

# Look before you leap

In the first of a two-part series, eventer Harry Meade explains an easy gridwork exercise for developing rhythm and straightness over fences



**G**ridwork is a great way to improve your jumping, no matter what your level. It can help improve...

- 1 Co-ordination
- 1 Balance
- 1 Rhythm
- 1 Tempo.

Says Harry: "Tino tends to come into a fence a bit long and strung-out, and because he has a lot of natural scope, he jumps very big. This is something a horse can get away with at the lower levels, but he'd get into trouble at Intermediate level and above, where the horse's jumping needs to be more disciplined."

## About Harry

Twenty-five-year-old Harry is the son of three-times Olympic gold medallist Richard Meade, and is following firmly in his footsteps, having already completed Badminton six times. With his top four-star horse, Midnight Dazzler, Harry has clinched top-10 placings at both Badminton and Burghley, and was recently selected for the World Class Development Programme. Here, he rides Jovial Valentino (aka Tino), a seven-year-old gelding who is showing a lot of promise at the lower levels.



## Pole position

To build the grid, start by placing six poles on the ground, 3.05m (10ft) apart – essentially, canter poles with a slightly longer stride than usual.

Place jump wings on both sides of the first and last poles, and a single wing on each of the four middle poles, alternating the ends at which you place them.

- 1 Start by cantering over the line of poles to warm up (left).
- 2 Bring in another couple of poles to make cross-pole fences at the first



and last set of wings, then ride through the grid a couple of times.

**3** Gradually raise the remaining poles on the ground at alternate ends, one at a time – the order in which you raise them isn't important.

What you end up with is a very athletic exercise, as each half-raised pole will work one side of the horse's body more than the other. And having the first and last fences as cross-poles encourages the horse to keep straight, instead of drifting to one side at the start and end of the grid.

"You basically want your horse to be conscious of where his feet are,"

explains Harry. "This exercise will get him thinking quickly on his feet – a bit like cantering over hot bricks!"

Your horse will quickly learn that it's easier to jump straight down the middle of the grid and, says Harry: "You should find he's making an effort to sit back on his hindquarters after each fence, in order to set himself up for clearing the next one."

"You want your horse to come to a fence softly and holding his rhythm," he adds. "Tino would rather 'plunge' at a fence, but to jump this grid, he has to maintain a rhythm and sit back before each fence."

The grid will get your horse thinking quickly on his feet – a bit like cantering over hot bricks!



Words: Mel Rutherford, Harry Meade. Photos: Horsepix. Thanks to Coolex for arranging the photoshoot at Harry's yard, www.wefi.co.uk. For more about Harry and his horses, visit www.harrymeade.com



### All change

If your horse lands on the wrong lead after a fence, it's important to correct him. "After a fence, you need to land, balance and, if necessary, change onto

the correct canter lead. Try to do this even after you've jumped the very last fence on a grid or a course, as you don't want to encourage your horse to become sloppy when he's finished jumping.

"If you don't have much space before the end of the school, then you have to be even quicker to prepare and ask for the change," he advises.

Harry teaches all his young horses flying changes – "Otherwise, you're only training the horse not to do them! This then makes it very difficult for him to learn when you start to teach the changes later on in his training."

When it comes to riding flying changes, Harry says: "Many riders get into the habit of throwing their body to the side in order to get their horse to jump and change legs. However, this will only make him land slightly to the side, when you actually need him to stay straight.

"If your horse learns to make the flying change while staying straight and without drifting, then it won't interrupt your line of approach to the next fence.

"To achieve this, sit up on landing and ask for a bit of travers on the new rein as you give the aids for the change,

### Harry's top tip...

"Gridwork is great for getting horses to think quickly with their feet – especially useful for horses who tend to run into trouble at combination fences."



### Harry's top tip...

"Although I'm riding Tino in a double bridle, I wouldn't advise others to start using one unless their horse is ready. The double bridle helps horses like Tino, who have a tendency to 'plunge' after a fence and get out of balance. However, the gridwork exercise will help correct this."

### Ask for a bit of travers as you give the aids for a flying change, to keep your horse straight for the next fence

to help the horse to step under with his hind legs and change on a straight line. This way, you'll be able to get a good line to the next fence."

### Next month...

Harry demonstrates a simple exercise that riders of all levels can have a go at, which will improve every aspect of your horse's jumping – with minimal effort on your part! Don't miss it.

### Gridwork: good for...

**Horses who like to have the last say!** Just like Tino, who is, says Harry, "the sort of horse who'll try to make life difficult for you!

"This exercise is really good for horses like Tino – it helps them to work things out for themselves, rather than you getting into an argument with them."