

## Ground

Always look at the ground your horse is jumping on. Is the footing very deep, soft sand that will strain his legs? Is it dry, slippery grass, rutted dried mud or full of holes? Try to make sure the ground is even and neither too hard nor too soft and deep. If you think the footing is bad then jump more carefully; always think of your horse's comfort and safety. When jumping logs and obstacles in woods and fields, always check the landing side of the jump first, to see that there are no nasty surprises like holes or branches.

## Flatwork

Because most of the basic riding is explained in the Main Manual and the Dressage Project Book, it will not be repeated here. Basic dressage or flatwork develops your horse's balance, impulsion and rhythm. It teaches him how to go straight on lines and how to bend on corners. However, you will now be looking for a different emphasis in your riding; your horse must be rounder, more bouncy and flexible. He must carry his weight on his hindquarters because that is where he pushes off from, and that's where the power comes from!



Impulsion

Remember to always do flatwork before jumping to warm your horse up and get him supple. Do several minutes of posting trot to warm your horse's back muscles before you do sitting trot or canter and he will carry you more comfortably.

One of the most important things your horse must have or develop is impulsion. This means he must push himself forward with energy. It doesn't mean rushing faster, it means controlled energy. You create energy with your legs and push it forward to your hands which contain it, gently. You will often hear people saying a horse should be more "forward".

What they mean is that the horse should show more impulsion. They want to see the horse stepping in under himself, with his hind feet either in or in front of the prints of his front feet. To you, your horse should feel as if he wants to go faster but is listening to you and feels really light in your hands.

Balance is also important. Both you and your horse must develop balance together so that you ride together, jump together and land together, ready to set up for the next jump. This means that you are sitting



Balance

as still as possible in relation to your horse or if necessary using your weight to help him.

Rhythm is produced by power and balance in the horse. He must be able to trot and canter rhythmically so that he can lengthen and shorten his strides as needed. When you're doing your trotting warm-up, ask for an even rhythm in lots of big bends and circles.

Pace refers to speed and is related to the forward motion of the horse. The paces or gaits are walk, trot, canter and

gallop. To supple your horse, you do transitions from one gait to another and within a gait do transitions from collected to extended.

Courses are measured in meters, and depending on the level of competition that you are doing, the speed or pace is determined in meters per minute. Advanced horses are required to go faster than novice riders and horses. Speed is also required to make the jumping effort over larger, higher fences. Most schooling is done at around 325 meters per minute which is a nice working canter.

Too much pace at a canter, for instance, and your horse can't manage turns, too little and he can't launch himself into the air easily over fences. To test pace, measure out a distance of 1/2 km., then ride the distance several times at varying speeds, and have someone time you on each ride to determine what speed you are going.

Flexion and flexibility are two different things. Both come from the horse's ability to make maximum use of his joints. Suppleness is the term riders use to describe this when speaking of muscle and joint flexibility. Frame, or the ability of the horse to carry himself correctly and in balance with the rider, is dependent to a large degree on the horse's flexibility.

Collection comes from the ability of the horse to slightly compress his frame resulting in the energy going more up than forward, and a shortening of the stride without loss of tempo (rhythm) of the pace. Extension is a lengthening of the stride and frame to accomplish the extended movements such as extended trot or canter, and comes from the horse's ability to cover maximum distance per stride without losing balance or tempo. Bend is the ability of the horse to "fold" around the rider's inside leg in turns and circles, and bend in the direction he is travelling without loss of shoulder or hindquarter control. Bend should be uniform from poll to dock, without excessive bend in the head and neck which may result in the horse bulging out through the outside shoulder, or losing the hindquarters to the outside. Your horse should remain upright, and not lean into the turns and circles as he bends into them. This is why

self-carriage in training is so important. So, bend is not really possible where flexibility is lacking.

Flexion shows in the head and neck as the horse collects and tucks his chin in while accepting the bit. Your horse flexes his head and neck as he bends correctly to left or right. Some people pull their horse's head in to look flexed but this is very wrong and shows because the horse is not flexing through his back which should be round and supple.

When people talk about stride, they may mean several things in the jumping world. Basically, stride is the distance your horse covers until all legs have moved once.

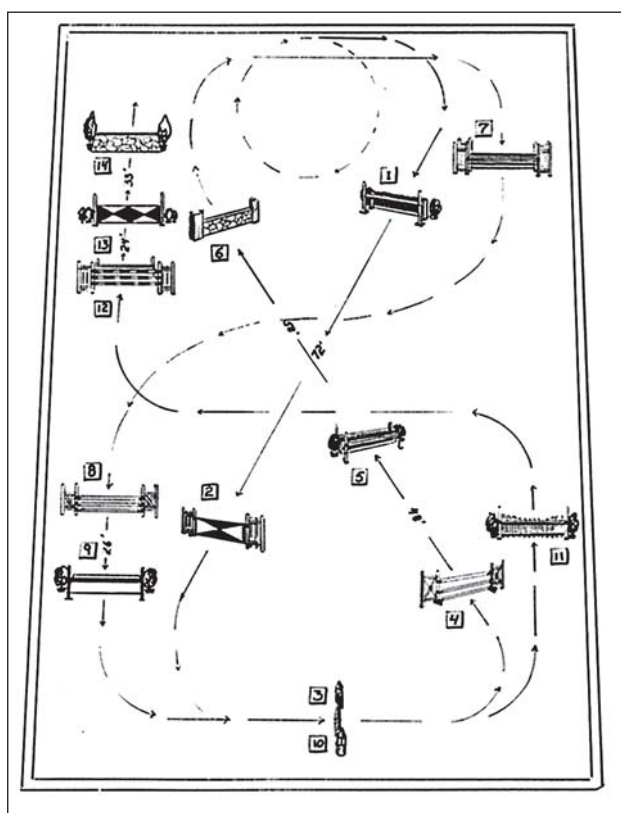
Because the big jumping courses are mostly ridden by very tall horses, Thoroughbreds and Warmbloods, the length of stride used to measure these courses is 12 feet. Most Quarterhorses and general riding horses take much shorter strides so it is best to calculate your courses on an 11 foot stride. Pony courses are 10 foot strides for 14 hand ponies, 9 foot strides for 13 hands and 8 foot strides for 12 hand ponies.

