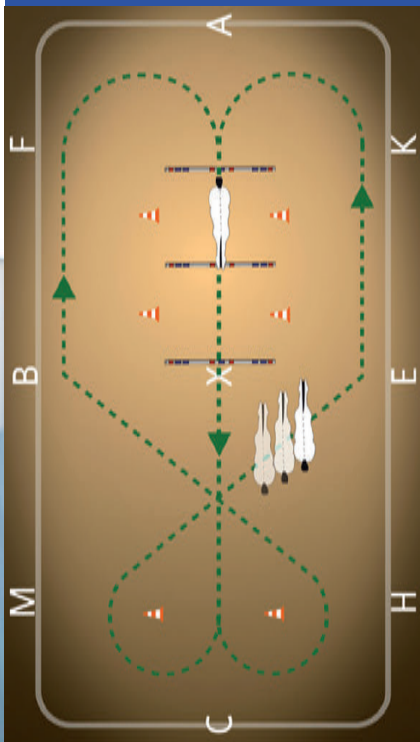


50 BEST

ARENA EXERCISES AND PATTERNS

Essential Schooling for
English and Western Riders



Ann Katrin Querbach



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7.1 Trotting On from Rein-Back

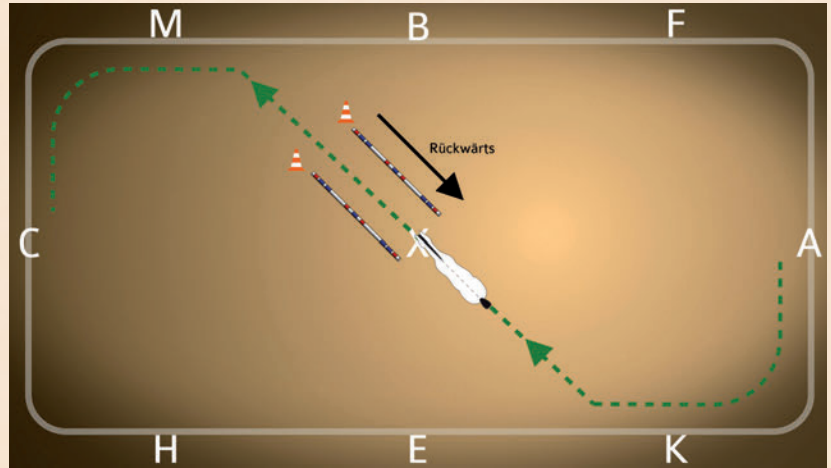
This exercise not only trains the horse to halt at a specific point and back up, but also to actively step under with his hind legs, and execute transitions. In order for the horse to move and lift through his back, which enables him to carry the rider's weight more optimally, he must shift weight off his forehead, back onto his hindquarters. An upward transition from rein-back into the trot is required in many dressage tests.

What Do I Need?

2 ground poles, 2 cones.

Setting Up

Position the ground poles parallel to one another, 3–5 feet (1–1.5 m) apart, along the diagonal from K–M. The poles should be placed in the second half of the diagonal. Position the cones at the end of the poles near M (see diagram).



How Does This Exercise Work?

- (1) At the trot, change rein across the diagonal, riding through both poles. From the trot, come to a halt between the two cones.
- (2) Back your horse a few strides in between the poles. When you reach the end of the poles, trot forward out of your rein-back and complete your change of rein across the diagonal.
- (3) Afterward, ride at a posting trot all the way around the arena.

Heads Up! Make sure that your horse backs up slowly and then trots off with energy and power. There should not be any steps of walk in between the rein-back and the upward transition to trot.

What Is the Horse Learning?

A straight rein-back. To halt from the trot at a specific point. To activate his hindquarters. Obedience. Transitions.

What Is the Rider Learning?

The rein-back. To halt from the trot at a specific point. Transitions.

In the upward transition to trot, Bijou's hind-quarters move up actively under his center of gravity.



What to Do if...?

My horse doesn't halt between the cones.

Solidify your trot—make a halt transition in a different spot, possibly along the rail. Be patient and practice lots of transitions.

The horse halts too soon.

When an exercise is repeated many times, the horse often comes to anticipate the commands. Outsmart your horse by riding through the poles at the trot a few times, without transitioning to a halt or backing up.

My horse does not stand quietly.

Practice standing quietly along the arena rail, either when mounted or from the ground. Remain calm and patient. Only begin to ride on again after the horse has stood quietly. Praise your horse using a quiet voice.

Heads Up! Pay attention to your seat! Maintain straightness in your upper body. Don't tip backward as you execute the halt or forward when you ask for the trot.

