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RIDING & JUMPING CLINIC

New Edition
Featuring
Full-Color
Photographs

A Step-by-Step Course for Winning in the Hunter and Jumper Rings

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an “eye,” the skill that tells you whether a distance is going to work nicely or need a little adjustment.

(If you have trouble telling which is the landing stride and which the first full stride, start earlier: say, “Land,” as your horse touches down with his front legs on the far side of the first rail, and then “One,” when those legs land the next time, and so on.)

When you’re able to keep your horse straight and stop smoothly, try varying the end of the exercise by halting on a straight line one time, then riding a smooth 20-meter circle in one direction the next, and riding a similar circle in the other direction a time or two after that. In addition to keeping your horse from anticipating the halt, riding the circles will be useful preparation for riding courses.

As you begin the circle, *look where you are going*. Sit quietly in the saddle, following the canter stride with your hips and arms. If you have any trouble sitting in the saddle after being in two-point, drop your stirrups and ride the circle without them. You’ll automatically sit correctly, and your horse will canter more smoothly, even with the stirrups hanging on his sides.

Exercise 1-D

Next, try adjusting your horse’s stride. It’s something you did in basic flatwork, but now you’ll have the added factor of a rail to focus on.

Try *lengthening* first. To make the exercise work you must establish a longer stride *before* you cross the first rail, so build more pace on a big circle and then turn to the rails. As your horse “lands” over the first rail, keep your leg and lighter feel of his mouth to *allow* him to continue his more open stride and cover the distance between rails in four strides. (Don’t forget your straight halt afterward!)

Adjusting Stride—Lengthening

In **fig. 8.21**, I am starting in my basic canter position: seat in the saddle, heels down, upper body



8.21



slightly ahead of the vertical, arms a continuation of the reins. A moment later I'm following more with my arms to encourage my horse to stretch his frame (**fig. 8.22**). To make four even strides between the rails, I must have his stride longer *before* we cross the first rail. He lifts up to begin to stretch over the rail (**fig. 8.23**). I maintain my forward hip angle to stay with him, but I don't lean way forward or look down at the rail. My seat is lightly touching the saddle. As he stretches, I follow with supple arms, seat, and hips (**fig. 8.24**). My horse is maintaining a lovely rhythm. My arms and hands are very soft, following him as he lengthens (**fig. 8.25**).



Even in the “gathering” moment he’s longer in his frame and stride (**fig. 8.26**). I’m concentrating on our rhythm and line so the four strides works out nicely. With seat and leg, I say, “Keep stretching,” and I feel his neck stretch, as well as his stride (**fig. 8.27**). As he steps over the rail, I follow, keeping a light seat and light contact with his mouth so that I’m not interfering with him (**fig. 8.28**).

Adjusting Stride—Shortening

Now shorten the stride. Again, prepare the length you want between the two rails *before* you turn to them by keeping just enough leg to maintain the canter and closing your fingers more firmly on the reins. When you feel the stride shorten, approach the first rail while *maintaining* the pace. Ideally, you’ll fit in a sixth stride before the second rail. But if you see you haven’t shortened enough to fit in that extra stride, just shorten some more—smoothly. Don’t yank; sit deeper and close your hands more firmly on the reins, and see if you can make the “six” work. And in any case, finish the exercise with a smooth halt on a straight line.

Notice throughout the photo sequence how my leg stays down and around my horse and my eyes stay up. My basic position—eyes up, heels down, seat in the





saddle—is the same as in lengthening, but now my reins are slightly shorter and I have stronger contact with the horse’s mouth (**fig. 8.29**). Over the rail, I’m feeling his mouth to ask him to keep the shorter stride (**fig. 8.30**). He responds correctly, shortening his frame. For the split second of this photo, he’s gotten a bit low (**fig. 8.31**). In **fig. 8.32** my elbows are bent, helping to keep his balance up and short. My seat says, “Stay in the canter,” and my hands say, “Shorten.”

Continue working over the two rails, varying your striding requests and experimenting until you find the combination of pressure that produces what you’re looking for. With repetition, you’ll store this information in your muscle memory, too.

If you discover that your horse is going crooked instead of straight, look for the cause in your own riding first. Many riders have one hand that’s heavier than the

other or one leg that's stronger. Another possibility: does your horse have a physical problem? Any unevenness you noticed on the flat may be magnified in this exercise, and it will certainly be more noticeable when you progress to fences.

JUMPING ON A CURVING TRACK

EXERCISE 2: CIRCLES OVER RAILS ON THE GROUND

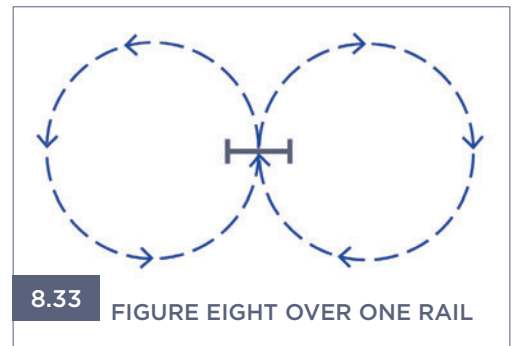
When you're comfortable with crossing two rails on a straight line, move on to learning how to negotiate them on a bending line—a feature you'll meet in all equitation and jumper classes.

We'll start with one rail as the center of a figure eight, then move on to two rails on a circle, and finally meet those same two rails as part of a more sophisticated figure eight. Each of these exercises will develop your use of your eyes and further your ability to maintain position, rhythm, and pace on a bending line. And following a bending track will increase your horse's suppleness; he'll have to think about “jumping” and turning while he stays balanced and focused on the upcoming rail through a turn.

