

Be Straight and Balanced

Improve your accuracy and control with this exercise from Mary Flood

EXERCISE

Start at trot on the right rein from A. Ride through the corner. At K, leg yield to the quarterline and go straight. Near S, transition to canter and ride straight ahead. Turn right and go through the corner. At M, leg yield to the quarterline. Near P, transition to trot and go straight. Turn right and repeat pattern.

LEVEL: First Level and above

PREREQUISITES

- The rider must be able to perform trot-canter and canter-trot transitions on a circle.
- 10-meter voltes in the corners should have balance and rhythm.
- The horse should be obedient in the leg yield. It is of benefit to have schooled leg yield along the wall and leg yield from the centerline to the wall.
- The horse should be comfortable cantering on the quarterlines.

NEFITS

- Improves accuracy and control, which leads to a straighter horse.
- Requires effective half halts.
- Reminds the horse to stay in front of your outside leg.
- Teaches control of trot-canter and canter-trot transitions on a straight line.
- You feel the importance of the connection between the outside and inside aids, and you are reminded to stay in the center of the horse.
- The ability to control the horse's alignment will help you develop better collection out of the working gaits.

HOW TO DO IT

- Thoroughly warm up your horse before beginning this exercise.
- First, ride an accurate pattern in walk. Tracking to the right, begin at A and ride with a correct bend through the corner. The bend will increase your horse's weight on his inside hind leg. At K, rebalance your horse to prepare him for the leg yield. Have contact in both reins, as you will use half halts in the left rein through the corner and will be switching to half halts in the right rein as you develop the leg yield to the right. Keep your horse parallel to the long side and arrive accurately at the quarterline between E and B. Go straight ahead. Repeat at the other end.
- Once you feel in control of the pattern, ride the first part of the exercise in walk, which includes the leg yield from K to the quarterline. Go straight, and when you are between S and R, ride trot. Stay in trot through the next corner. Leg yield from M to the quarterline. Walk when you are between V and P. Continue on the quarterline and repeat the exercise beginning at A.

- When your horse is comfortable with the walk-trot pattern, ride the entire pattern in the trot.
- Once your horse is comfortable with the pattern in trot, then add the canter. Trot from A through the corner, leg yield to the quarterline, ride straight ahead. When you are between S and R, canter and ride straight ahead on the quarter- line. Turn right, then ride through the corner and at M, leg yield in canter to the quarterline between B and E. Then, go straight ahead. Between V and P, transition to trot and continue on the quarterline. Repeat the exercise.
- Ride this exercise in both directions. When changing directions ride the pattern in walk first until you and your horse are familiar with it. Then do the pattern in trot, then add canter.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

This exercise requires precision. Pay attention to the details:

- Half halts are critical for ideal balance.
- The corners must be balanced. After the corner, obedience to your outside leg is required so your horse is ready to respond to the change of direction.
- When reaching the quarterline, make sure your horse goes immediately forward to your new outside leg so that when your horse is on the quarterline he is then balanced between your aids on both sides and does not deviate.
- When asking for the canter on a straight line, be sure your horse departs straight. Be aware of the balance of the trot before the depart. Make sure your horse responds exactly when you ask and does not bulge the outside shoulder or fall with the haunches to the inside. A slight shoulder-fore is necessary.
- When transitioning from canter to trot, pay attention to the balance of the transition and exact rhythm of the trot from the first step into the trot, and maintain that rhythm.

VARIATION

After your horse can negotiate this exercise, ride this same pattern with canterwalk-canter transitions. Focus on balance and straightness.