



EXCELLENCE IN EQUINE NUTRITION

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Horse Sense, in association with



Jumping for balance and confidence



BHSI performance coach **Brendán Bergin** has some tips and exercises for riders to improve their show jumping rounds

As the country starts opening up more over the next few weeks, we will finally be allowed to get back on the competition field. We need to explore the new skills we have had time to develop over the course of lockdown in order to be prepared.

In showjumping training we have to lean heavily on our rider responsibilities; look and plan (know where you are going), speed (including rhythm and impulsion), direction (including suppleness and straightness) and balance (including rider position, contact and collection). Any weak link in this chain can lead to dropped poles, lost time or errors of course.

The quality and practice of these rider responsibilities are the difference between success and failure. As the rider, if we look after our role it affords the horse the best opportunity to look after their end of the deal.

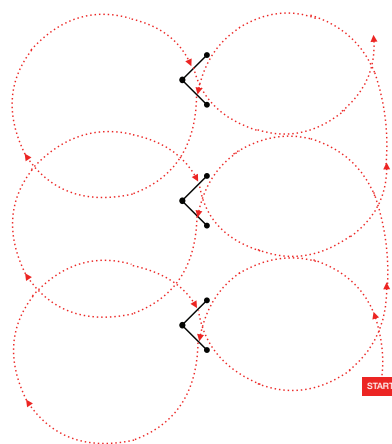
With our obligations in mind I am going to look at three exercises which I hope will challenge and assist you in the training of your showjumping skills. As always when using jumping equipment it is worth getting professional advice on the appropriate distance for your specific horse or pony. Remember that poorly placed equipment can lead to serious safety concerns for both horse and rider.

1. The grid that keeps on bending

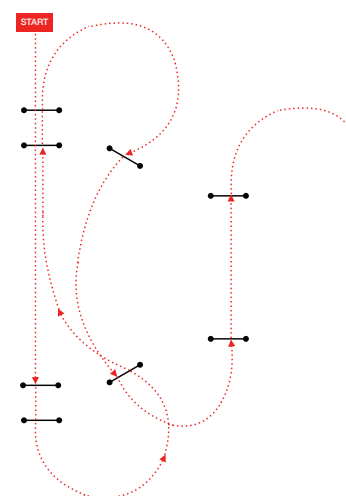
Grid work is one of those divisive exercises loved by some loathed by others. It can sometimes be a very confining tool used by trainers and coaches to improve horses in a single aspect of their education. As with all related fence exercises extreme care must be taken to ensure that distances are appropriate for your specific horse. However, with a bit of cre-



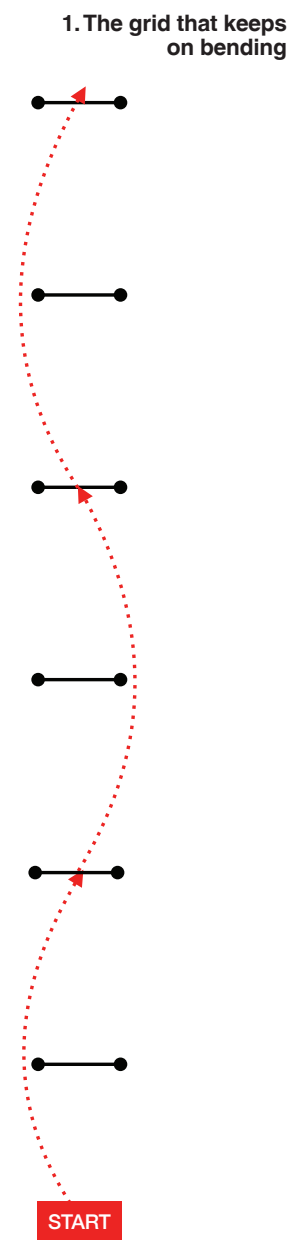
Jumping off a curve is a rudimentary skill which is essential, particularly on the eventing field



2. Jumping on a serpentine curve



3. Bounce, curve and count



1. The grid that keeps on bending

Investing in young horses

MAKE sure you tune into the next Teagasc *Let's Talk Equine* webinar, Tuesday next (April 6th) from 8.30pm–10pm. Panellists on the night include Andrew Hughes of Ennisnag Stud, Damien Griffen of Lissyegan Stables, and international showjumper Cam-

eron Hanley. The panel will discuss the topic "Which youngsters merit further investment?"

The webinar is free to join, but to attend live it is necessary to pre-register following the link at www.teagasc.ie/letstalkequine.

ativity and careful set up a grid can be used for a diverse range of skills development which could keep you occupied for session after session.

The first time I saw this exercise was at a BHS national convention with eventing master coach Yogi Breisner FBHS who stated that once you can do this grid you have all the skills you need for badminton! The grid set up in the exercise is set out as a series of one-stride distances located on the centre line, as many as you can fit in the arena.

You ride the exercise by skipping the first fence, jumping the second and skipping the third changing direction all the way down the grid. The rider needs to communicate the new direction clearly and with practice the horse should land after each fence in good balance and form, ideally on the correct lead. Riding smoothly from turn to turn is the crux of the exercise; turning from the outside leg rather than dragging on the inside rein.

2. Jumping on a serpentine curve

There is often a lot of time spent training straight lines from fence to fence and limited time exploring the options jumping off a curve. Jumping off a curve is a rudimentary skill which is essential, particularly on the eventing field, saving time on bending lines and helping the horse to engage the inside hind leg.

One of the all-time great eventing coaches, Christopher Bartle FBHS, who coached German and British teams to medals at Olympic level, is often quoted saying: "A curving line is often better than a straight one."

His rules for riding cross country are

legendary in our sport. This exercise will assist the rider in honing their rider responsibilities as such facilitating the horse fulfilling their role in the partnership. Like the first exercise, one of the key aspects of this exercise is moving from curve to curve smoothly.

To achieve this end you must make sure to complete the previous circle before starting the next. Once you have completed the previous circle (about a stride out) you should start showing the horse the new intended direction. This gives the horse a good opportunity to change his shoulders to adopt the new leading leg. If you lose the canter quality you can always go large and link in at the same spot allowing quality practice. Remember as always practice makes permanent and quality jumping is a function of this practice.

3. Bounce, curve and count

The final exercise in this series is set up in a more course like mode to draw on the skills developed from the previous two exercises. This exercise is adapted from Caroline Moore FBHS Youth Performance Coach to the British Eventing team. The goal of this exercise is to evaluate your canter, ensuring that you can re-establish your competition jumping canter no matter the line or the obstacle.

Set out the bounces with four non-jumping strides between the two sets. Set the bounce to bending line on four non-jumping strides. The last two fences on a straight line should be set on three non-jumping strides. First ride down from bounce to bounce in a straight line counting your strides between the two sets of bounces.

Once you find your horses natural

stride pattern you can then work on the adjustability of the canter. The bending line to the bounce should be ridden in the same number of strides as from bounce to bounce. Next ride the two angled fences on the curve, you can practice varying the curve from fence to fence to assess how this affects the number of strides in the distance.

Finally, you ride the three stride distance to evaluate your competition canter, remember that in distances three strides or less you cannot easily add or remove a stride. The main objective of these exercises is to develop the key rider responsibilities and skills required for successful course jumping.

By looking after your rider responsibilities it offers the horse the best opportunity to jump clear and out of their stride minimising the need for rider intervention. This in turn promotes the development of the fifth leg which is critical to getting the rider out of trouble. Always remember reviewing the skills needed in competition will help you make your own luck!