Note: Using this arena setup, you can also school the side-pass (see *Exercise 10.4*).

7.2 Extended Trot from Shoulder-In

This exercise combines the shoulder-in with riding straight ahead at the trot. In shoulder-in, the horse's inside hind tracks up more definitely under his center of gravity and he loads and flexes his haunches. This improves the carrying power of the hind legs. As you trot straight forward, the hindquarters are activated and impulsion is fostered. The horse develops a floating, ground-covering trot.

How Does This Exercise Work?

(1) Ride a few steps of shoulder-in at the trot. At some point, trot forward out of the shoulder-in. As you do so, the horse will clearly shift more weight onto his hindquarters and develop more thrust while in motion.

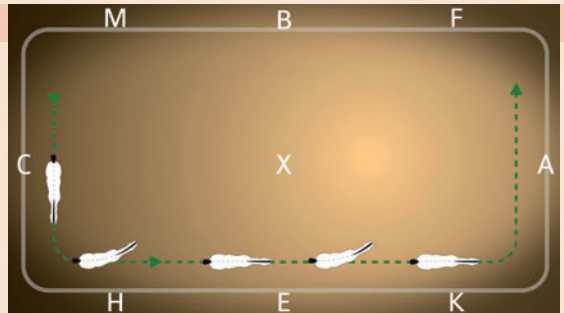
(2) After a short time, resume shoulder-in as you come out of a corner onto the long side.

Aids: Weight your inside seat bone, which enables the horse to more pronouncedly step up under the center of gravity with his inside hind. Imagine you want to begin riding a volte, so apply your inside leg at the girth to ask the horse to bend. Your inside rein positions the horse and the outside rein regulates and lifts his shoulder. The outside leg is in a guarding position.

(3) Before E or B respectively, choose a specific point where you will trot straight ahead. Here, send the horse forward from both legs. Have an even contact on both reins and distribute your weight evenly on both seat bones. Your hope here is that the hindquarters work harder than usual. If after a few steps, you lose this extra power from behind, return to the shoulder-in and return to the forward trot after just a few steps of shoulder-in, as described above. This time, try to maintain the forward, driving trot until you reach the next short side. Then repeat the exercise.

Tip: Time your change from shoulder-in to forward-moving trot to correspond with the moment when the horse's inside hind leaves the ground. This way, the momentum carries forward into the straight movement.

Variation: You can also practice this exercise while crossing the diagonal. To do so, ride through the corner in shoulder-in and then straighten and extend your trot as you come across the diagonal.



After shoulder-in, horses move from behind more actively.



What Is the Horse Learning?

To activate his hindquarters. To actively track up under the center of gravity. To cover ground at the trot.

What Is the Rider Learning?

The rider develops feel for a more active hindquarters (impulsion and thrust). Changing of the aids between a lateral and forward movement.

What to Do if...?

My horse's trot lacks impulsion.

This can be caused by a muscular problem. If your veterinarian says all is in order, take a step back: ride changes of tempo along the arena rail. Ride transitions between and within the gaits. Only after doing some more preliminary work should you try this exercise again.

My horse shoots forward.

Consider the quality of your horse's movement during the shoulder-in. If your horse is not on the aids, the source of the problem has already begun during the shoulder-in. Try the forward trot again once your horse is clearly on the aids during shoulder-in. Please make sure that you are driving the horse forward to the bridle at all times, ensuring a refined connection with the horse's mouth.

If the rider's inside heel comes up, it can cause her weight to slide to the outside, which blocks her inside hip from following or influencing the movement of the horse.

Imagine you want to lift your outside shoulder and, at the same time, touch the arena floor with your inside heel. As you do so, please also allow your inner shoulder to lift.

Tip: The rider's shoulders are parallel to the horse's shoulders; the rider's hips are parallel to the horse's hips.

7.3 Extended Trot from Volte

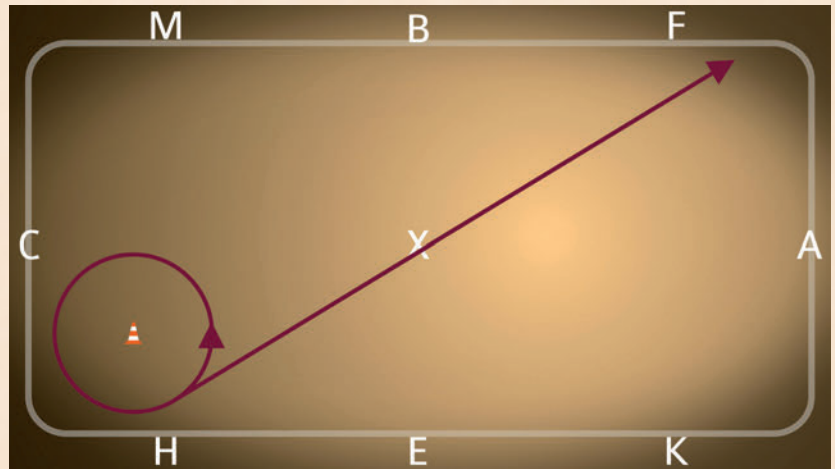
On a volte, the horse learns clearly how to track up under his center of gravity with his inside hind leg. This helps the horse to lengthen, covering more ground during the extended trot.

