

*Leg Yield*

## **Flatwork**

### **Exercise 1**

Learn to feel the horse's feet in all three gaits. We have talked about the importance of knowing where the horse's feet are since the beginning. If this is not second nature, back track and practice until it is. Quality and connection won't happen unless you are in rhythm with the hind feet, feel how the neck is moving, and use your aids in unison with the movement of the hind end. Count the rhythm.

### **Exercise 2**

Leg yielding asks your horse to yield sideways from your leg. Just like the turn on the forehand, the best way to teach your horse to step sideways from your leg is to face him toward a solid barrier that prevents him from going forward. This allows you to use your hands only to maintain straightness. Beginning in this way will help your horse to understand the difference between a leg that asks him to move forward and a leg that asks him to move over and cross his legs. Using a displacing leg, ask for a step or two of yield in one direction, and reward the slightest "try." Your reins should be short enough to keep your horse facing the wall. Use them as little as possible. If your horse has really tried and given you even a very small yield, stop. Come back to this exercise the next time you ride, and you will probably receive a better response. Do not look for perfection at this point. Look for an understanding of the cue.

Once your horse understands the basic cue for sideways movement, ask him to step sideways while walking. Start by walking along the rail. Relax your inside leg to clear a space for him to step into. Draw your outside leg back 4 to 6 inches, to become a displacing leg. Use a slight inside leading rein in conjunction with the outside displacing leg. You are still riding the "X". The leading rein encourages the inside foreleg to step sideways, as the displacing leg asks the outside hind leg to cross in front of the inside hind. Your horse is moving forward and sideways simultaneously. The outside rein acts as a bearing rein to support the outside displacing leg.

Ideally your horse's head and neck should remain straight in front of you. As you are teaching this movement, it is fine if your horse bends slightly away from the direction in which his body is moving. This is easier for the horse in the learning phase. When your horse makes an effort to step across and over, reward him by walking straight forward. You should only expect a step or two of sideways yield at this point. After walking forward and straight for several steps, change the inside leg position to a displacing leg. Allow the outside leg to relax to create a space. The outside hand uses a slight opening rein, and the inside hand becomes a bearing rein as you ask for a few steps forward and sideways back to the rail.

If you go slowly in the beginning and reward every effort your horse makes to give the desired response, he will remain confident, and his learning will progress more rapidly. While practicing at the walk, really

focus on coordinating the opening rein with the motion of the inside foreleg and following with the displacing leg to catch the outside hind as it moves forward to engage. The walk is slow enough for you to feel each footfall, so you can begin to time your aids to make it easier for your horse to respond correctly. When you and your horse are confident with this movement at the walk, you can begin to experiment at the trot. Always remember the "X," and strive for lightness in your horse's response. Timing your aids with his feet is essential for achieving lightness.

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*The moment just before suspension. Prepare to ask for the change and note that the head and neck are up.*



**Exercise 3**

Creating a stride of straightness in the flying change of lead is the primary goal of this exercise. Switch outside reins and counter canter for a moment without losing forward impulsion. The horse's head and neck will come up in the moment of suspension, and at that instant ask for the change with the new outside leg. Riding across the diagonal of a large work area is a good place to start. If you have practiced simple changes of leads, your horse will know the signals. Now your job is to keep enough forward impulsion so that your horse can switch feet behind. Be sure to concentrate on straightness, keeping your horse upright so he can produce a clean change. Follow the head and neck gesture, and ask for the change when the head and neck are in the "up" position to allow him to complete the change from hind to front.

Cantering over a pole on the ground increases the moment of suspension and lets you feel the moment more clearly and time your aids correctly. The increased suspension also makes it physically easier for your horse to change his lead. Make sure his shoulders stay square as you ask for the flying change, but practice this without drilling the horse. Remember, it's better to get a "TRY" than to demand perfection and cause a problem. Even if the horse is a stride or two late, it's okay. Try again later, rather than repeating this exercise many times.

As your horse begins to understand what is expected of him, vary the situations in which you ask for the flying change. Practice the change using a half-circle in reverse as demonstrated on DVD IV. Counter-canter a large circle, and ask your horse for the change of lead at a specific point on the circle. Be careful that he doesn't learn to associate the corner or the ring fence with the lead change, so that he doesn't anticipate or worry about the change as he approaches a corner or fence. Remember not to drill this or any other exercise. If your horse shows you he understands by giving you a "try," then reward him and move on to other things.