However, these measurements really only relate to hunter and equitation courses when the number of strides between fences is designated and the judge expects to see it correct.

In jumper classes the horse may take as many strides as the rider chooses, bearing in mind that the course designer has based his course problems on a set number of strides. You start schooling your horse to his comfortable stride length then teach him to shorten and lengthen his stride when you ask. An exercise you can use to measure your horse's stride is to rake the sand clean in your riding area and then ride at a normal-speed canter, past a friend, who can watch the foot-fall and measure your horse's length of stride. For instance, from one right hind footprint to the next right hind footprint in front of it. Collected canter strides will be slightly shorter than your working canter stride, and gallop strides will be longer. In competition, the course-designer takes this into account to set challenging courses that test the rider's and horse's ability to modify strides to get the distances between

fences correct to avoid stops and knock-downs.

Many things influence your horse's stride. Horses shorten their strides when they are jumping indoors or in a small arena, when they go uphill or when the footing is muddy or deep sand. They lengthen their strides when they are going towards home or the "in" gate of a ring, when they are jumping in a large outdoor space, when the footing is good and springy and when they are going down a gentle slope. A steep down slope makes them prop.



A jumper course

To achieve all these things, your horse needs to answer your aids immediately! You ask by giving the aid then reward by relaxing your aid the moment your horse responds. This way he learns to answer the lightest aid, either from leg, hand or weight. A most important cue used in jumping is a half halt. This momentary check to the horse's forward movement helps him to shift his weight back to his hindquarters. It can warn him that something is about to happen or that you are about to ask him to do something different. You can use a series of half halts to steady a horse who is rushing too fast on a jumping course. It is a far more effective aid than pulling on the horse's mouth which usually results in the horse shaking his head to get free of the restraining hand.

In order to be an athletic jumper, your horse needs to learn to go straight on his lines so that his hind feet track his front feet. If you watch, many horses go with their heads to the outside and their quarters inside the track. That puts them in the wrong position to jump. Your horse must also bend correctly on his corners while staying on the track you want. These two points are basic to good jumping. Horses are naturally one sided, preferring their left hand and must be taught to be straight.

Once your horse goes straight, you want to teach him lateral work which means moving sideways. The easiest movement is turn on the forehand which teaches him to move away from your leg applied behind the girth. Next is leg yield which teaches your horse to move his whole body in one direction while being slightly bent in another. On a circle this is the movement which keeps the horse from "falling in". Shoulder-in is best learned along a wall or fence. Keep your horse's hindquarters on the track beside the rail while leading his shoulders in slightly. Haunches-in (travers) is the reverse, shoulders stay on the track while the haunches are moved in. Finally teach the half pass, when your horse moves forward and diagonally at the same time.

Some more exercises to work on together are walk - halt - walk; trot - walk - trot; trot - halt - trot; each time asking for fast responses to light, invisible aids. When your horse can do these exercises easily, start the more complicated trot - canter - trot; walk - canter - walk which help prepare your horse for flying lead changes. Other transition exercises to help supple your horse are ones within a pace - lengthen and shorten his stride at a walk, then at a trot, then at a canter. Another exercise which helps towards the flying lead change is counter canter, also excellent for balance and control.

To help your horse to relax and strengthen his back, teach him to go long and low. This is a movement in which you encourage your horse to stretch his head and neck down towards the ground.



Long and low

Horses get very bored doing the same things every day. Work your horse out of the arena to give him a break; he'll love going for trail rides, trotting and cantering in fields and through forests. Teach him to go by himself as well as with other horses.

Fitness is crucial to having a happy and efficient jumper. It takes several months of work to strengthen the horse's muscles and joints to withstand the stresses of jumping. Long-term wear and tear on your horse will have the effect of shortening his working life-span if fitness requirements are ignored. Fit horses can jump for years, and many have trained several riders over the course of their working lives. Yet, the auctions are full of horses whose useful years have been shortened by carelessness and thoughtlessness in regard to their health and fitness needs.

## Jumping

### How your horse jumps

First you have to understand how your horse jumps, physically. Then you will understand how what you do on his back influences his jumping.

As a horse approaches a jump he lowers his head and neck slightly while gathering his hindquarters in under himself.

