

FIT & FOCUSED IN

52

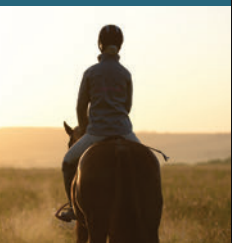
The Rider's Weekly
Mind-and-Body
Training Companion

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Author of Pressure Proof Your Riding

FEATURING
The Ultimate
52-Week Calendar
of Rider Training Tips
and Exercises

SUNDAY



MONDAY



TUESDAY



WEDNESDAY



THURSDAY



FRIDAY



SATURDAY



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*Two things define you as
a rider. Your patience when
you have nothing...
and your attitude when
you have everything.*



CHAPTER TWO

Calm, Cool, Collected, Confident, Courageous, Cheerful, Centered, Capable, Consistent

SOAR is a *mental training* acronym for **S**tay in the Zone, **O**wn your Mistakes, **A**dapt to Pressure, and **R**elax and Enjoy the Ride. When all four come together, your inner greatness is allowed to soar because it's no longer being weighed down. Before I present your 52 weekly *mental training* tips for focusing (beginning on p. 60), let's first take a quick look at each part of the SOAR mental-training program.

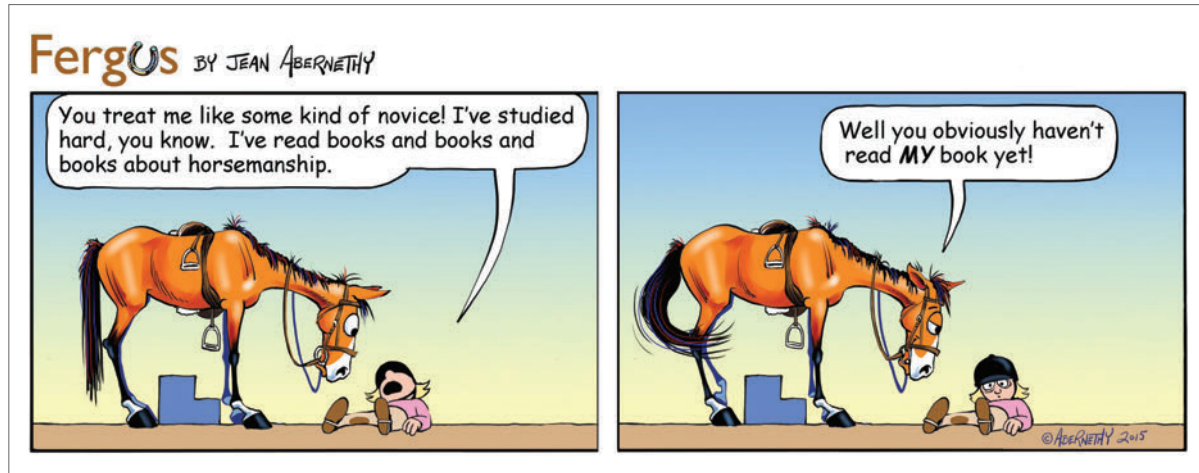
STAY IN THE ZONE

You've most likely heard someone say, "Get in the Zone." But just what is it? And how do you get there? Well, the Zone is an abbreviation for Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning (IZOF), and it describes a specific zone of mental arousal that allows you to function optimally. When you get into this special mindset, your mind becomes locked on the *present* and *positive* (instead of focusing on problems from your past). It's here that you believe you:

- Have the skills to match any challenge.
- Feel completely immersed in the ride.
- Are able to adjust your tactics depending upon new information.
- Have crystal clear focus and clarity of goals.
- Lose any thoughts of self-doubt.

S - Stay in the Zone

O
A
R



If all this wasn't enough, there's another benefit of being "in the Zone" that's perhaps the most important of all: it's called the *autotelic experience* and it's basically the feeling that the *love of the ride* is all the reward you really need. You're no longer motivated by ribbons and results, but instead by a deeper love of the horse and sport. The upcoming 52 weekly Focus tips are going to act like a vehicle to get you there.

