

Vanessa Bee

OVER

UNDER

THROUGH

Obstacle Training for Horses

50 Effective, Step-by-Step Exercises for Every Rider



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12 RAMPS

Walking up and down steep ramps and slopes.

One of the first horse-agility obstacles we built at home was a big A-frame with a square platform on top. It was a very interesting way of learning to direct the horse's feet up a fairly steep ramp and down the other side without him feeling he needed to leap off halfway over.

A journalist came to write a piece for a magazine and asked why on earth you would want to do that with your horse. Of course, with all my obstacles, they are either there to put principles to purpose or have a connection to a real-life task. I replied with a question: "Have you never loaded your horse into a trailer?" She looked a bit embarrassed but had the grace to look around the obstacle course and say, "Now I see, they all mean something, don't they?"

Yes, they do, but if it's only to build a trusting relationship between you and your horse, then that's good enough for me.

By teaching your horse to navigate up and down ramps in hand, he will be prepared when faced with steep banks like this one.



Exercise 12 • Ramps



A Make sure the horse can cross a tarp first.



B Using a podium or bridge to show him how to step up is very useful.



C A trailer ramp is a good start. Use a long rope so the horse has room to move.



D Some horses can happily put their front feet onto the ramp but not the back.



E On a ramp that is less steep, you can walk over it from side to side.



F This helps a horse load with confidence onto a van.



G ...and unload.



H It's an easy step to encourage him to go up onto a horse-agility obstacle...



I ...and come down the other side.



J Let the horse explore different ways of tackling steep ramps without the weight of a rider.



K Then take opportunities to let him explore with a rider on board. Keep the ramps shallow and short to start.

4 GATES

Safely negotiating opening and closing gates.

I always say to my students that if you can open and close a gate calmly and efficiently while riding your horse, you're a long way to being in control of your horse's feet. Just think of all the different ways you need to move those feet and all while holding the reins in one hand if you don't want to let go of the gate.

Because there is more than one type of gate in the world, you may need to practice opening gates towards and away from you, and leaning down to reach a catch or move a lever. I cannot stress how complete this exercise is and a great test of where you are in your horsemanship. I put this and easy trailer loading of my horses at the top of my list of things I want to be able to do calmly and easily.

All gates are different, some opening towards you and some away, while others have walls or hedges alongside them. You need to adapt some of the movements below to complete the task with a different type of gate.

You should never have to dismount to open, go through, and shut a gate behind you.

A gate should be a quiet place. When it causes anxiety in you or the horse, it can become very difficult to open and close while on horseback.



Exercise 4 • Gates



A Walk through the process of opening and closing a gate without the horse.



B You will need to be able to go forward.



C Stop and go back.



D You need to be able to move the front end over, a turn-on-the-forehand (see *Blueprint 5*, p. 17).



E You need to be able to move the hind end over (see *Blueprint 4*, p. 14).



F Approach the gate quietly, setting up the right position before you reach the gate.

Exercise 4 • Gates (cont.)



G Unlatch the gate and open it by turning the forehand in towards the gate.



H The horse must wait before passing through the gap. Here, he is rushing through.



I The horse is just about to step over with the hindquarters.



J Close the gate by moving the horse over sideways, or just the forehand.