

# Setting your horse up for success with

# Harry Meade



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.



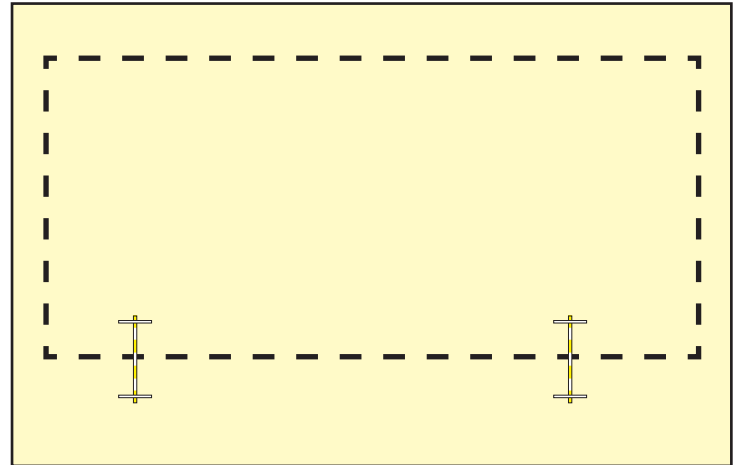
**Exercise focus:** Maintaining your rhythm; lengthening and shortening the canter; improving straightness; developing your eye for a stride.

**Horse:** Mister Optimistic (Mo), six year old 3/4 TB, currently competing at novice level.

**The exercise:** Set two poles on an unrelated distance down the long side. Ride over the middle stripe on both the poles and then ride a 90 degree turn. Repeat this in each corner in order to form a rectangle. When riding down the long side that does not have the poles, ride five metres in from the track so that you have to take responsibility for the horse's straightness.

Use your eye to find the most comfortable number of level strides between the two poles and repeat this three times on each rein in order to establish a consistent canter.

Deliberately vary the canter in order to change the number of strides between the two poles. For example,



Place two poles down the long side at no set distance

if a comfortable working canter gives you seven strides each time, then you can lengthen the canter to get six strides and the collect it to get eight strides. Keep repeating 6-8-6-8.....

**Harry explains how to ride it:** "The horse's shoulder will naturally bulge out on a straight line, and the

*"Once you meet your first pole, your adjustment should be early on in the first 30% of the distance."*

*On the turn do not take the inside hand across the horse's neck*





## TRAINING ARTICLE



Canter over the first pole out of the same regular canter rhythm regardless of whether you are going to move or wait

horse (and rider!) will naturally knife in and cut across each corner. This exercise will aid straightness as you ride from point to point down the poles and will encourage the horse to stay straight through their body and work through their back. It will also help develop riding a correct and balanced turn. You can use subtle counter flexion on the straight lines to bring the horse onto two tracks in order to develop true straightness. By riding in from the track, you don't have the wall to balance so it encourages the rider to use their outside aids to keep the horse straight.

"When attempting this exercise for the first time, it will take quite a while for the rider to be able to ride a straight line without having the shoulder falling out the whole way down the poles. You must apply your outside leg and position the horse's shoulders and neck so that you can ever so slightly see the corner of the outside eye. This should be done by raising the outside hand up slightly. Be soft with the inside hand and then release all pressure on the outside hand too, which will allow you to bring both your hands together and for the horse to remain truly straight in self-carriage.

"Through the turn, raise the inside hand slightly whilst keeping it soft, do not take it across the horse's neck and don't take the hand back to your inside hip either. As soon as you come out of the turn you use the outside leg and the outside hand to bring the shoulders round. Practise this turn in all four corners of your rectangle. It is like a soldier learning to march, you just practise and practise and the idea is that it is as much for the rider to understand the aids they are giving as it is for the horse to understand the aids they are receiving. If a horse

is one sided, you may just need to be more specific on the rein they are difficult on. Bring the shoulders round so that they don't fall out, and be clearer with your aids. This exercise can be done in all three paces."

Once you have mastered this exercise you can build upon it by playing around with the stride length in the canter.

Harry continues: "As a progression, after establishing how many strides your horse gets between the two poles in working canter, you can then begin to lengthen and shorten the stride."

In this exercise, Harry initially rode seven strides each time and then lengthened to get six and collected to get eight. He repeated quite a few

*You can use subtle counter flexion on the straight lines to bring the horse onto two tracks in order to develop true straightness.*

circuits each time alternating between six and eight strides.

"Make sure you decide how many strides you are riding for before you approach the first pole each time. When altering the stride, the idea is that the canter to the first pole shouldn't look any different regardless of whether you are going to lengthen or shorten. The adjustment must come on landing over the first pole. Do enough in the first two strides so that, regardless of whether you are

lengthening or shortening, you can sit quiet in the last two strides to the second pole - in other words don't leave your adjustment to the second half of the distance and end up either strangling the horse to the base of the second pole to get the eight or meeting it on a flier and having to stand off in order to get the six. Do the adjusting in the first 30% of the distance.

"When asking the horse to move, you want to just use the heels - the seat and the body should not alter. You want to still be sitting in the saddle but lightly, without driving with the seat. I try to imagine I am moving down to a double of uprights; so you are travelling early and then you can sit tall so that your final two strides are regular. Similarly, if you're waiting in order to get one extra stride, then you wait early and you imagine you are riding to a big wide oxer. Early move, early wait and it should look level and effortless.

"Make sure when you are altering the canter that you continue with the discipline of the initial exercise - riding the 90 degree turns around your rectangle concentrating on straightness on the straight lines, suppleness through the turns

and the quality of canter and self-carriage throughout.

Your accuracy comes from riding over the central point of the pole and the effectiveness of your turns; this will benefit both your flatwork and your jumping. Always do this in your show jumping length of stirrups rather than dressage length as the aids are fundamentally different for the two disciplines."

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



Support the horse with the outside aids as you come down the poles to keep them straight