Three other *Zones* also influence your ability to *soar*. They are the *Comfort Zone*, *Danger Zone*, and something called the *Goldilocks* or *Growth Zone*. I'll talk briefly about each one:

1 Comfort Zone

Given the chance, many riders would love to find their *Comfort Zone*, plant roots, and stay forever, because everything they do there, they do well. They

look good doing it and don't make many mistakes. However, while this sounds like a good place to be, it's actually a place that *weighs you down* instead of allowing you to *soar*.

You've probably heard, "You learn the most from your worst lessons." While this might sound a little pessimistic, it's actually true because attempting and achieving a difficult task (that is, riding outside your *Comfort Zone*) helps you to develop the belief that you have the confidence and courage to accept and learn from struggles and challenges—instead of simply trying to avoid them.

An important key to learning outside your *Comfort Zone* is being able to accept that you have made a mistake. I'll talk more about this in the next section (*Owning Your Mistakes*, p. 13), but for now, it's simply enough to know that mistakes provide you with learning opportunities that constant success and comfort cannot. Every time you make a little

mistake, you learn something about that situation—and yourself. But here comes the problem: mistakes don't happen inside your Comfort Zone, so learning doesn't happen there, either. In order to *soar*, you're going to need to give up your Comfort Zone before it weighs you down.

Pushing yourself outside the Comfort Zone is a good thing, but pushing too far will likely get you into a bit of trouble. I'll now talk about the second kind of Zone that can influence your ability to *soar*, and that is the *Danger Zone*.

2 Danger Zone

Unlike riding outside your Comfort Zone, learning doesn't actually occur when you push yourself so far out that you get to a place where injury or harm to you or your horse might occur. While learning to ride without stirrups is a great idea—outside the Comfort Zone in the beginning—learning to ride without stirrups on a hot, three-year-old, green, Arabian horse in an arena with a working water truck might not be the best learning environment. Because you've pushed yourself so far out of your Comfort Zone, you've entered the Danger Zone!



Be wary of pushing so far you enter the Danger Zone!



*Don't just go through life. Grow through life.
P.S. It only happens outside your Comfort Zone.*

Push to Failure

A muscle man selects a weight that's so heavy he can only lift it twice. He struggles but completes his two reps—and then asks himself to do a third! He tries and tries but fails. It's the wrong weight to lift three times. He has pushed himself to the point of failure. But if he continues to exert himself in this way, his muscles will grow and get stronger. This is the principle behind the Comfort Zone. You might make mistakes—and even fail from time to time—but push yourself beyond the walls of your Comfort Zone, and your confidence and courage will grow and get stronger.

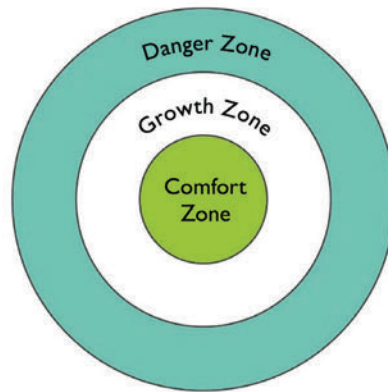


Fun Fact...

Did you know that we're able to survive on planet Earth because we're in something called the "Goldilocks Belt"? We're not too far from the sun, nor too close to it. We're just right!

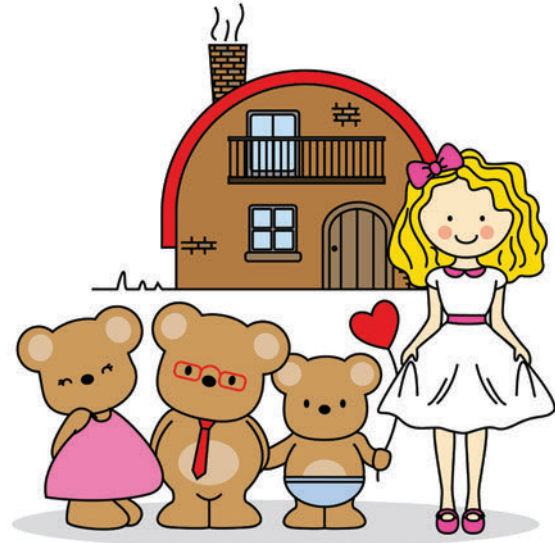
Finding the start of your Danger Zone is just as important as finding the end of your Comfort Zone. This ensures that you stay safe and learn from your mistakes. To do this, I'm going to need to talk about the third Zone that influences your ability to soar: the zone that lies between the end of your Comfort Zone and the beginning of your Danger Zone. This is the most important zone of all and it's called the Goldilocks Zone (or Growth Zone).

