

Gymnastic Exercises

Progression from this point simply includes varying the layout of your poles, and building fences starting with low heights and increasing the number of obstacles in the grid. Initially, work up to three cross poles with bounce strides (8'-10') in between, followed by an upright jump one stride away. When you are both comfortable with this, change the cross rails for uprights and the last upright jump for an oxer. This exercise teaches your horse striding, how to jump a series of obstacles in succession, how to round his back and push-off, and how to handle himself while "airborn". Heights and widths will be determined by confidence of horse and rider, and cleanness of jumping efforts. The great danger during this phase of training is to hurry the horse or rider when they are not comfortable or competent. You can expect to take two or three months of regular schooling to achieve this level. Schooling over fences should be limited to two or three sessions per week, and should generally follow your flat session when your horse is attentive, and warmed-up.

Schooling Fences in courses

Fences can be introduced to the schooling sessions when the horse is happy with the whole idea of jumping. Keep them low, and encourage your horse to trot or canter with relaxation and calmness before attempting to raise the height of the jumps. Remember that as you land over one fence, you should be setting up for the next one, instead of cantering on and only setting up when you are close to the next fence.

Look at jumping courses in books and magazines. Practice the different combination problems and school over them at a low height. Teach your horse to problem-solve for himself by presenting easy question-asking fences, then increasing the difficulty. Now you can introduce various scary



Scary looking jump

looking jumps: hang plastic tablecloths over a pole, use a folded blue tarp on the ground to simulate water under a jump, orange cones under a pole and so on. Old artificial Christmas tree branches make excellent fillers and never lose their leaves! Plastic flowers and artificial plants are also great since they never die. Be careful, though, not to use anything dangerous that could hurt your horse if he hit it and always start with low heights. Schooling fences are generally kept low to ensure that relaxation and attentiveness are established. Increasing heights should be schooled with individual fences and most often done over oxers. It is a good rule of thumb to school courses that are at least 6" lower than the height you are schooling over individual fences.

Distances between fences at this level must be carefully measured to ensure that the striding you are attempting to teach the horse is accurate. The table of distances included with this manual will be useful here. Knowing the distance, in strides, between fences will also teach you to count strides and learning distances will increase your competence and skill. When you are counting strides between fences, say "landing" for the first stride you feel, then "one, two, etc.". After your horse is comfortable cantering between 2 jumps in the correct number of strides, practice slowly increasing and decreasing the distance between them to teach him to cope with difficult distances.

Conditioning

There is no mystery or hidden secret to getting your horse fit enough to jump. Most horses who live outside move around enough to keep themselves supple and adequately fit. When we put a horse into work, however, he is burdened with the extra weight of rider and tack so needs to be made more fit so that muscles and joints, ligaments and tendons are not over stressed.

LSD, or long slow distance is the key to successful conditioning programs. Add a hack/trail ride to your regular schooling program 3 or 4 times per week and increase the distance travelled to two or three miles, which normally takes the best part of an hour at a walk.

After your horse seems comfortable with that, you can introduce short periods of trot, then longer ones, and after that, you can add canters. Learn to listen to your horse's heart and respiration to judge how well he is handling his exercise. Avoid high speed runs until you have been working out two or three months so your horse won't have leg problems.

In Alberta, where the riding season is so short, it is wise to start your conditioning in March, so that your horse is partly fit when the snow is gone and you want to get to work. Riders with the benefit of indoor facilities are more able to keep their horses fit all year "round". It is common practice to "let horses down" (rest or turn out) during the coldest

months. This means that the horse is rested from serious work and is able to relax, but still has the benefit of turnout exercise to keep himself limber. Horses lose fitness slower than people, so a three or four week rest period is not too bad for them. However, when you bring your horse back into work, it is important to take it easy for the first couple of weeks until muscles and joints are again accustomed to the work.

Warm Up and Cool Down

Just as you wouldn't like to go out and be asked to run and jump to the maximum of your ability with no warm up, neither would your horse. His muscles need to warm up slowly doing different exercises like straight lines, bends and circles, lengthening and shortening strides, leg yielding and changes of pace. This is essential to stretch his muscles to avoid damage from over-exerting cold muscles resulting in aches and stiffness after the workout, and making the horse less enthusiastic when you want to jump. When he feels balanced and alert, start with trotting poles then small jumps. At a show where you can't use trotting poles, do your flat work, then start on a cross-rail jump and go on from there. A young or inexperienced horse will need longer to warm up and settle down before being asked to concentrate on his jumping.

When you have finished working your horse, walk him around until he is cool and dry. A horse cools down faster walking slowly than being left to stand still. While he is cooling down, offer drinks of water to help him rehydrate. If the day is cool and your horse is hot, put on a sweat sheet or other kind of sheet which absorbs sweat. On cold winter days you can put a sweat sheet under his heavy blanket until he is dry.

