



Approach the grid in a forward, active canter



Make sure the horse is feeling confident before raising the canter poles



We have teamed up with Dodson & Horrell and their new ambassador, Harry Meade, to share with you his top training exercises that he uses regularly with his horses. Known for his quiet and sympathetic style of riding, Harry gives us an insight into setting your horse up for success, from the arena to the cross country field.



**Exercise focus:** Athleticism, strength, straightness and technique.

**Horse:** Catherston Definitive (Fin), 3/4 TB, six year old gelding, currently competing at novice level.

**Setting up:** Half cross bounces in a grid. Set up six poles on bounce distances (10 feet/ 3m) down the centre line. Put a pair of wings beside both end poles, and have a second pole to hand at either end. Put one wing only on alternate sides of each of the other four poles. Place the jump cups fairly near the top hole on the pair of wings at either end of the grid; the cups on the four wings in the middle can be 3-4 holes lower.

## Setting your horse up for success with Harry Meade

**The exercise:** "This is a gymnastic bounce exercise where we are looking for the horse to be able to come off both reins comfortably and get used to jumping consecutive bounces. It improves the horse's rhythm by regulating the evenness of their stride as well as testing their gymnastic ability by requiring quick reactions."

### Harry explains how to ride it:

"Have your stirrups in cross country length - a few holes shorter than your usual show jumping length. To begin with, get the horse used to cantering over the poles whilst maintaining a forward rhythm. When the poles are on the ground, the distances will seem long so come up out of the saddle into a forward, open canter. As the exercise progresses and the fences go up, the distances will appear much shorter, so

don't lose your nerve and shorten the distances!

"As you ride through, turn alternate directions after the line of canter poles so you approach off a different rein each time. Make sure there is someone to help on the ground as the fences will need to be put up one at a time while you are doing the exercise. I would suggest giving the horse one

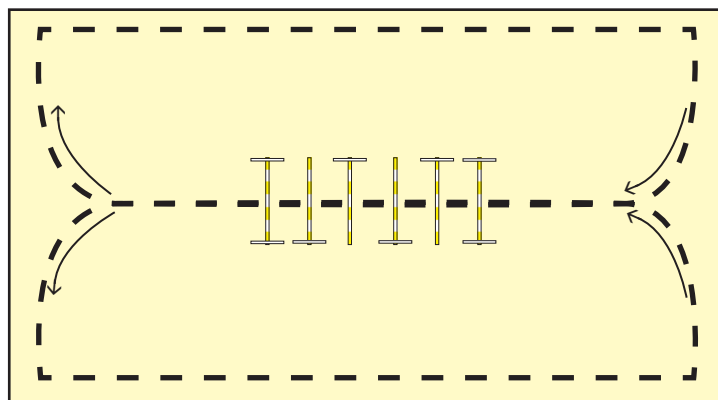
or two five minute breaks during the exercise, but otherwise keep going without stopping while the fences are put up.

"Having cantered down the line several times, put up both poles at either end of the grid to high cross poles, leaving the four canter poles in between each fence. Ride through this on both reins and then raise one end of one of the middle poles, and after riding this through on both reins, raise the opposite end of the other middle pole. Keep repeating this until all the poles are raised.

"The horse should stay dead straight down the line and become sure footed and nimble through the bounce exercise. The angle of the poles will encourage the horse to work on his technique and bascule properly. The rider must maintain their own balance and not interfere with the horse by getting ahead of the movement.

"The reason we use cross poles at the beginning and at the end rather than uprights is to prevent the horse from drifting and to make sure they remain straight throughout causing them to work harder and more accurately. They also can't rotate their body in a barrel roll to avoid having to bascule properly because the angled sides of the cross poles won't allow them to. The reason why we use half cross poles for the middle four fences, rather than true cross poles, is that they encourage the horse to

*"As the horse jumps through, he will become more aware of the placing of his feet"*



Set up six poles on a bounce stride (10 feet/ 3m) with the end two as cross poles

Watch Harry demonstrate this exercise by watching the video on our YouTube channel: Redpin Publishing



Use cross poles rather than uprights to encourage the horse to stay straight and prevent him from being able to rotate his body in a barrel roll to avoid having to bascule properly

stay straight of their own accord. By drifting to the smaller part of the fence, they have to jump the higher part of the next, which act as a logical deterrent.

"As the horse jumps through, he will become more aware of the placing of his feet and will be able to work it out for himself rather than relying on you as the rider too much.

"It is important to remember though that this is a physically and mentally demanding exercise for the horse, so if they are struggling with it then go back a step by putting one or two of the canter poles back down in order

to simplify the exercise, and then build back up gradually.

"If the horse is relatively young or inexperienced then keep the fences small and build the exercise up slowly so they are clear about what is being asked."

**Things to consider:**

"This exercise is high octane and whilst it does not take long, the horse will have jumped about 50 jumping efforts in a very short space of time. It is a good strength and conditioning exercise as well as being an intellectual puzzle for the horse.

"I find that horses really enjoy this exercise, it can be a change from their usual work and keeps them interested and mentally engaged."

*"If the horse is relatively young or inexperienced then keep the fences small and build the exercise up slowly...."*



As the horse jumps through, he will become more aware of the placing of his feet

# Harry's training tips:

## how do you recommend warming up for cross country?

"At a one day event, the horse has already done the dressage and show jumping so only needs a minimal warm up for the cross country. I get on 15

*Harry is one of Britain's leading event riders. He finished third at Badminton last year and was a member of the silver medal winning team at the World Championships. He was also voted the 2014 Rider of the Year.*

*Harry is always looking for new rides at all levels. For more information visit [harrymeade.com](http://harrymeade.com)*

minutes before my time and give the horse a steady canter on the way to the collecting ring; riding constant circles is not beneficial to the horse's mindset for the cross country so warming up on the way to the start box encourages the horse to draw forwards, travelling from A to B. I normally jump three fences in the warm up - one in a relaxed open rhythm and then two at a steep angle off either rein.

A horse doesn't need to charge around at a strong gallop and jump lots of fences in the warm up, there is no benefit in over exerting them and, if anything, this is only likely to make them less rideable on the course. Given that the first two or three fences on a course are straight forward questions, I'm not afraid to use these as my practise fences on a hot or difficult horse that might get wound up in the collecting ring and be difficult to start.

In a three day event the scenario is different as the horse has not competed in other phases earlier in the day, and also the cross country course is nearly double the length of a one day event course. This means that the warm up should be more progressive yet not compromise the horse's endurance, which he will need for the latter stages of the course. I would either take the horse for a gentle hack earlier in the day or give him a loose lunge. I then get on 35 minutes before my start time, which allows the horse to have a steady canter, jump a few fences, and then a short but decent pipe opener (fast gallop where the horse has to blow). After this he will walk for about

10 minutes so that his heart rate returns to resting, before heading into the start box."



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