The space between the end of your Comfort Zone and the beginning of your Danger Zone is where the magic happens.



3 The Goldilocks or Growth Zone

There exists a zone where you'll find the perfect combination of carefree and careful—a place where you're neither under-confident nor over-confident, doubtful, or anxious. This zone is called your Growth Zone and it fills the space between the end of your Comfort Zone and the beginning of your Danger Zone. It's here that you learn from mistakes rather than paying for them, where you *soar* rather than feel sorry, and where you know it's going to be difficult but not disappointing, discouraging, or dangerous.



Get into your Goldilocks!

It's here that you'll learn to *soar* because it's here—and only here—that you can grow as a rider.

The Growth Zone has also been called the *Goldilocks Zone* because it's here that you have JUST the RIGHT amount of confidence; JUST the RIGHT amount of challenge; JUST the RIGHT amount of success; JUST the RIGHT amount of failure; and make JUST the RIGHT amount of mistakes. When it comes to riding well and giving up what weighs you down, don't just get into the Zone—get into your Goldilocks Zone, and to do this, you're going to need to push yourself outside your Comfort Zone!

WEEK 2

Focus: Get in the Zone

To ride your best you're going to need to focus on the positive and present rather than problems from your past. You'll also need to believe in yourself, recover quickly after mistakes, remember your goals, and maintain crystal clear concentration. The good news is that all of this happens automatically—without effort—every time you get into the *zone*.

Getting into the *zone* is perhaps the single most important thing any rider can do, but you're going to need



Perhaps the best "target" of all is the sound of your horse's legs.

Weekly Homework

Teach yourself to get into the zone this week by writing down one rhythmical target sound, and one rhythmical cadence that you'll use to get into the zone. Try both of them this week to see if one works better for you.

Focus Fact

The term zone is an abbreviation of *individual zone optimum functioning*, which is a really good thing because it would sound super weird if coaches had to keep telling their riders to "get into your individual zone of optimal functioning!"

to first create a *state of flow* (that mental harmony, rhythm, or tempo that allows your brain to change its thinking from being forced, mechanical, and over-analyzing to automatic, confident, and not rushed). There are two ways to create this important mental rhythm: one, focus on rhythmical sounds in your environment like your horse's breathing or hoof falls (this is called *targeting*) and two, create your own rhythmical sounds by repeating (out loud) a verbal cadence like, "1, 2, 1, 2" or "Be strong, push on," (this is called *cadence training*).

Brand Builder

Cereal bars, diet plans, and even an auto parts company have all used the word *zone* when creating successful brand recognition for their many products and programs. If it can work for them it can work for you.

YOU'RE ONLY LIMITED BY YOUR OWN IMAGINATION!



My favorite *cadence* of all time came from a young rider in one of my clinics. She told me that when she gets nervous she whispers to herself, "Fish are friends not food." When I asked why, she simply said, "Because when I think of Bruce (the shark from Nemo) it makes me laugh and smile." Not only does her *cadence* get her into the *zone*—it also gets her into a good mood!

