s a physical limitation.

2. Restriction Through the Body

Your horse cannot engage if movement is blocked.

Restrictions can occur in:

- The pelvis
- Anywhere in the back but commonly the lumbar spine
- The thoracic sling
- The ribcage

When this happens:

- The hind legs cannot step under
- The back cannot lift
- Energy cannot travel through the body

👉 Engagement becomes mechanically impossible.

3. Discomfort (Even Subtle)

Engagement increases load on the hindquarters and back.

If there is discomfort, your horse will:

- Avoid stepping under
- Hollow or brace (move with a high neck and inverted back)
- Resist transitions or collection

👉 What looks like behavioural resistance is often protective movement.

4. Poor Posture and Balance

A horse that is:

- Hollow
- Crooked
- On the forehand

...cannot organise their body well enough to engage.

Posture dictate's function.

👉 If posture is incorrect, engagement cannot be correct.

⚠️ The Common Mistake

When engagement is missing, riders often respond with:

- More leg
- More pressure
- More insistence

But this creates:

- Tension
- Resistance
- Compensatory movement patterns

👉 You cannot "push" a horse into correct biomechanics.

✅ A Better Way Forward

Instead of chasing engagement, focus on what allows it to happen:

- Relaxation → removes restriction
- Straightness → allows even loading
- Freedom of movement → enables correct mechanics
- Postural balance → supports weight transfer

👉 When these are correct, engagement becomes a *result*, not a demand.

Want to Understand What's Really Blocking Engagement?

If you want to go beyond surface-level riding advice and truly understand *why* your horse moves the way they do, our no work but full of information course is essential:

Training from an Anatomical Perspective [LINK](#)

Learn how the body actually works during training so you can develop the exercises we show you that improve—not restrict—movement. We give you everything you need!

Because real engagement isn't something you create...

...it's something you *enable* through correct understanding.

Our courses are approved by:

