

NEWSLETTER

MARCH-APRIL 2024

Virginia Dressage Association Charlottesville Chapter

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Isabel F. de Szinay Memorial
Dressage Show

15 - 16 June 2024

HITS Commonwealth Horse Park,
Culpeper, VA

Opening Daste: TBA

Closing Date: TBA

Breed Component
USDFBCS Qualifying Competition

Performance Classes

Sponsorship

Volunteer

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello everyone, and hello spring! While we are still bundling up in the earlier hours of the day, we definitely are feeling signs of impending warm weather as well as flowers to brighten our day!

Our Club held its first event of the year with a clinic at Grayson Farm and Hannah Pierucci Schmidt. Low number of riders and auditors but everyone felt the sharing of knowledge and demonstrations of progress for all riders was fantastic. So don't miss the next one!

Our next Educational Clinic is April 13 with Bruno Greber. Details in this newsletter.

Our recognized show in June needs YOU!!! (Envision here my finger pointing directly at you just like Uncle Sam only I am much prettier than US...). Please check the website and read your emails to learn how you can help with this show.

Our Meet n Greet will be reschedule and hopefully Mother Nature won't interfere. Can't wait to see everyone there.

Eleszabeth

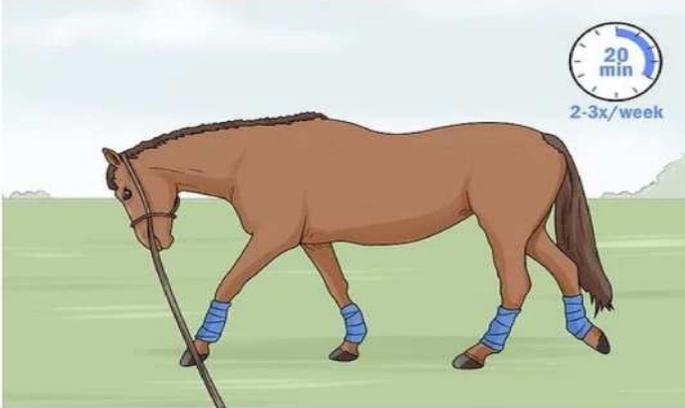


2024 Chapter Membership (as of 3/28/24)

Bettinna Longaker	Laura Berne
Jeremey Fox	Shaleena Arreguin
Nancy Doody	Sandy Worley
Beth Sproule	Anne Chapin
Taska Parker	Flavia Anger
Peta Wyllie	Halley Bell
Nancy Lowey	Helle Stewart
Jeri Tate	Kim Schmidt
Nicky Vogel	Hannah Schmidt
Roxanne Hagan	Melissa Wimmer
Robin Dannels	Sophia Bryant
Lisa Macchi	Katherine Innes
Susan Laurie	Darla Fainter
Sandi Nelson	Karen Fox
Donna Martin	Laurel Moore
Jillian Kirkpatrick	Hannah Parker
Carol Bauer	Ellen Hudgins
Wendy Owens	Bruno Greber
Melyni Worth	Barbara Greber
Sabine Desper	Bettina Anderson
Malinda Zielke	Sandra Gaylinn
Kim Aust	Brent Pusey
Gardy Bloemers	Angela Doolan
April Rivers	Tamara Showalter
Isabella Rice	Joyce Howear
Molly Bull	Kerry-lynn Corry
Nancy Olson	Krisine Gillis
Sarah Olson	Carolyn Briggs
George Williams	Michelle Foss
Roberta Williams	
Eleszabeth McNeel	
Erin Fitzwater	
Kathleen Gruss	
Michelle Anderson	
Celia Refalko	
Karen Rice	

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORKSHOP WITH BRUNO GREBER



"Longe Your Horse Safely, with Purpose and Confidence!"

An opportunity to have a hands-on experience in working your own horse on the Longe with the help and support of Bruno's expertise.

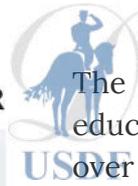
Bruno will also demonstrate and discuss the advantages of Long Lining.

April 13, 2024 1-4 pm

Bruno Greber Dressage in White Hall

Contact Eleszabeth McNeel
at E7Aquila@aol.com to sign up for this educational clinic.

Auditors encouraged - members free; non-members \$10.



The USDF Virtual Education Series hosts education sessions with industry professionals over a variety of dressage and equine education topics. Members are eligible to sign up through the online submission form to receive the webinar link and access to the session. Each session is free to USDF members and is USDF University accredited. Members will receive 0.25 education credits upon verification of attendance. The webinar will start automatically through the provided link at the designated date and time. All times are listed in Eastern Time. Questions? Email education@usdf.org.

Each session will last 60 minutes and includes a live Q&A with presenters. Suggestions for future education sessions or topics may be emailed to education@usdf.org.

You do not need to purchase a Zoom licensed account to access the session. Interested members will need a device with audio and visual capabilities. Can't attend a session? Sessions will be available for streaming in the USDF Education Library within 30 days following the scheduled session.



**FITNESS ROUTINES FOR SPRING
PRESENTED BY: JEC BALLOU
MAY 7, 2024 AT 8:00 PM ET**

[More Information](#)

[Register](#)

VADA CHAPTER CALENDAR



Download
the **NEW**
US Equestrian
Rulebook App!



USEF RULE CHANGES THAT AFFECT DRESSAGE COMPETITIONS

EFFECTIVE 12/1/2023

By Lori LaFave and
Michelle King

As a competitor, one of the biggest changes you will notice when you go to a show this year is the way equipment checks will be handled. There will still be a ring steward stationed ringside who will check the equipment of 1/3 of the riders in each class (unless it is a regional championship, in which case, every horse will be checked.) However, the steward will now check everything EXCEPT your bit and bridle.

Effective 12/1/2024, bits and bridles will be checked by the technical delegate (TD) and not the ring steward. DR126 spells out the new procedures and it is strongly recommended that all competitors read this rule, along with all other rules that were amended or added this year (which will be easy to spot as they are printed in red in the Rule Book.) TDs will check 50% of the horse/rider combinations entered at the show. Most of these checks will be conducted when the equipment is off the horse, in a variety of ways. You may be asked to show the TD your bit and bridle when they are walking through the barns doing their daily (or more frequent) barn checks, as they walk around the trailer parking area or be asked to bring them with you when you check in at the show office or perhaps to the warm up area the day before the show begins if the TD is there on warm up day. In addition, the TD will check some horses after their test in much the same way as the traditional check previously performed by the stewards. This will be the check to ensure that the bit and bridle shown to the TD is actually the bit and bridle being used by the competitor. The TD for the show will work with the show management to determine the process that will work best for each particular show and that information will be provided to the competitors before the show. And remember, TDs are at the show as a resource to both competition management and competitors, so if you have a question about your equipment (or anything else show related) feel free to reach out to the TD, who will be listed in the prize list and ask them!

Below are more rule changes for this season, that might affect you directly (this is NOT the full list of changes), please refer to the USEF Rulebook for any questions or for a longer explanation of each rule.

Category	Rule No.	Summary...please see rule book for full text / exceptions!
Comp Mgt	GR821.2e DR126.4	Dressage Level 1-3 competitions may offer Eventing Opportunity Classes . Dressage Level 4-5 competitions may not offer Opportunity Classes
Comp Mgt	GR848.6	Competitor's Return to Competition release may now be signed by licensed physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner .
Comp Mgt / Officials	GR1040.1	A judge's horse may now compete in any Dressage class unless he/she is judging that class. (Previously had to compete H.C.)
Comp Mgt	GR1101.1	All horses entered must have a USEF Horse ID . Recording/ registration number issued by Federation Recognized Discipline Affiliate such as USDF are no longer sufficient for USEF's purposes
Comp Mgt	GR1101.10	Effective December 1, 2025 , all horses competing at Federation Licensed and Endorsed Competitions must provide a microchip number that verifies the animal.
Comp Mgt	GR1212	Prize lists may now only be submitted electronically, not via mail.
Comp Mgt	GR1214.1	Competition results for each class must now include name and USEF number of judge(s).
Comp Mgt	GR1215.4	For six consecutive hours overnight, stabling must have minimal lighting and noise to allow stabled horses to rest adequately.
Comp Mgt	GR1215.7	All permanent barn structures and temporary stabling must have clearly visible identification, such as numbers, letters, or names.
Comp Mgt/TD	GR1304.8	Permission to approach a judge regarding a decision may only be granted by the Steward / TD (no longer by Show Committee or Competition management); Steward/TD shall be present for the meeting.
TD	DR120.4.1	If spurs are worn, a separate spur must be worn on each boot.
Comp Mgt / TDs Competitors	DR121.19	Numbers. Competitors may use their own numbers for schooling (and competition) but they can't skip check-in just because they don't need to pick up a number. Failure to check in at the show office prior to schooling will result in the issuance of a Warning Card.
Officials	DR123.8	Video tape or any other kind of digital/electronic media replay may not be used to dispute a judge's decision.
Comp Mgt	DR129.6d	If there is a problem with their freestyle music , rider should immediately approach judge at "C" to discuss options for restarting the test.
Comp Mgt	DR129.9	Clarifies that 63% is the minimum qualifying score for any national level freestyle , even if an FEI test is ridden as the qualifier
Comp Mgt	DR129.9e & .9f	A qualifying score is not required to enter FEI Pony Rider, FEI Junior, and FEI Young Rider Freestyles, nor for a horse/rider combination competing in the U25 division to ride a GP Freestyle.



**ISABEL F. DE SZINAY MEMORIAL
DRESSAGE SHOW
15 - 16 JUNE 2024
HIT COMMONWEALTH HORSE
PARK, CULPEPER, VA**

PRIZE LIST - COMING SOON

**OPENING DATE: TBA
CLOSING DATE: TBA**

**ONLINE ENTRIES -
HORSESHOWOFFICE.COM**

VADA Charlottesville is hosting "Isabel F. de Szinay Memorial Dressage Show" on 15 and 16 June at Commonwealth Park, Culpeper, VA. Once again, we will have the breed show component on Saturday, 15 June. It will be a qualifier for the ProElite/USDF Breeders Championship East Coast Series. Performance classes will run on Saturday and Sunday.

Last year the footing at the Commonwealth Park facility had a much-needed renovation. The footing was completely replaced with high tech materials in most of the arenas. We think this is a major improvement! HITS has refreshed/upgraded the showgrounds. We think you will enjoy your experience there this year.

Our judges are Natalie Lamping, Jennifer Roth, Susan Graham White, and Margaret Freeman. Our Technical Delegate is Sheli King.



VOLUNTEERING AT THE SHOW

Earn your volunteer hours to qualify for 2024 State and Chapter Year End Awards. Sign up as a volunteer, go to "Show Volunteer Sign Up" located under "Licensed Show and Clinics" on the VADA-CH homepage. Sign up now! Join us for a fun and an educational weekend!

Volunteer Sign Up

SPONSORSHIP

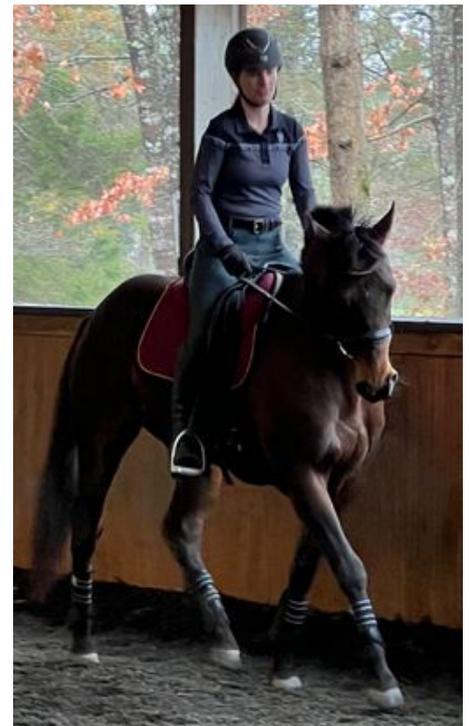
VADA CH invites you to consider supporting the show by becoming a sponsor! We are offering levels of sponsorship opportunities from Sponsorship Bundles, Individual Class Sponsor, and Advertising on the showgrounds and in the digital show program. To discuss sponsorship, reach out to Eleszabeth McNeel at e7aquna@aol.com.

**To Learn More About
Sponsorship**

MY RIDE WITH HANNAH PIERUCCI SCHMIDT BY ELESZABETH MCNEEL



Grayson Farm hosted a clinic with their trainer, Hannah, on the 23 of March 2024 or our Club. I wanted to have a session with Hannah but was unable to bring the horse I am currently leasing. My friend, Laurel Olson, has a horse in training with Hannah and offered me a ride on her horse, which, ironically, turns out to be a mare that I had owned for a few years, then sold to Laurel because I felt I wasn't making any progress with her. If you are familiar with the terms "Gee" and "Haw," the mare and I weren't "Geeing" and "Hawing."



Due to cancellations which were rain related, we only had four riders for the clinic, and a small galley of auditors. I wanted to include our auditors so I asked Hannah to ride the mare first so everyone could see how lovely her movement is and to understand the problems I had had with her while I was riding her. Hannah demonstrated the walk, trot, and canter while explaining her training techniques which resulted in a lovely frame and fluid movement.

Unless I use a direct rein, every horse I get on will move to the left when I squeeze and ask for the walk from the mounting block. And yes, the mare moved to the left. At the walk, Hannah worked on my position in the saddle as well as explaining and teaching me the aides she had taught the mare. We discussed the importance of equal weight in our seat bones, correct position in the saddle, and calf pressure. Most of us have a stronger right leg due to muscle development from driving vehicles with an automatic shift.

At the trot, I was quickly reminded of the smoothness of the mare's movement. Big mover in a small package. With Hannah's help, I was able to keep the mare in a lovely frame which had not happened with the mare and I in the past. I was not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, and had trouble keeping the frame, but felt I could easily get her back into a frame with Hannah's guidance. All in all, I had a lovely ride on the mare and felt that Hannah's instruction was easy to understand and got the results we both wanted.

All three of the remaining riders were on horses (young, off the track Thoroughbred; an older Saddlebred/Connemara cross; and a young mustang) who showed much improvement in collection and relaxation by the end of their sessions with Hannah. All in all, it was a great learning opportunity for all of us – riders and auditors.

Thank you to Hannah and Grayson Farm for teaching and hosting, and to Laura Berne for organizing the clinic!



PREBIOTICS AND PROBIOTICS: UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOUR HORSE NEEDS

BY MELYNI WORTH, PH.D

HORSE PREBIOTICS AND PROBIOTICS

In the vast world of equine nutrition, understanding the distinct roles of probiotics and prebiotics can be somewhat complex. These two types of dietary supplements play crucial roles in promoting the health and wellbeing of horses. Let's delve into their specific functions and why your horse might benefit from them.

What Are Probiotics and Prebiotics?

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts that are good for health, especially the digestive system. Although we usually think of bacteria as something harmful, our bodies are full of bacteria, both good and bad. Probiotics are often referred to as "good" or "friendly" bacteria because they help keep the gut healthy.

On the other hand, prebiotics are types of dietary fiber that feed the friendly bacteria in the gut. Essentially, they act as fuel for probiotics, helping these beneficial bacteria to grow, multiply, and outcompete some of the harmful bacteria in the gut.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GUT HEALTH IN HORSES

The gut microbiota, the community of microorganisms living in the digestive tract, plays a significant role in maintaining the health of the horse. It's involved in processes such as digesting food, producing certain vitamins, regulating the immune system, and even influencing behavior. A healthy balance of gut microbiota is essential for the overall wellbeing of the horse.

In the horse's digestive system, the hindgut (the large intestine and cecum) is particularly vital. It's where the majority of fiber digestion occurs thanks to the work of billions of bacteria. Maintaining a healthy hindgut microbiota can help prevent issues such as colic, laminitis, and behavioral problems.

By now, it should be clear why equine nutrition experts focus so much on supporting gut health. Probiotics and prebiotics are two of the tools in the toolbox for achieving this, each with unique functions that can help keep your horse in top form. In the following sections, we will take a closer look at these two groups of supplements and how they can be of benefit to your horse.

PREBIOTICS AND PROBIOTICS: UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOUR HORSE NEEDS

PROBIOTICS FOR HORSES

How Do Probiotics Work in Horses?

In the horse's gut, trillions of bacteria work to break down food, extract nutrients, and keep the digestive system functioning smoothly. When this community of bacteria is balanced, it aids in digestion, immune system regulation, and even contributes to the horse's overall behaviour. Probiotics play a crucial role in maintaining this bacterial balance.

Adding a probiotic supplement to your horse's diet introduces beneficial bacteria into the gut microbiota. These 'friendly' bacteria compete with harmful bacteria for resources, essentially crowding them out and reducing their numbers. Besides, some probiotics can also produce substances that directly inhibit harmful bacteria.

When to Use Probiotics for Horses

Probiotics for horses can be especially helpful during periods of stress or digestive upset. Stress can upset the delicate balance of gut microbiota, leading to digestive problems such as diarrhea. Here, probiotics can help restore balance to the gut microbiota, promoting a healthy digestive system.

After antibiotic therapy, a horse's gut microbiota can be severely depleted as these medications kill both harmful and beneficial bacteria. Supplementing with probiotics after antibiotics can help restore the population of 'friendly' bacteria in the gut.

Changes in diet can also upset a horse's gut microbiota. If you're introducing new feed or changing grazing conditions, adding a probiotic supplement can help your horse's digestive system adjust to the change.

Choosing a Probiotic Supplement for Horses

Choosing a probiotic supplement for horses can be a little confusing due to the many options available. It's essential to select a supplement that contains strains of bacteria known to benefit horse health, such as *Lactobacillus*, *Bifidobacterium*, and *Enterococcus* species. Also, the supplement should ideally contain a high number of live bacteria to ensure that enough reach the gut to have an effect.

Prebiotics for Horses

How Do Prebiotics Work in Horses?

Prebiotics are non-digestible dietary fibers that act as food for the beneficial bacteria in the gut. They reach the horse's large intestine or hindgut undigested, where the resident bacteria ferment them. This fermentation process produces substances like short-chain fatty acids that are beneficial for gut health and overall well-being.

Prebiotics serve a dual purpose in the equine gut. Firstly, they provide nourishment for beneficial bacteria, helping them to grow and outnumber the harmful bacteria. Secondly, the substances produced during their fermentation have numerous benefits, including providing an energy source for the cells lining the gut, reducing inflammation, and promoting a healthy immune system.

By promoting a healthy balance of gut bacteria, they can improve digestive efficiency, enhance nutrient absorption, and support a robust immune system. They also have a beneficial effect on gut health, helping to maintain the integrity of the gut lining and reduce the risk of issues such as leaky gut syndrome.

When to Use Prebiotics for Horses

There are several situations where prebiotics could be beneficial for horses:

- **To Support a Healthy Gut Microbiota:** Given their role in promoting beneficial bacteria, prebiotics can be useful as part of an ongoing strategy to support gut health in horses.
- **To Enhance the Efficacy of Probiotics:** Prebiotics act as food for probiotics, so using them together can help to maximise the benefits of probiotic supplements.
- **During Periods of Digestive Stress:** Stress, changes in diet, illness, or antibiotic use can all disrupt the balance of the gut microbiota. In such situations, prebiotics can help to support the population of beneficial bacteria and maintain gut health.

PREBIOTICS AND PROBIOTICS: UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOUR HORSE NEEDS

Choosing a Prebiotic Supplement for Horses

When it comes to choosing a prebiotic supplement for horses, there are several things to consider:

- **Types of Prebiotics:** There are several types of prebiotics, including fructooligosaccharides (FOS), mannan-oligosaccharides (MOS), and trans-galactooligosaccharides (TOS). Each of these prebiotics provides slightly different benefits, so you may want to choose a supplement that contains a combination of these.
- **Source of Prebiotics:** Some prebiotics come from natural sources like chicory root or yeast cell walls, while others are synthetically produced. Both can be effective, but some horse owners may have a preference for natural sources.
- **Compatibility with Your Horse's Diet:** Different horses have different dietary needs, so it's crucial to choose a prebiotic supplement that fits well with your horse's overall diet.

The Combined Benefits of Probiotics and Prebiotics

Understanding Synbiotics & Their Role in Digestion

As we've explored, both probiotics and prebiotics play vital roles in maintaining your horse's gut health. However, their combined usage, known as synbiotics, can provide even greater benefits.

Synbiotics are supplements that contain both probiotics and prebiotics in a form that allows the probiotics (the live beneficial bacteria) to survive in the gut and the prebiotics (food for the bacteria) to stimulate their growth. This combination not only helps the probiotics to reach the gut alive and in large numbers but also ensures they can thrive once they're there.

When to Use Synbiotics

Synbiotics can be a great tool for supporting overall gut health in horses. They can be particularly beneficial during periods of stress or illness, where the gut microbiota may be disturbed.

Just like probiotics, synbiotics can also be useful after a course of antibiotics or a change in diet. By providing both the probiotics to restore the gut microbiota and the prebiotics to feed them, synbiotics can help the gut recover more effectively.

Choosing a Synbiotic Supplement for Horses

When choosing a synbiotic supplement for your horse, consider the same factors as for probiotic and prebiotic supplements. Look for supplements that contain proven probiotic strains and effective prebiotics. It can be beneficial to consult with a vet or equine nutritionist to ensure the supplement is suitable for your horse and is administered at the correct dosage.

Final Thoughts on Horse Probiotics and Prebiotics

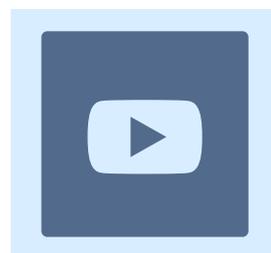
Consult with Your Equine Nutritionist

Remember, while probiotics, prebiotics, and synbiotics can be powerful tools for maintaining and improving your horse's gut health, they should be used as part of a comprehensive approach to equine health. It's always essential to consult with your nutritionist before starting any new supplements.

Ongoing Digestive Health Management

Beyond supplementation, maintaining your horse's gut health should include a balanced diet, regular exercise, and routine vet checks. Also, remember that each horse is unique, and what works for one horse may not work for another. Tailoring gut health strategies to individual horse needs is key to a thriving and happy horse.

by Melyni Worth, Ph.D



Watch Now



Four by Four

16 CAVALETTI EXERCISES FOUR PATTERNS USING FOUR POLE

In the first article we discussed, *Why Cavaletti?* In general, using cavaletti can improve any training program by adding variety and exercises that challenge the horse and rider for accuracy, consistency, balance, and focus. Cavaletti improves horse and rider communication and teamwork when done on a regular basis.

For these exercises you will need four heavyweight 12-foot poles that are striped or marked using duct tape in 3-foot sections from the middle outward. Shorter poles or timbers are also fine, but no shorter than 8-foot is best. PVC or light plastic poles are not recommended because they move and shatter easily when stepped on. You can find details about setting up your pole stripes in the first article from the last edition of VADA-CH Newsletter.

Exercise Set Up #2 - "The Clock"

See Figure 1 for basic set up details. This series of exercise uses four poles at the 12, 3, 6, and 9 positions of a clock. Make sure you set the four poles according to the diagram, ensuring the same stripe is on the 20-meter circle line. If your arena is only 20 meters (66 feet) wide, place your 12 and 6 position poles on opposite long sides against the arena wall. Make sure that you then measure the distance between the poles at the 3 and 9 positions, so the measurement from the outside of the pole to the outside of the opposite pole is 20 meters. This pole set up gives you a target on each quarter of the circle which will help you ride a consistent size circle.

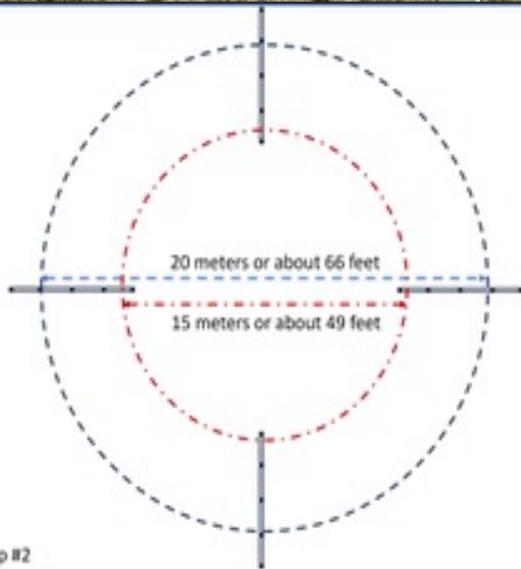


Figure 1: Set Up #2

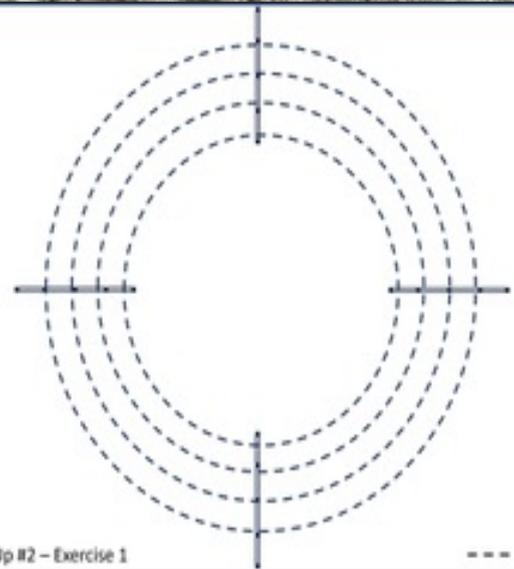


Figure 2: Set Up #2 – Exercise 1

----- Trot

EXERCISE 1, SET UP 2

Warm your horse up according to your normal routine. You do not need to canter before starting the first exercise, but if your horse trots better after cantering, you should consider cantering before you begin.

If you set up your poles according to Figure 1, then your outermost circle shown in Figure 2 will be approximately 20 meters. Pick up a trot tracking your easier direction and aim for the outermost mark on your poles. Your goal is to ride a regular trot hitting the same mark on all four quarters of the circle. You should focus on consistency of tempo and enough bend to keep your horse nose to tail along the circle line. Think of this as your perfect 20-meter trot circle. When this circle feels easy for you and your horse, start to spiral down one mark at a time. You should spend enough time on each circle size to feel that your horse is comfortable, balanced, and regular before moving to the next smaller circle. This exercise will progress you from a 20-meter circle down to about a 15-meter circle. Only go as small as you can while maintaining accuracy, balance, bend, and consistency of tempo.

Depending on you and your horse's fitness level, you can spiral back out one mark at a time or take a walk break. After your break, you can begin the same direction starting at the smallest circle and work your way back out, or you can change directions and proceed through the exercise the opposite way. This exercise is a great variation of the classic spiral in and out exercise. Throughout, you should be focused on accuracy, balance, bend, and consistent tempo. Most people will find this exercise helpful in pointing out how much our "circles" aren't round and drift in or out throughout. It's a great way to practice riding a 20-meter or 15-meter circle and learning what it feels like to really ride a round figure. Riding this exercise as accurately as possible will also greatly improve balance and your outside connection.

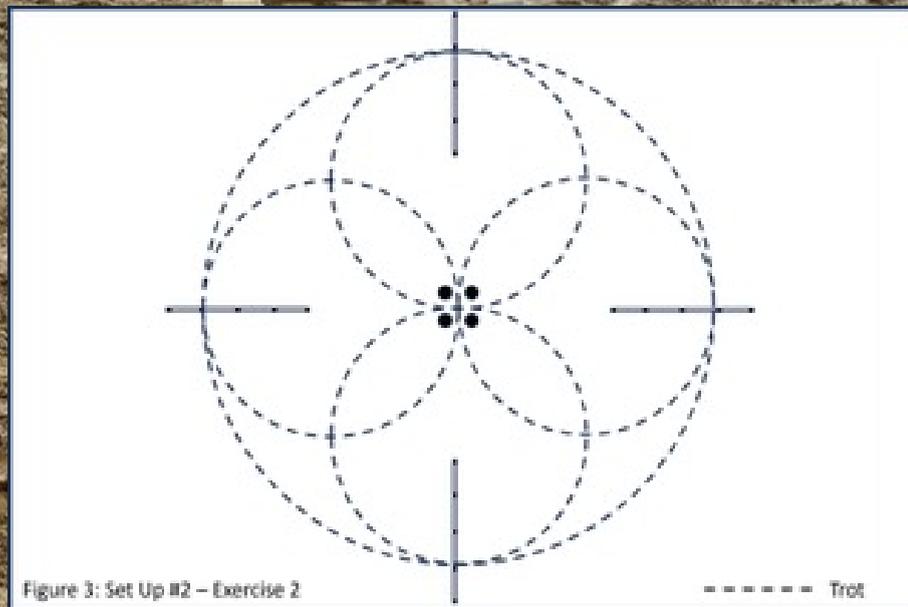


Figure 3: Set Up #2 – Exercise 2

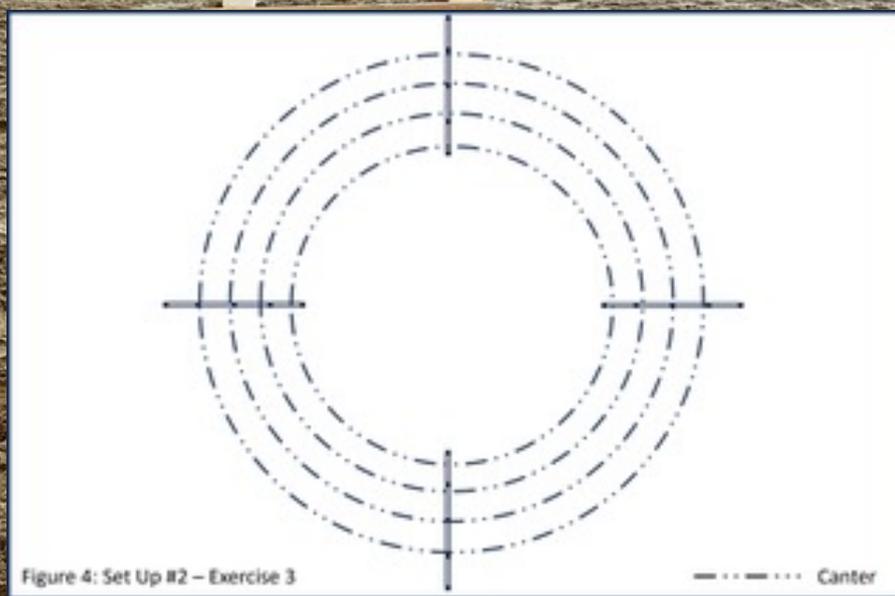
----- Trot

EXERCISE 2, SET UP 2

This exercise builds on the consistency of the trot you achieved in Exercise 1 by adding smaller circles and changes of direction. If you have small cones or something similar, you can put them in a square as shown by the dots in Figure 3. They should be set about a horse width apart on all sides surrounding the center of your 20-meter circle. You can eyeball this placement or measure 10 meters (33 feet) from your 20-meter markers on each pole.

Start out trotting your 20-meter circle marks in either direction. Ride the circle until you find the consistent tempo you found in Exercise 1. Once you find that balance and tempo, perform a 10-meter circle leaving the pole at the 20-meter mark, passing through the cones and returning to the same mark on the pole from which you started. Continue along the 20-meter circle to the next pole and do another 10-meter circle. You'll follow the 20-meter circle around, doing a 10-meter circle at each pole until you've completed four 10-meter circles. On each of the 10-meter circles, you are thinking about accuracy, the bend along the circle line, balance, and a consistent tempo. Once you have completed four circles, you can continue on the clover leaf pattern doing more circles, or do a change of direction through the cones, performing a 10-meter half circle to a 10-meter half circle.

This exercise is a great way to practice centerline turns, 10-meter circles and 10-meter half circles. Once you've gotten the feel of the pattern and the circles become easier, you can do figure 8's, transitions from trot to halt and back to trot at the center, and almost any pattern of circles and direction changes. This pattern will improve your planning, accuracy, bend, balance, tempo, and connection while putting your horse more on your aids.