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WEEK 2

Fitness: Canter Crunches

This week's exercise is another review of a Fundamental Exercise (number 3), and it is going to focus on your core. Made up of your abdominal, back, and hip muscles, your core is responsible for maintaining your posture while stabilizing and mobilizing your hips and back. Without a strong core, your position and posture—not to mention your half-halts, transitions, and using your body as an aid would all suffer. Strengthen your core this week by working on the *canter crunch*. Here's a reminder of how you're going to do it:

- 1 Sit in the BASE with your knees close to your chest.
- 2 Slowly open your hip angle by extending your legs forward. Pause for one second when your legs are extended as far forward as comfortable.
- 3 Return to your BASE by flexing your hips and tightening your core. Pause for one second when you reach the starting position and repeat.



Keep This in Mind

Focus on your balance, rhythm, and posture when doing your *canter crunches*. They're all very important so working on them here will ultimately improve your riding. Make sure you place the same amount of weight in each seat bone and extend your legs equally (think placing the same amount of weight in each heel) because symmetry is just as important as balance, rhythm, and posture.

Reps, Sets, and Sweats

Do three sets of 20 repetitions in your BASE position at RPE-6 and IRS.

My favorite exercise is a cross between a lunge and a crunch. I call it lunch.



WEEK 15

Focus: Pre-Performance Routines

This week's tip begins a month-long look at four different kinds of *pre-* and *post-*performance plans. Each one occurs at a different time, but they all work together to create the impression that you're always in control and well-prepared for whatever awaits you.

Pre-performance routines are made up of a series of specifically designed actions or behaviors performed in the days leading up to an important class, clinic, or competition. Each time you complete an action from your list, you'll be reminded that you're in control of your preparation (so make a list and check it twice). *Pre-performance routines* provide your brain with what's called a *trigger*—a positive behavior that *triggers* your mind into feeling like it's in control (during a time when you might otherwise worry or anticipate problems). For example, repeating a mantra on Wednesday *triggers* your thoughts to remain relaxed; listening to empowering music on Thursday *triggers*

your mind to feel confident; and visualizing your course on Friday *triggers* your brain into feeling prepared (and you thought Trigger was just a horse...).

Out of Control

Admit it—riders can be pretty big control freaks. If you could, you'd love to be able to control the weather, your opponents, and those darn meddling judges (just to mention a few). Point your *triggers* in the correct direction by ensuring your *pre-performance routines* focus only on your *body* (have you warmed up and hydrated today?), your *tack* (now where did I put that crop?), and your *mind* (did you listen to all those motivational songs like you said you would?).

Super Superstitions

Some *pre-performance routines* can be downright weird—or even superstitious. From sleeping in Superman pajamas the night before a big show to wearing two different colored “lucky socks,” you're only limited by your own imagination. Riders have been known



to eat four-leaf clovers, place family pictures in their pockets, and even tap the butt (of their horse!) a certain number of times prior to a riding event.

Focused in Five

Make a list of *triggers* you can use five days to five minutes before an event. It might look something like this:

- Five days before—Begin eating healthier and eliminate all junk food.
- Four days before—Begin hydrating with eight, 8-ounce bottles a day.
- Three days before—Begin banking rest by getting an additional 30 minutes of sleep per night.
- Two days before—Set goals for your upcoming competition.
- One day before—Listen to empowering music before going to bed.
- Five hours before—Stretch and walk your course.
- Five minutes before—Take a few deep breaths while visualizing your ride.

Weekly Homework

This week, *trigger* your mind into staying relaxed, confident, and prepared by creating a list of specific and timely behaviors you'll perform in the days leading up to an important ride.

WEEK 15

Fitness: Pole Pony Pats

This week, you're going to revisit the *pony pat* exercise from a few weeks ago (p. 67), but this time you're going to increase the challenge by adding a target, an actual pole on the ground that you're going to need to *pat* before completing the exercise. You've already discovered how to turn a squat-thrust into a *pony pat*, so let's increase the difficulty by turning the *pony pat* into the *pole pony pat*. Here's how you're going to do it:

- 1 Start in the BASE with your feet on each side of a ground pole.
- 2 Extend your knees and jump off the ground.
- 3 Maintain your balance and keep your knees bent while in the air.
- 4 Land equally and close your hips and knees as you reach for the pole.
- 5 With a flat back and eyes up, touch the pole as if patting your pony.
- 6 Begin extending your knees as you prepare to jump up again.
- 7 Jump off the ground with good form and posture.
- 8 Land in your BASE and get ready to do it again.

