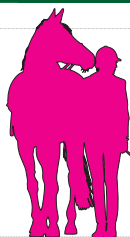




EXCELLENCE IN EQUINE NUTRITION

www.trm-ireland.com   



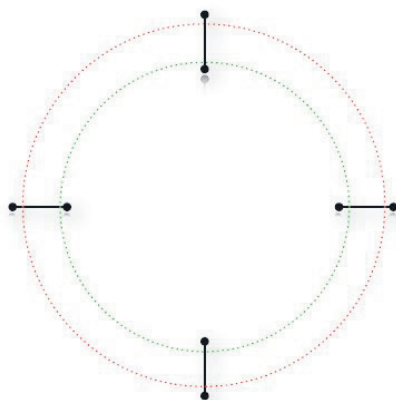
Horse Sense

Practical advice for all horse owners

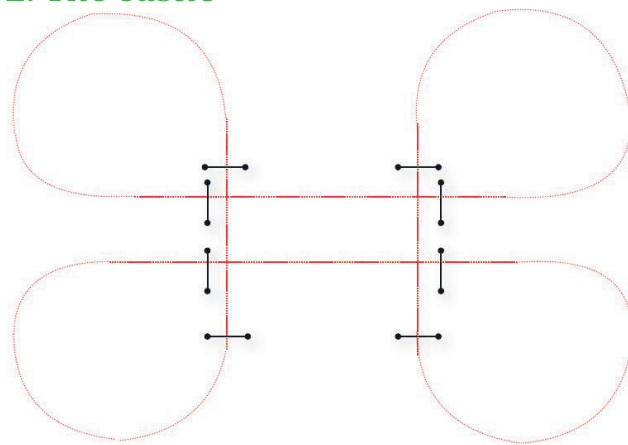
Edited by Rachel Moriarty
Contact: rmoriarty@theirishfield.ie



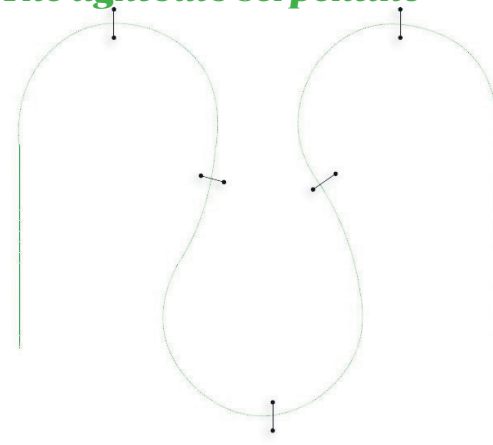
1. The circle of poles



2. The castle



3. The lightbulb serpentine



Developing your dressage skills



Brendán Bergin has some simple exercises for riders to improve their dressage score

AS lockdown carries on and the prospect of lessons, amateur competition and pony club activities seems so far away it is easy to lose sight of the opportunities which are afforded to us.

It is worth remembering that a large aspect of equestrian sport is mental discipline.

Over the next couple of articles, I will be looking at some simple exercises to develop the three phases at horse trials (eventing): dressage, show jumping and cross country.

Remember that in the sport of eventing, it is not three unrelated individual phases but rather the crossover of each into one complete equestrian sport. In approaching your training clarity of the rider's role is essential; 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).

With these in mind we are going to look at three exercises that I have learned over the years which are useful at any level.

In this article, I have elected to use poles to offer added eventing value and focus to the dressage however they can easily be used without.

When using poles it is always safer to use non-roll poles or planks as loose round poles can be extremely hazardous if a horse were to stand on them.

1. The circle of poles

The perennial staple of every dressage test and as such the foundation of many schooling sessions is the circle. Remember that no matter what your discipline a circle is the foundation stone of every turn and line.

In a test depending on level they range from 20m (circle) to 6m (volte). One of the key factors is uniform bend from ears to tail and consistent shape and size with the conspicuous absence of corners and straight lines.

One of the main pitfalls in riding circles is the rider dragging the horse around with the inside rein rather than pushing the horse round from the outside leg.

In this exercise you position four poles on the quarters of the circle as shown in the diagram. These poles will focus the rider's eye holding you to account on the shape and pole meeting accuracy. By picking a specific colour band or point on the pole you will derive maximum benefit not only of the exercise but in crossover to the other phases of the event.

Depending on the length and situation of your poles you should be able to ride a range of sizes for example; 20m circles if you ride on the outside third of the pole or 15m circles on the inside third of the pole. You can massively add value to the exercise if you can count the strides between the poles.

If your circle is consistent in size and shape you will get the same number of strides between each pole.

2. The castle

The castle is another exercise that works somewhat on the principle of circles by building on from the skills of the "circle of poles" and the pitfalls are very similar.

The idea of the castle exercise is to join bends and straight lines together joining up many of the possible lines in a test or on a show jumping course in concentric repeatability.

When building this exercise you need to set the distance between the poles on the long side on a distance of at least four or five non-jumping strides.

I like to think of each of straight line as practice for getting your horse onto the centre line without over or under-shooting the turn.

This is a key test of the control of the shoulder and to ensure the rider is guiding the horse round rather than just pulling the inside rein.

Once again you can add value by picking a specific colour band on each pole and riding accurately to it.

How much are you able to guide the horse with your legs and seat without reliance on the rein?

Are you pushing the horse around the turn with the outside leg or dragging him around with the inside rein?

By positioning the poles on a specified distance and counting strides you can once again assess the regularity of your paces and establish if you are riding accurate lines.

3. The lightbulb serpentine

The lightbulb serpentine is described by William Micklem FBHS as a "golden exercise." A significant quality of this exercise for the horse is developing the equality of suppleness particularly in young horses and consequently improved straightness and purity of gait.

Like all exercises with curves and turns the foundational circle skills are a key component. For the rider the exercise develops the proportionality and accuracy of aid application equally on each side.

Riding this exercise often forms my warm up in walk and trot to help move my horse evenly on both sides and tune up my application of the aids. The rider should push the horse round from the outside leg and shoulder rather than dragging the horse with the inside rein.

This lightbulb serpentine is contrasted with the "conventional" serpentine by curving back on yourself through each loop offering a more gradual change of bend. Adding poles as shown in the diagram focuses the rider's mind and promotes consistent accuracy.

One of the key skills and issues with serpentines is to ensure that the horse actually changes bend through their whole body. The key to good quality schooling work is to constantly review the rider responsibilities and develop the horse's basic responses.

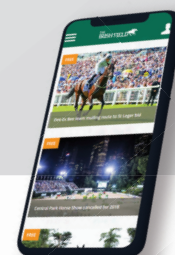
Practicing a short schooling session well will offer much more positive long-term change than high volume low quality practice.

unlock
unlimited access

HOW TO USE THE CODE:

1. **FIND** your unique code printed below
2. **CLICK** 'Paper Code' in our News app
3. **ENTER** your email address, the code and create a password

You now have unlimited access to all digital content on The Irish Field News app until 4pm Friday!



Visit www.theirishfield.ie/code

ENTER THIS CODE TO UNLOCK UNLIMITED ACCESS

Q D R E J 6

Queries: code@theirishfield.ie
01-4199 584 | www.theirishfield.ie/code