What Do I Need?

1–2 cones.

Setting Up

In two corners, position each of the cones about 15 feet (5 m) from the short side and 16 feet from the long side.



How Does This Exercise Work?

- (1) In the corner, ride a volte at the trot.
- (2) As you exit the volte, ride across the long diagonal, extending the trot as you do so.

Tip: If the horse loses thrust halfway through the diagonal, you can build in another volte. Only take the horse back once you have reached the rail, so that he doesn't just decide to change the tempo of his own accord before you reach the rail.

Aids: As you leave the rail after the volte, drive your horse forward from both legs. Allow your horse to come forward onto the bridle. In the beginning, do this at the posting trot so that you don't disturb his movement.

Tip: Western riders, this is a great exercise for reining! Ride your volte at a jog, but stand up in a light seat as you leave the rail. Allowing the horse to move forward, you may keep a light contact on the reins. You may also hold on to the saddle horn.

What Is the Horse Learning?

The development of thrust. To actively step up with his hindquarters. To cover more ground. This exercise trains and develops the horse's back muscles.



Alicia drives her horse softly forward into the extended trot.

What Is the Rider Learning?

To ride through changes in tempo. To ride the horse clearly forward onto the bridle.

What to Do if...?

My horse won't come back from the extended trot.

Build an extra volte in at the corner. Ride the volte to calm the horse until he is once again accepting your aids.

My horse gets crooked while crossing the diagonal.

Practice simply riding a straight diagonal, without extending your trot.

My horse breaks into a canter.

Riding your horse correctly on the bridle and working on the rail, practice increasing your tempo a little at a time.

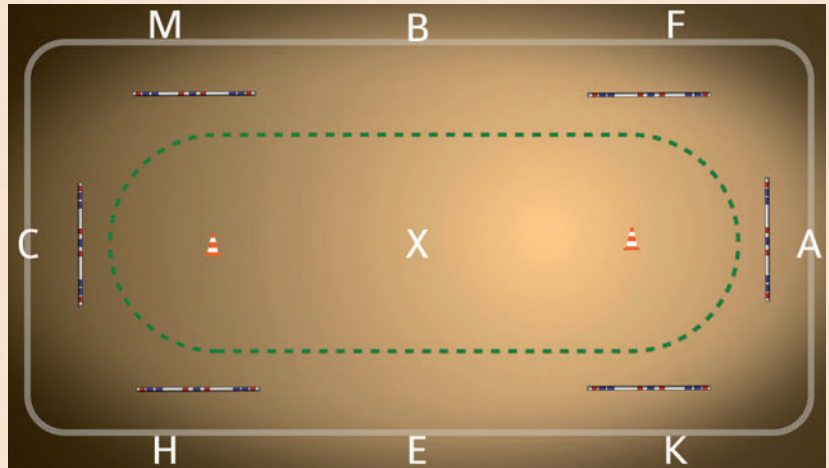
7.4 Changing Tempo

What Do I Need?

2 cones, 6 ground poles.

Setting Up

Position a cone at both D and G, 3–5 feet (1–1.5 m) from the rail, position the six ground poles so that they frame the line you are going to ride (see diagram).



How Does This Exercise Work?

- (1) Ride along the delineated line 4–6 feet (1.2–1.8 m) from the rail at, let's say, the trot. On the long sides, you can lengthen the trot stride.
- (2) As soon as you are in line with the cone on the long side, use your weight aids to bring your horse back then ride half of a 15–20 meter circle around the cone (as opposed to riding deep corners). The ground poles set the boundary for your circle and prevent the horse from falling to the outside. As soon as you have finished your turn around the cone, breathe into your chest in order to lift your breastbone and, thereby, heighten engagement and tone. Drive your horse forward, more onto the bit, and allow his frame to expand.

Tip: Post the trot!

Aids: On the long sides, you should drive the horse forward more by using both legs and sending him onto the bit. Allow your hips to swing forward in order to increase the tempo. As soon as you approach the point where the turn begins, change the swing of your hips to be more upward (“your belt buckle should reach the ceiling!”) and breathe into your chest. So, you should have the feeling that your breastbone is attached to a cord that is pulling upward. Make sure you don't develop a hollow back, which will block your hips from following.

