



# Training and Riding with Cones and Poles

Over 40 Engaging Exercises to Improve Your Horse's Focus and Response to the Aids,  
While Sharpening Your Timing and Accuracy



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## *Getting Started*

- Earning the Horse's Trust 2
- Warming Up 4
- Riding with a Plan 6

## *Training Exercises with Poles*

- Step by Step over a Pole 10
- Leg-Yield Down a Pole 12
- Leg-Yield Down and Back 14
- The "L" 16
- The Double "L" 18
- Double "L" Combination 20
- Riding over Ground Poles 22
- Serpentines between Poles 24
- Simple Turn in the "Funnel" 26
- Turn-on-the-Forehand in the "Funnel" 28
- Turn-on-the-Haunches in the "Funnel" 29
- Volte over "T" Poles 30
- Leg-Yield with the "T" 32
- Over the Corner with Zigzag Poles 34
- Serpentine with Zigzag Poles 36
- Voltes over Zigzag Poles 38
- Figure Eight with Zigzag Poles 40
- The Fan 42
- Crossed Poles Square 44
- Crossed Poles Square: Diagonal 46
- Crossed Poles Square: Volte 48
- Crossed Poles Square: Figure Eight 50
- Cavalletti on the Circle 52
- Cavalletti and Ground Poles 54





### *Training Exercises with Cones*

- Volte around a Cone 58
- Volte with a Stick 60
- Figure Eight with Two Cones 62
- Serpentine with Three Cones 64
- Cloverleaf with Three Cones 65
- Turn-on-the-Forehand and Turn-on-the-Hindquarters with Cones 66
- Spiraling In and Out with Cones 68
- The Four-Leaf Clover 70
- Four-Leaf Clover: Shoulder-In 71
- Half-Pass between Cones 72



### *Ending on a Good Note*

- Playing Ball 76
- Cooling Down 78
- Cleaning Up 80
- Thank You 82
  
- The Team 85
- Acknowledgments 86
- Index 87

#### Key

Next to each exercise you will find a "dot" symbol, which indicates the level of difficulty:

- ● ● Easy Exercise
- ● ● Moderate Exercise
- ● ● Difficult Exercise

This key should help you choose your focus during each lesson, as well as expand your training program over time.

EXERCISE 10 TRAINING EXERCISES WITH POLES

## Riding over Ground Poles ●●●

**Even simple pole exercises** require impulsion and increase activity in the horse's hindquarters. For example, just riding over several poles in a row teaches the horse to lift his legs actively and move in a regular rhythm. The rider becomes more supple and secure in her seat.

### WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Begin with three or four ground poles. The distance between the poles depends on the size of your horse, his length of stride, and also the gait in which you are working. A standard place to begin is with the poles approximately 2½ feet (.8 meters) apart at the walk and 4¼ feet (1.3 meters) apart at the trot. You can increase the number of poles later.

To begin, ride with a long rein at the walk over the poles. (If the poles are too close together or too far apart for your horse, you

will notice that he moves irregularly and hits the poles. Adjust the distances as necessary and take care that he doesn't hurt himself!)

If your horse is unsure or evades sideways, trying to avoid the ground poles, lay them out along a fence line to start with. This way, you only have to worry about one side.

When you and your horse are comfortable doing the exercise at the walk in both directions, ride it at the trot after adjusting the distance between the poles. The horse should step over the poles fluidly in a regular rhythm.



Here you can see a "staggered" setup: The distance between the red-and-white poles is greater and appropriate for the trot stride of this horse [see sidebar on p. 23].



After the last pole, "give" the reins and let your horse stretch forward and downward.



### HOW TO DO IT

When first leading the horse over the poles from the ground, move briskly alongside your horse and let the lead rope hang loose. Your horse should move freely forward, striding fluidly over the poles, and you shouldn't have to pull him! If he is sluggish or refuses, it is better to drive him from behind with a flick or tap of a whip than to drag on his head.

When doing this exercise from the saddle, pay attention to the tempo and rhythm of the horse's gaits—they should be regular. As you ride to the first pole at the walk or trot, give your hands forward to allow the horse to look where he is stepping. Maintain a consistent, elastic connection with the horse's mouth. Stay in balance with your horse. You will notice that the "swing" of his back increases when he goes over the poles. After the poles, reward the horse with a stretch, then pick the reins up, ride around the arena, and try it again.

1 Go over the poles with your hands slightly forward so your horse can look to see where he is going. Note that your upper arms should stay near your body.

2 This exercise can be done with a partner when both horses have a similar length of stride. This can be fun for the riders and the horses.

### Variation: Staggered Poles

You can also stagger the poles about 1½ feet (1/2 meter) to the left or right (see left photo on p. 22). This presents new possibilities: You can ride to the left or right, meaning over every pole, or every other pole. One side is set at the standard trot stride, and the other side increases the distance between poles so that not every trot step crosses a pole, causing the horse to have to concentrate.

EXERCISE 11 TRAINING EXERCISES WITH POLES

# Serpentines between Poles ●●●

**Serpentines can be practiced between ground poles.** The poles provide a boundary that makes traveling the path of the serpentine much easier, as you will find. Lay out the number of poles according to the number of serpentine half-circles you want to ride. Serpentine are effective tools to supple and gymnasticize the horse.

## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Place four to six poles so they are spaced evenly apart. Don't put the poles too close to the edge of the arena or work area because your horse needs enough room to make the serpentine turns on each side of the poles. Begin by riding through the "path" created between the first two poles on one end, turn at the end of the path in an arc, and then ride through the path created by the second and third poles, and so on. If you want to make a bigger arc, you can skip a path and vary the size of the serpentine. Start out with only a few poles and increase the number (and thus

the number of serpentine half-circles) when all goes well.

## HOW TO DO IT

When trying this exercise from the ground, stand at the end of the first ground pole and ask your horse to walk around you in a half-circle. Then lead him down the "path" created between the first and second ground poles.

If your horse doesn't yet know how to do a half-circle around you using hand signals and body language, you can support the horse's hindquarters with the light touch of a whip.



When riding this exercise, maintain a light contact on the reins so the horse can stretch forward as he walks. Make sure he doesn't go around the poles stiffly. The goal of the exercise is to achieve a supple and consistent bend. It is better to ride a larger serpentine turn than one that is too small. You don't need to turn into the very next path between poles if it is too challenging for your horse to bend that much. Note that every horse has one side through which he bends more easily than the other. Start your serpentine so you bend in the easier direction. This will make the exercise more achievable and positive for you and your horse.

Be precise in your seat: Turn your upper body and shoulders in the direction of movement and remember that you must make your horse straight again after every bending half-circle.

When attempting this exercise at the trot, it is easier for the horse if you go slowly. Adjust your seat in enough time to help the horse begin the next turn in the serpentine.

In contrast to the Four-Leaf Clover (see p. 70) or the Figure-Eight with Zigzag Poles (see p. 40), you have time in this exercise to guide the horse in the right direction. Riding serpentines between poles is a good way to prepare for more difficult exercises.

- 1 Watch that your horse stays straight when between the poles and doesn't start bending into a turn until he reaches the end of a set of poles.
- 2 Ride straight until it is time to ride into the bend as the serpentine heads for the next set of poles. Maintain a correct seat. Your horse should not run through the shoulder, as he is in Photo 2, but should bend through his entire body.
- 3 Your horse should travel through the poles straight...and you should sit straight!
- 4 In Photo 4, you can see that the horse is bending correctly (compare to Photo 2). Don't forget to praise your horse at the end of the exercise.

