

TRAINING EXERCISES – THE SCHOOL FIGURES

School figures, when properly executed, help to develop in the horse the qualities that are set forth in the Training Scale.

Changes of Direction

Definition

A change of direction is reversing the direction the horse is traveling around the ring, for example going from clockwise to counter-clockwise. Examples of change of direction are: changing rein across the diagonal, or across the arena, changing rein out of or through the circle, half circles, etc.

Gymnastic Purpose

Frequent changes of direction, with appropriate changes of bend, supple the horse by working both sides of the horse.

Qualities Desired

In changes of direction the horse should adjust the bend of his body to the curvature of the line he follows, remaining supple and following the indications of the rider without any resistance or change of pace, rhythm or speed.

“When changing direction at right angles, for instance when riding corners, the horse should be correctly bent and balanced, and at Training through Fourth Levels, ridden as deeply as is appropriate to its level of training, into the corner. At FEI levels and in FEI tests, the horse should describe one quarter of a circle of approximately 6 meters diameter at collected and working gaits.” [USEF Rule Book DR109]

Aids

The aids for changing direction are the “turning aids.” Approaching the change of rein the horse should be bent in the direction of travel, balanced between the rider’s inside leg and outside rein with the inside leg placed slightly behind the girth and the outside leg behind to support the hindquarters. The rider’s weight is slightly heavier on the inside seat bone. As the rider changes direction, he/she must subtly shift his/her weight to the new inside seat bone, and change the bend of the horse so that it is balanced between the new inside leg and outside rein with the position of the rider’s legs reversed.

Training Advice

If the changes of direction are accomplished without correct balance, change of rider’s position, and change of horse’s flexion and bend, they lose their gymnastic effect. Riding accurate figures will help accomplish the gymnastic purpose of changes of direction.

“When changing the rein across the diagonal, the rider should use the inside leg and the outside rein to insure that the horse does not turn off the track too early. The turn should not begin until the horse’s shoulder is level with the marker. Across the diagonal the horse should remain in front of the legs, should be straight, and should work into both reins equally. The shoulder should again be level with the marker when the horse rejoins the track on the other side of the school.” [Principles of Riding, p 103]

Common Mistakes

Some common mistakes when changing direction are falling on the inside shoulder, bulging out the outside shoulder, hindquarters swinging in or out, incorrect bend, or loss of balance indicated by change of pace, rhythm or speed.

Corners

Definition

The corners are the four right angles in the rectangle of the ring.

Gymnastic Purpose

The gymnastic purpose of corners is to supple and balance the horse with correct bend around the inside leg and into the outside rein. Corners can often be used to prepare the horse for the next movement or exercise to come.

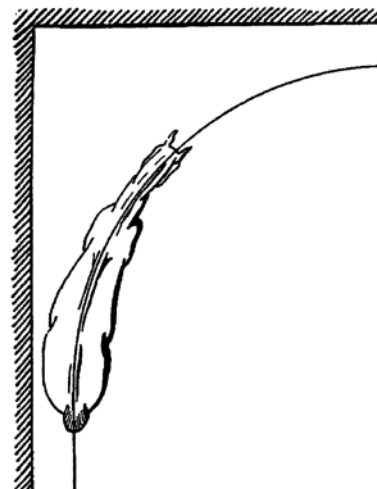
Qualities Desired

The horse should be correctly bent around the rider's inside leg and connecting on the outside rein, going as deeply into the corner as is appropriate for the horse's level of training. The horse must remain straight on the curved line, i.e. the hind hooves follow in the lines of the front hooves, without any changes of pace, rhythm or speed.

Aids

"Each turn should be preceded by a half-halt. This alerts the horse and enables the rider to make any necessary adjustment of his seat. The horse is then made to bend towards the side to which the turn is being made while simultaneously, the rider shifts his center of gravity to the inside with his inside leg on the girth and the outside one behind it." [*Riding Logic*, p 131]

Source: *Practical Dressage Manual*



Training Advice

Every corner should be ridden as an exercise in its own right and is a test of the horse's suppleness. A corner is ridden as a quarter circle or quarter volte, and the horse should be bent accordingly.