You're going to need ground poles this week (see p. 75).



Reps, Sets, and Sweats

Do three sets of 10 repetitions in your BASE position at RPE-7 and IRS.

No Pole, No Problem!

Just because this exercise is called the *pole pony pat*, you don't really need a pole. You can substitute it with almost anything—including a small stuffed horse! Just give him a pat each time you perform the exercise. FYI: You shouldn't substitute the pole with a cinnamon bun or anything with the word *caramel* in it!

There's no remote control for life. Get up and change it yourself!



WEEK 39

Focus: Plan Your Ride, Ride Your Plan

This week you'll begin a month-long look at four different mental-preparation plans that can help you cope with almost any situation and make you feel physically and mentally prepared to perform your best. The goal of these plans is to reduce the number of things that can go wrong and prepare you for those things that do.

This week's plan is called your *normal* plan: the plan that happens when everything goes right and nothing goes wrong—which almost never happens!

This is the mental-preparation plan you'll use when there are no rain delays, pulled shoes, or spooks in the middle of a class. Just easy-peasy-lemon-squeezy.

You build your *normal* plan by creating a short list of predictable tasks you can perform before an important ride. It can contain things like braiding your horse's mane first thing in the morning, followed by a good grooming, brief hack,



Grooming is a typical part of a normal plan.

a 10-minute longe, warm-up, and arriving at the in-gate five minutes before your class. When you complete this list (in the same order before every important ride) you'll create a sort of predictable path to the event. Your brain loves this because it helps turn a potentially unpredictable event into a predictable one.

What Was That Thing I Was Supposed to Remember?

Pre-competition routines make your preparation feel predictable, but they're also invaluable because they help ensure you won't forget to do anything before an important ride (meaning, no more, "OMG, I forgot to braid my horse's mane!").

Most riders don't plan to fail—they fail to plan.



CONTROL FREAKS

Be honest. If you could, you'd love to be able to control everything, including the weather, the judge, and that crazy three-year-old chestnut mare of yours—but you can't! The only thing you can really control is yourself, so make sure your plan only focuses on things like your hoof pick and brushes (in place), your body (well rested, hydrated), and your mind (calm, cool, collected).

Weekly Homework

Write a detailed list of at least four tasks you'll do before every important ride. Practice them this week so they become second nature and do them again before your next big clinic, class, or competition.

WEEK 39

Fitness: Shoulder-Band Jumps

This is admittedly one of the weirdest of all FF52 exercises—but sometimes a little weird can be welcome in a world full of normal! Don't let the weirdness of this exercise trick you into thinking it's going to be easy, though. "Weird" definitely does not mean easy in this case! You're going to need your rubber fitness loop for this exercise (a regular fitness band doesn't work for this exercise). Here's how you're going to do your weird *shoulder-band jumps*:

- 1 Start in the BASE with your fitness loop under your feet and behind your neck.
- 2 Lower yourself by bending your knees as you prepare to jump.
- 3 Extend your knees against the resistance of the loop as you start to jump.
- 4 Maintain your balance in the air.
- 5 Land balanced and press your hands slightly forward.
- 6 Return to your BASE and get ready to do it again.

Reps, Sets, and Sweats

Do three sets of 10 repetitions in your BASE position at RPE-8 and IRS.

**Listen to the Band!**

Most exercise fitness loops come in different tensions (strengths). The higher the resistance, the more difficult it is to stretch the band and, therefore, the more muscular effort you'll need to expend. This is called a *progressive resistance system* and it makes it easy to measure your progress. Here's how it works. You start by using a lightweight loop but when your strength and stamina improve

*Riding is a matter of will,
not just skill.*



you replace it with a heavier weight loop. This increases the difficulty of the exercise and ensures your muscles continue to be challenged.

You're going to need a fitness loop this week (see p. 97).