If you want to wash the horse down after his workout, use lukewarm, not cold water, and sponge or scrape the excess water off before walking him dry. Various astringent additives are available to put in the water to ease his aches and pains from exertion, and a nice leg brace under stable bandages is a comfort to the working horse. Never, ever, tie a hot horse up and leave him to cool down on his own. He will chill, which may lead to pneumonia, colds, etc., and is very hard on his muscles and system generally, as well as being unkind and thoughtless behavior on your part. It will also do nothing to enhance his thoughts about you and your desire to jump!!

Horses have no problem eating and drinking normally, exercising moderately then going back to eating and drinking. You wouldn't want to give a feed right before hard exercise and neither would you give an enormous grain meal immediately after. The old feeding rule of offering water, hay, then grain still holds true. Frequent, smaller feeds during the day are the key to keeping your horse's stomach happy.

Refusals and Knockdowns

These happen. A refusal usually means that your horse thinks he cannot comfortably jump what is in front of him. Horses refuse because they feel intimidated by the jump, can't see it in time, sense that the rider is unsure or for many other reasons. Sometimes some part of their body hurts when they jump; sometimes the rider loses his balance and jerks his horse's mouth over every fence which is very painful. So before hitting your horse to make him jump, stop and think about why he refused. Certainly you must immediately present him at the obstacle again in case he was having a momentary fear and, having looked at the fence, will now jump. If he refuses again, lower the jump and work him over it once or twice until he

is comfortable, then start to raise it up again. When he has jumped a bit higher, don't push it, praise him and stop working. In the show ring you may have two refusals before being eliminated.

If you want to know what a knockdown feels like, try jumping a rail on your own feet and hitting it with your shin - it really hurts! Transfer that thought back to your horse, he doesn't want to hit rails either! Knocking poles down is usually the result of rider error: the horse has been brought in to the jump wrong, the rider has shifted his weight during a critical moment or the jump is just too high.



Horse being jerked in the mouth



Horse refusing

Courses

There are several different types of arena courses and all sorts of ways of arranging the jumps. A combination is any series of 2 or more fences within 2 strides (usually 39' 4") of each other. Related distances are obstacles more than 2 strides (40') from each other but no more than 5 strides (70'). A line of fences, two or more related obstacles in a row, and how these lines relate to each other is very important. Unless a class is specified as a pony class in a show, then the 11' or 12' spacing is used. It is best to train all small horses and ponies to learn how cope with the bigger striding. A really good idea is to look at books and magazines which have ideas in them. For setting up show ring courses, use the Equine Canada Handbook rule books which tell you the specifications in all classes.

The easiest courses are probably hunter ones which have 8 or 9 solid looking jumps in a figure eight pattern, 4 or 5 strides between fences, the fence height fairly constant and no true vertical or square oxers. On courses under 3' high, no combinations are used either. The jumps should be in soft colours to reflect their foxhunting country origin. Green, brown, white, grey and black are good. Use natural fillers and decorations like straw bales, small trees and jumps painted like stone walls. No numbers or flags on a hunter course and competitors may not walk the course beforehand.

An equitation course asks questions of the rider. The judge expects to see the correct number of strides in combinations and related distances. The course is harder than a regular hunter one, with bending lines, combinations, related distances, turns and changes of pace.

Open jumper classes are based on the fewest faults in the fastest time. Again, combinations, related distances, bending lines and turns, and varying pace. The course will be designed to be ridden between 300 and 350 meters per minute depending on the class; this will be the "time allowed", anything slower will be given time faults. If more than one horse goes clear in the first round then a jump-off round is ridden with fewer but

higher jumps. In this round the horse with the least faults and the fastest time wins. Besides the ordinary open jumping classes, there are various other formats like Gambler's Choice, Take Your Own Line, Match the Clock, and Six-bar.

Eventing or Horse Trials require 3 different tests of each horse/rider combination. The first is a dressage test, second is a stadium jumping round following open jumper rules, the third is cross-country where you ride over a flagged and numbered course through fields, woods, hills and water. The cross-country jumps are solid and can't be knocked down, so your horse has to learn to