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*Feel that your horse is sitting back on his hocks, jumping up and then around the jump.*

## Jumping Work

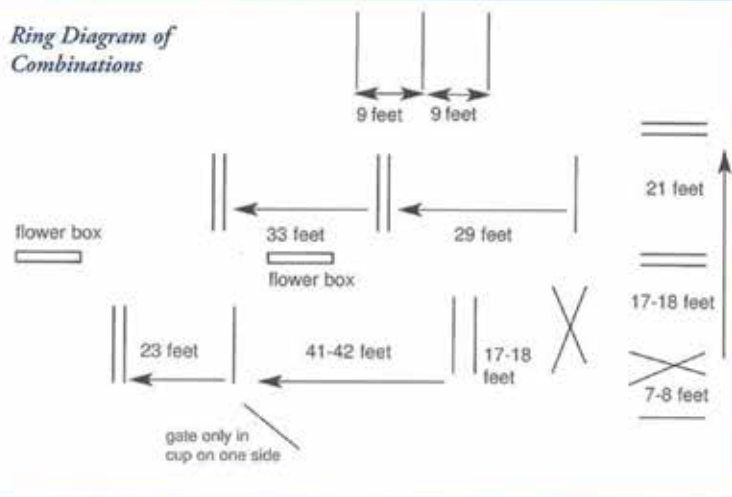
### Exercise 1

Basic work over poles, cavaletti, half-raised planks and various combinations are exercises that allow you to practice relaxing your hands and using your legs to ask the horse to leave the ground. This is the place to focus on your horse jumping up to you, rather than letting your upper body crowd his front end. Feel that your horse is sitting back on his hocks and jumping up and then around the obstacle. Always remember to ride across the back rail of oxers and to focus on a point in front of you.

#### Begin by setting:

- Poles 7 to 9 feet apart to canter over
- Cavaletti as bounces 8 to 9 feet apart, depending on your horse; keep the distance comfortable for his canter stride.
- A plank, gate, or pole set in a jump cup at only one end. Practice three different approaches: a short roll back while sitting the saddle, a medium approach using half-seat, and a long approach using two-point position. Be creative.
- A basic combination: a trot rail, then 7 feet to an X with ground rails, then 17 feet to an oxer at 2'6" to 3 feet.

### Ring Diagram of Combinations



Be sure you set distances that encourage the horse to jump up and around the fence. If the distances between the bounces or other combination elements are too long, your horse will have to stretch and reach with a flat arc across the obstacle. Linda Allen's book, *101 Jumping Exercises for Horse and Rider*, is a wonderful resource. Our suggestions for gymnastic work with your horse will keep you focused on your position as he develops a more consistent take-off and jumping style. The distances we have suggested are a starting point for the average horse. It will be very helpful if you can have a ground person with you as you use the various combinations. He or she can make any necessary adjustments to the distances, so they are comfortable for your horse and encourage him to jump off his hocks.

#### Exercise 2

Trotting in and cantering out of lines is an exercise which when performed correctly, makes a huge difference in creating quality jumping efforts. To trot in and canter out of lines set on the average 12 foot stride, you add one stride to the normal canter. If the line is set at 72 feet, which is five cantering strides, you should trot in and canter out in six strides. This exercise slows everything down a notch so that the horse and the rider have more time to attend to the details. In the beginning use of ground poles 9 feet in front and 9 feet behind the first



Trot in . . .



Canter out



obstacle will help the horse learn to judge the distance and pay attention to landing. As you canter forward to your midpoint (3 strides) from the trot fence, you know that there are 3 more strides left. This is a great place to train your eye. Is the second jump coming up as a tight, medium, or long distance?

If the distance seems tight as you land off the first jump, exhale and say a long, slow whoa. (This is breathing your horse down.) Open your hip angle and create the sail, so your horse will drop back to you. Give him the freedom he needs in his head and neck to raise his withers, drop on his hocks, and rock back for the jump. There is plenty of time to work on straightness when the distance comes up easy. Do not get caught over steadying. Keep looking ahead to your midpoint, and soften your hands when you know you have made the adjustment that was necessary to make the line work for your horse. Use only a half-ounce of pressure to let your horse know he can use his head and neck without restriction. This is enough to catch drifts, keep forming the track, and keep him on his hocks. Every line has a midpoint. Make any necessary stride adjustments as you ride to the midpoint to allow your horse to move forward in balance and get his hocks to the base of the jump in the second half of the line. Remember to relax the feel of your hands, and ask him to leave the ground with your legs. Practice waiting for your horse to jump up to you, and ride across the jump in mid-air.

If the distance looks medium, keep cantering and support straightness. Don't allow your upper body to lead you ahead of your horse's motion. Look for the moment when you might lighten your hands. You must



relax your feel by the base of the jump, if not before. As you lighten your hand, remember to ask your horse to leave the ground. Sometimes this may just take a thought; it depends on the horse. Remember that you are riding to a focal point at the end of the line. In time, you will be able to see the line with matching strides from the very beginning as you trot over the first jump. Picture the line exactly as you want it to ride. Create a visual of being "at ease" while jumping these exercises.

If the distance feels long, canter forward to the midpoint. Concentrate on getting there in three strides with your horse balanced on his hocks and straight. As you move up to the midpoint, your horse will know when he has moved up enough. **Listen** and allow him to raise his withers, drop on his hocks, and rock back for the jump. This is why you rode forward to the midpoint. When you feel your horse settle back on his hocks, do not push the horse forward thinking he is backing out of the jump. Allow the back up and support the new rhythm. Use your upper body to help—open your hip angle. Protect the straightness off the ground.

Trotting in and cantering out of lines gives you time to practice riding to the midpoint. Create and re-establish the pace as you land off the first jump. Once you reach the midpoint, you will see and feel any minor adjustments you need to make. You will see the ride you are seeking in your mind. Focusing on flatwork as you ride to the midpoint will often relax you and make it easier for you to let the jump come to you. Just keep forming the track, like a chute between your hands and legs. Relax, wait, and maintain. These are the final steps in riding to the base of the jump.

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### **Exercise 3**

To add and leave out the stride over poles and boxes, set your poles or boxes 66 feet apart as we demonstrated on DVD III. There are so many ways to be creative with this exercise. For example:

Create pace in the medium canter while in half-seat, and simply canter the poles or boxes using the 66' line. When practicing this way, you will immediately know how much stride your horse has. Remember to establish pace, ride out the line, and relax. Wait with your horse while riding him up in front of your legs. Keep the connection from the inside leg to the outside rein, and maintain a



smooth, forward pace. Focus on establishing a rhythmic canter. At this point, don't worry too much about how you meet the poles or the striding between them.

Once you can comfortably canter the poles and keep your horse in front of your leg and straight, vary the strides between the poles. Every horse will have a different stride length in the ordinary canter. Begin with six easy strides, then open up your horse's stride, and canter between the poles in five strides. Finally, settle the canter, and ride seven strides between the poles or boxes. Mix it up without drilling. Practice the three seats as you vary the striding. Use two-point position to ride five strides. To ask for six strides, drop to a half-seat, and when you want seven strides practice full-seat using your upper body as a sail and allowing your weight to drop down and around your horse into your legs and stirrups. Practice stepping down into the balls of your feet, and imagine a decrease from your horse's hind end as he elevates slightly to lighten his front end. Try the exercise a few times, take a walking break, and then try again.

#### **Exercise 4**

There are three approaches to a jump: short, medium and long. Establishing the pace needed for the jump is crucial. Once you accept this as the first step of EVERY jump or line of jumps, you become a leader committed to her horse and his stride length. Also, you must always practice the steps of a turn, even when they happen quickly in the short approach to a jump.

**Short Approach:** A rollback to a jump off a short turn or a tight turn to a jump with four or less striding strides to the take-off are considered short



approaches. Ride this approach using a full-seat connected to the saddle, and focus on staying in the center of the horse and riding with the motion. To continue forward on the short approach, keep your shoulders square as you open your hip angle and create a tall upper body in the center of the horse's motion. Riding a straight line with your focus, relax your feel, and as you ask your horse to leave the ground with your legs, wait for him to close your hip angle and jump up to you. As you land, re-establish your pace, and reconnect to the rhythm to ride out the line.