The key to making each circle round is using your eyes properly. When you drive a car, you go where your eyes are looking—your eyes automatically signal your body to make the adjustments that will take you where you're looking (that's why people swerve when they look at something off to one side of the road). The same thing happens in riding. When you look around a circle where you want to go, your body will follow the bending track that your eyes mark out. You won't need any consciously applied bending aids to push your horse out; the eyes will do it for you.

Exercise 2-A: Figure Eight Over One Rail

I think of this basic figure-eight exercise as having two perfect circles joining at the center of the rail. Each time I cross the rail, I angle my horse slightly in the direction of the new circle.



Before my horse even steps over the rail, I anticipate the right turn, not by dropping a shoulder or collapsing a hip, but simply by turning my head and looking right (**fig. 8.34**). As I do so, my hands automatically shift rightward and tell him to begin turning. My eyes hold us on my imaginary circle pattern.

Going to the left, both my hands are slightly left, so that my left rein is direct, my right supporting (against the neck). I continue to look where I want to go, so as soon as I reach the halfway point I'll glue my eyes back on the center of the rail where I want to cross it (**fig. 8.35**).

As we get close to the rail, I make my horse straight to the center of it (**fig. 8.36**). Again, I anticipate the new direction by looking right and beginning to turn him with both hands slightly right. As I make my right-hand circle, I glue my eyes back onto the center of the rail (**fig. 8.37**). I don't lean in; I simply turn my



head and so stay in line with my horse. My eyes are right, both hands are slightly right, my outside rein and leg are preventing the shoulder and haunches from falling out. And always—*always!*—I look where I want to go.

Exercise 2-B: Two Rails on the Ground on a Circle

Now that you've practiced riding over one rail on a curving track, develop your feel further by negotiating two rails on a circle. Visualize a circle 20 meters across (about 60 feet), then place two rails across the circular track, one at the equivalent of nine o'clock and the other at three o'clock. (To help yourself keep the circle round as you ride it, you can also place markers just inside the track at six and at twelve o'clock and ride around them.)

First, walk the circle once. Remind yourself constantly to keep focusing ahead, around the circle, to keep the figure *round*. Then move on to trot.

Trotting the Rails

As I let my horse step over the rail in **fig. 8.38**, I concentrate on looking at the next rail, not down at this one. To turn him, I'm carrying both hands slightly left; my left rein, just off the neck, is directing, while my right, against the neck, is supporting. My inside leg prevents him from falling in; my outside stops him from falling out.





Now pick up a posting trot and negotiate the circle again. Discipline yourself to go over the center of each rail . . . and to stay on the circle between rails. When you discipline yourself this way, your body language—what you do with your eyes, your reins, and your legs—communicates clearly with your horse to tell him where you want him to go.

Without actually looking at the rail, I know we are about to go over it in **fig.**

8.39; that's my horse's responsibility. I know he's bent slightly left—I can feel it; I don't need to look at him. As we go over the rail, I'll remain focused *ahead*.

Cantering the Rails

When you're able to maintain your trot rhythm dependably and ride a truly circular track, go on to cantering the rails. Again, stay straight to the center of each rail and keep looking around the circle. Maintaining the rhythm and shape of the circle is the important thing; don't worry about the number of strides between rails.

Concentrate on keeping the circle perfectly round so that your horse follows the same track *every* time, *smoothly*. Visualize *exactly* the same pattern and *exactly* the same feeling each time around.

In the canter, I ride and think just as in the trot, putting my eyes on the next rail and letting my horse concern himself with stepping over the obstacle (**fig. 8.40**). Because he's found a rather big distance, I've come farther out of the saddle than usual, but I am going with him, keeping my hands low. I keep my outside aids on him to be sure he turns



as he goes over. As we continue around to the next rail, my seat stays in the saddle, following the motion of his back. My eyes are keeping us on the track. My horse is bent only as much as the circle we're on; my inside leg at the girth asks him to bend and keeps him from falling in (**fig. 8.41**). Once over the rail, my seat stays close to the saddle (**fig. 8.42**). My hands, working together toward the inside, make the turn happen. Notice I'm holding the inside rein slightly off the neck.

Attention to detail and the ability that attention gives you to repeat a good performance again and again are assets you'll rely on as you advance. Whether you're going over rails on the ground or 5'6" fences, the basics you're establishing now are the ones you'll come to depend on.

Exercise 2-C: Figure Eight Over Two Rails

To develop your eyes' accuracy and your horse's suppleness still further, now ride the two rails on the ground as a figure eight, using three versions of the same exercise.

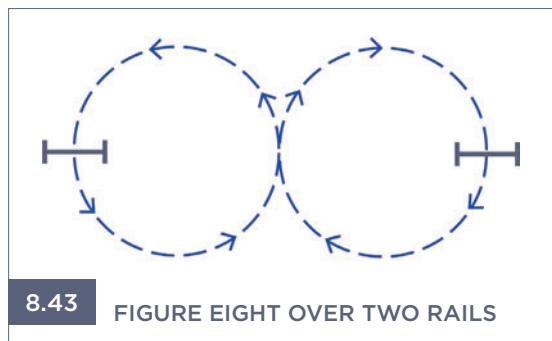
First, trot and then canter a simple figure eight. In the canter, cross the first rail. After landing, turn onto the diagonal, and change leads through the trot at the midpoint of the diagonal. Keep using your eyes to define the track, and turn in time to let



8.41



8.42



8.43

FIGURE EIGHT OVER TWO RAILS