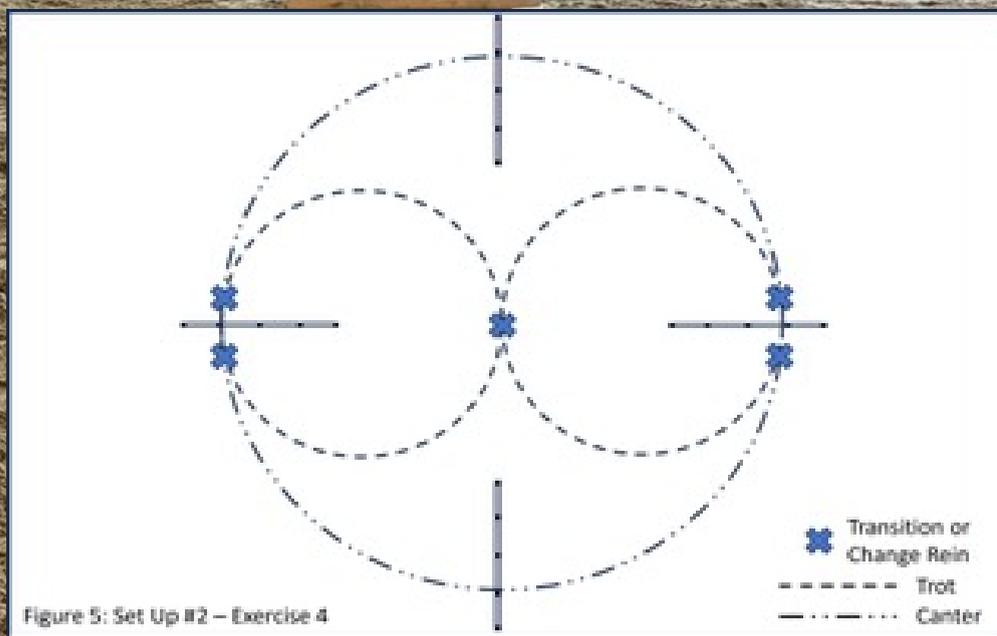


EXERCISE 3, SET UP 2

In this exercise, we will use the same pattern as in Exercise 1. Figure 4 again shows the progression from the outermost circle on the 20-meter marks down to the innermost circle on the 15-meter marks. Now that you have done the spiral in and out at trot, we will attempt it at the canter. You will still focus on accuracy, balance, bend, and tempo, but you will also work on stride length. Your goal for this exercise is to create a canter circle with the same length of stride throughout which means counting strides. While this may seem more important to jumping, it is also extremely important in the dressage arena as you work toward flying changes and placement of figures and transitions moving up the levels. It can also be critical in performing musical freestyles.

If you have never done an exercise like this before, it can be daunting to start. Most people don't realize how inconsistent their canter is until they attempt a stride counting exercise. Start trotting on the 20-meter circle in the direction of your easier canter lead. Pick up your canter at any point. Initially your focus will be on maintaining your canter through the circle. Your goal is to place the strides so that your horse canters over each pole and puts the same number of strides between. The number of strides will vary based on the natural length of your horse's stride. You should work to find a canter stride that is easy for you and your horse to replicate as you go around the circle regardless of how many strides you get between poles. I suggest counting in a way that accounts for the pole as well as the strides, such as Pole, One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Pole, One, Two and so on. Once you find the rhythm of the exercise, you'll be amazed at how much better balanced and controlled your canter will feel. In your first attempt, I suggest trying to find that count on the 20-meter circle on your easier lead and then taking a break and doing the same on your harder lead. For most riders and horses, performing the exercise on the 20-meter circle each way is plenty for the first time. It is also common for one direction to have a different number of strides than the other when first doing this exercise. Your first goal is to make both directions the same.

Once you feel like you can consistently repeat this exercise with accuracy, balance and bend on the 20-meter circle, you can work to spiral down to the 15-meter circle and find the same consistency in each direction. As you get better and better at finding the correct balance and stride length repeatedly, you can start to work on shortening and lengthening the strides while maintaining the consistency of the number of strides on each quarter of the circle. This is a great exercise to return to as you move up the levels of dressage. It's a great test for balance and adjustability in collection and will help improve your overall connection.



EXERCISE 4, SET UP 2

In this exercise, we will combine elements of each of the previous exercises and add in more transitions for accuracy. If you still have your cones set up from Exercise 2, you can use them to aid you in this exercise as well. As with the previous exercises, we are looking for consistency of tempo and stride length in each gait, balance, and bend. Focusing on each of these throughout performing this pattern will also result in a better overall connection. Start at trot on the 20-meter circle in your easier direction. Perform a 10-meter circle as shown in Figure 5. After you complete the smaller circle, pick up your canter immediately after going over the pole, as close to the X as possible. You'll ride half a 20-meter circle in canter before performing a downward transition to trot at the next X. If you remember how many strides you achieved in Exercise 3, try to ride that number of strides from the canter transition to the pole, ride over the pole and then the same number of strides before performing the downward transition to trot at the next X. You'll then ride into another 10-meter trot circle. After you complete the smaller circle, repeat the exercise on the next half of the 20-meter circle. Most horses will pick up the pattern and if you make the exercise a game, enjoy the challenge of figuring out what's next.

This exercise is a true test of how well you were able to perform the previous exercises and will really show if your horse is balanced and truly on the aids. If you master this exercise and need more of a challenge, you can canter half the circle, counting strides on one lead, perform a change of direction through two 10-meter half circles at trot and then canter the other lead on the next half circle. You can repeat the changes of direction and leads as you like. For more advanced riders, this exercise can be used to practice the 10-meter half circle to 10-meter half circle in counter canter from Fourth Level Test 3. You can get really creative depending on you and your horse's level of training by adding more transitions, smaller circles, flying changes, and almost anything you can think of doing!



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Michele is a USDF Bronze and Silver Medalist and USEA ECP Level III certified eventing coach. She has competed multiple horses through Intermediate level dressage and Preliminary level eventing. Michele owns By Chance Farm where she teaches and trains, hosts cavaletti clinics monthly and holds 8 dressage schooling shows and 4 Licensed shows each year. Her goal is to make riding and showing a fun and accessible experience for all.



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