**Medium Approach:** Ride in half-seat, and review the steps to a turn. The beginning of the turn creates the connection of inside leg to outside rein. Shape the turn with the inside leg and an inside indirect rein in front of the withers so that you can see the inside corner of your horse's eye as you focus your eyes forward. In the second part of the turn be sure the horse is in front of your leg, preparing for the third part of the turn. In the third part, the haunch turn finishes the turn and comes straight on the line of the medium approach to the jump. Always follow forward. As you come out of the turn, straighten the horse by riding outside leg to inside rein. Line up. Relax, wait, and maintain your pace until you are ready to relax your hands—ask your horse to jump and wait for him to jump up to you.

**Long Approach:** Take a two-point position with your seat out of the saddle, but remember that your leg connects to the saddle all the way past your knee to your mid-thigh. This is crucial to maintaining the connection between horse and rider. Often the long approach will

appear as a slightly long distance. When this happens, stay open, continue forward and wait the jump out. With practice you will find the base of the jump with the same pace. Always ride the three steps to the turn, and then relax, wait, and maintain the same pace. Even on long approaches, it is important to finish the turn with the outside leg and outside bearing rein while continuing forward. At the take-off point, relax your feel, use your legs to ask the horse to jump, and wait for him to jump up to you. Remember to ride across the jump, and be ready to re-establish your pace and reconnect to the rhythm as your horse lands.

Whatever your approach, always set the **pace** you need before you make the final approach, so that your horse will "see" which distance will work best for him. This is the glory of a stabilized horse—they help.

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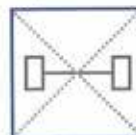
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**Exercise 5**

The key to riding jumps on the angle is using a focal point to create a visual line for the approach, jump, and landing. Jump the middle of the jump and then ride out the line you have created. Watch the explanation for jumping an angled fence on DVD III.



Begin with a pole on the ground and imagine an X with lines that cross directly over the center of the pole. Ride the lines of the X in a comfortable medium canter. Practice both lines.

Once you are comfortable over the pole, proceed to a flower box or small wall. When you can jump those confidently, keeping your horse in the medium canter and straight on your lines of focus, move on to small jumps.

When you really feel comfortable jumping this particular angle, begin to practice jumping precise lines on more severe or challenging angles. Use the same steps to ride all angled jumps. However, it is important to remember the inside leg to the outside rein and to focus on the track your aids are describing to your horse. Visualize the image of a chute between your hands and legs, and you will keep your horse straight, even when jumping on a very steep angle to a fence. Always remember to relax your feel at the base, close your leg to ask your horse to jump, and wait for him to jump up to you.

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## Mental Work

Train yourself mentally using mental strength training.

### Exercise 1

Exhale! Rather than always focusing on the intake of the breath, focus on exhaling. This reinforces the "letting go" process. Many top riders have found that this works wonders right before they go into competition. The horses feel the "letting go."<sup>xiii</sup>

### Exercise 2

Re-connect. Put yourself on the lunge line for this exercise. If you feel disconnected from your horse, begin at the walk. Close your eyes for three or four strides and focus on the rhythm and relax into it. Then open your eyes for the remainder of the lunge circle. Do this several times at the walk, and then practice it at both the sitting and rising trot. In time you will reconnect with your horse and become part of him.<sup>xiv</sup>

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It is our hope that you feel empowered by the ideas and concepts we have presented in the DVD series and this workbook. The DVD's provide you with the visual images, and the workbooks lead you through the process and describe how things should feel. We have left places throughout the workbook for you to take notes. Making notes will help you remember and understand what you are experiencing and facilitate your learning.

Think of the *process* as your goal, and practice reaching your goal using small steps. Be patient; reward and appreciate each small success. You will develop achievable short-term goals as the process unfolds. You are seeking a true partnership with your horse, a partnership that allows you to fill-in for each other when needed. Strive for this type of relationship with every horse you ride, but remember building relationships takes time. Using this system helps you reach a place that allows you to know in each moment and stride that you will be OK. You now have the tools and the understanding to handle anything that comes your way with your horse, so you can focus on your relationship and how you communicate with each other. This is the real Life Lesson Learned with Horses.