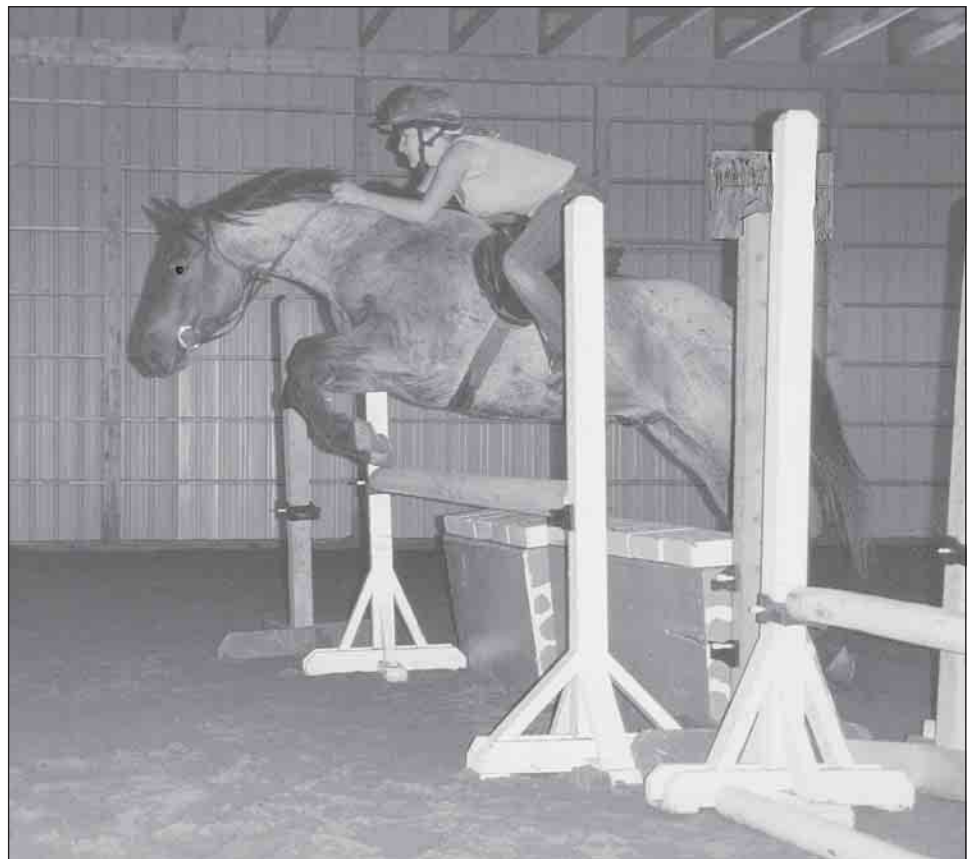


Cross country jump

jump safely and without hesitation over a course which you have seen but he has not. Eventing started in the early 1900's as a complete test of cavalry horses to show that they were obedient and versatile. In its full form a Three Day Event has dressage on the first day, roads and tracks followed by a steeplechase course, more roads and tracks and then the cross country jumping. On the third day the horse had to do a stadium jumping course to show he was still fit and supple. Now these events have been shortened to one and two days so that people can fit them in on a weekend. To make them easier to run, the dressage still goes first, then stadium jumping with cross country last.

Conclusion

This project book is just an introduction to jumping. Watch all the jumping videos, read all the books and magazines about jumping and schooling jumping that you can. The basic answers to the jumping levels are in this book or the Horse Reference Manual and the Dressage Manual, but you should try to add to your knowledge from other sources. Remember that different authors, riders, trainers have different points of view; some of these may work for you and some may not. Keep an open mind, try these other techniques and see what works. And have fun!



Suggested reading

Magazine
 “Practical Horseman”
 “Equus”
 “Corinthian Sport Horse”
 “Canadian Horse Journal”
 “Horse Canada”

Video
 Gail Greenough Showjumping
 Anatomy in Motion: Horse, Rider
 Simply the Best Showjumping Tour
 The Best of Jumping Training
 Training the Jumper, Nelson Pessoa
 Any WEG, Badminton, Olympics, Burghley videos

Books
 Threshold Picture Guides - Show Jumping, Poles and
 Gridwork, Basic Coursebuilding, Making Your
 Own Jumps, and others
 Equine Canada English Riding Handbooks, 1 - 3
 How to Ride - Debby Sly
 Riding and Jumping Clinic - Anne Kursinski
 Jumping is Jumping - Jane Wallace
 Any of Randy Roy's books
 The U.S. Pony Club manuals
 Any of the Compass Points books
 Practical Showjumping - Judith Draper The Handbook
 of Jumping Essentials - Francois Lemaire de Rufieu
 101 Jumping Exercises - Linda L. Allen



The ECH referred to in this book is Equine Canada Hippique, the governing body for horse sport in Canada. Anyone may join EC, but nationally competitive riders must join. Equine Canada promote the rider and coach levels nationally in western, english and driving disciplines.

The Alberta Equestrian Federation is the provincial body which oversees horse sport in Alberta. The AEF administers many of the EC programs and is the office from which you would get the EC Rider Handbooks. The AEF office is in Calgary, phone 403/253-4411.