What Is the Horse Learning?

To change his tempo in response to more refined aids.



Build engagement and tone by lifting through your breastbone as you inhale.

What Is the Rider Learning?

To keep the horse on the aids at the extended trot without the support of the rail. To bring the horse back through the corners using more refined weight aids.

What to Do if...?

My horse deviates from the designated line of travel and weaves down the long sides.

First, take away the change in tempo and just ride along on the designated line 4–6 feet (1.2–1.8 m) from the rail. Make sure that you sit straight in the saddle and frame your horse evenly with your aids on both sides.

My horse does not slow down in response to my weight aids and body energy.

Revisit and practice chapter 2.

7.5 Stop Sign

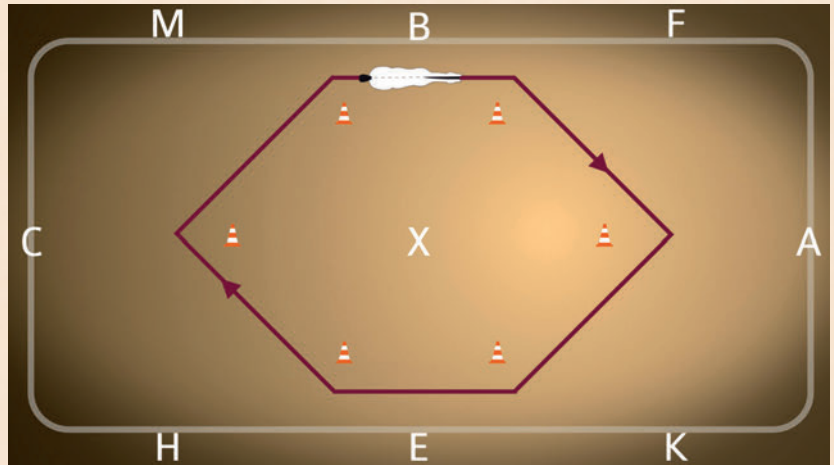
In this exercise, the hindquarters are activated, the shoulders are lifted, the hindquarters are lowered, and the horse's willing cooperation is encouraged.

What Do I Need

Up to 6 cones.

Setting Up

This exercise offers many possible variations: a square—four cones spaced at least 32 feet (10 m) apart; a triangle—three cones positioned as a triangle and spaced at least 32 feet (10 m) apart; a hexagon (see diagram).



How Does This Exercise Work?

- (1) Ride along the outside of the cones. Always maintain a consistent distance from the cones. On the straight lines, frame the horse according to your riding style.
- (2) Western riders execute a quarter turn-on-the-haunches at each cone, while dressage riders execute a few steps of half-pass (see *Exercise 9.7*).

Tip: In the turns, the horse must shift more weight onto his haunches and allow his shoulder to move freely through the corners. The horse must clearly step up beneath the center of gravity. In trot/canter, the tempo should be scaled back noticeably.

Aids: (Note: Classical dressage riders can find a description of the aids in *Exercise 9.7*.) The exercise can, of course, be ridden at the walk or trot.

When going straight, evenly distribute the weight aids, evenly apply leg aids, evenly guide with the reins (your shoulders are parallel).

When turning on the haunches, as soon as the horse's croup is even with the cone, your outside leg sends the horse's shoulder around. Your weight comes to the inside, the horse is positioned to the inside, and the outside rein lies against the neck. The inside leg becomes active only when the horse begins to fall onto his inside shoulder through the turn, or even positions himself toward the outside.

For a slight half-pass, your seat is lightly weighted to the inside, your inside leg drives the horse, while your outside leg is applied lightly in a guarding position. The outside rein regulates the horse while the inside rein positions him.

Ground poles also make a great visual barrier when used to mark the straight lines.



Heads Up! With difficult breeds or in some different riding styles, the outside leg can also come back while driving the horse forward, which supports the outside hind.

What Is the Horse Learning?

To lift through his shoulder and step up actively with his hind legs. To shift weight onto his hindquarters and respond to his rider's refined aids.

What Is the Rider Learning?

Feel and correct timing of the aids. To plan ahead and put the horse back onto his hindquarters.

What to Do if...?

My horse positions himself to the outside.

The horse is finding it difficult to maintain longitudinal bend through the turns and is leaning on his inside shoulder. Make your turn bigger and make sure that your inside leg is active and your inside rein positions the horse.

My horse doesn't turn but gets quick instead.

Review the acceptance of the leg aids with your horse (see ch. 2 *The Rein Aids*).