"The novice rider can start off by riding accurately through the corner in walk. This way he has more time to practice the aids." [*Principles of Riding*, p 102-103]

Common Mistakes

"The forehand should not be pushed too far into the corner. Another fault is trying to make the horse go into the corner by carrying both hands, especially the inside one, to the outside. This causes the horse to fall out onto the outside shoulder. If the horse tries to cut the corner, the rider should counteract this tendency by using his inside aids more strongly. When there is not an outside wall, the rider should ensure that the horse does not fall onto its outside shoulder and escape sideways before the corner." [*Principles of Riding*, p 103]

Circles and Curved Lines

Definition

"Volte or circle. The volte is a circle of 6, 8 or 10 meters diameter. If larger than 10 meters, one uses the term Circle stating the diameter." [*USEF Rule Book DR109*]

Gymnastic Purpose

The gymnastic purpose of circles is to supple and balance the horse with correct bend around the inside leg and into the outside rein. Circles can often be used to prepare the horse for the next movement or exercise.

Qualities Desired

"Turns and curved or circular tracks can only be ridden correctly if the horse is reliably and consistently 'on the aids' and can be bent throughout its length, as far as is anatomically possible, in accordance with the curvature of the track it is following. The hind legs should follow in the same track as the forelegs, and the inside hind leg is required to carry an increased share of the weight." [*Principles of Riding*, p 102]

As with all school figures, the rider should maintain the qualities described in the training scale beginning with rhythm, regularity and relaxation.

Aids

Before riding a circle the horse should be prepared with a half-halt.

“The aids are...the inside leg (which is) next to the girth, makes the (horse’s) hind foot step forward, maintains the bend and prevents the horse from falling in on the circle. The outside leg is in a ‘guarding’ position behind the girth and, along with the outside rein, prevents the horse from falling out and ensures that the outside hind foot steps forward correctly and evenly.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 103]

The correct distribution of the rider’s weight is most important. In transferring his weight to the inside seat bone he should push the inside hip forward with a deep knee. This will also prevent him from collapsing his inside hip and slipping his seat to the outside. At the same time he should make sure not to leave the outside shoulder behind. Only when sitting correctly with correct distribution of weight can the rider bend his horse as needed.

Training Advice

The horse’s bend throughout his body should follow the arc of the circle, with the horse’s hind legs following the tracks of the horse’s fore legs. The rider should remember to make frequent changes of direction so as to work both sides of the horse to prevent one-sidedness, and maximize the suppling effect of the circle.

Common Mistakes

Some common mistakes when riding a circle are falling on the inside shoulder, bulging out the outside shoulder, hind-quarters swinging in or out, incorrect bend, or loss of balance indicated by change of pace, rhythm, or speed.

“A common fault is an elliptical or egg-shaped circle or volte. The two halves of the circle should be of equal size and the circle should start and end at the same place.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 104]

“When riding turns and circles, especially small circles and voltes, the rider should beware of using the inside rein too strongly. He should also ensure that the elastic contact on the outside rein is maintained, otherwise there is a tendency for the horse to come behind the vertical or lose rhythm.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 104-105]

Half-Circle

Definition

“The *half-circle and return to the track* can be performed part way along the long side or out of the corner (usually the second corner of the long side). The first part is ridden as half of a small circle. When it reaches the point of the circle farthest away from the long side the horse is ridden obliquely back to the track in a straight line. It arrives back at the track on the opposite rein.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 104]

Gymnastic Purpose

A half-circle is a means of changing direction that embodies the same gymnasticising qualities as properly ridden circles, corners, or other changes of direction.

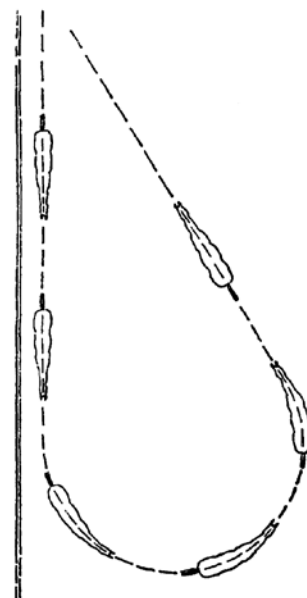
Qualities Desired

The qualities desired in riding a half-circle are the same as the qualities desired in riding proper circles, corners, and other changes of direction as described above.

Aids

When riding a half-circle and returning to the track, the aids for the first part of the movement are the same as for the volte. A half-

Source: *Complete Training of Horse and Rider*



volte is ridden in a 5-meter (16 foot) diameter. It is usually ridden in the second corner of a long side. After riding 180° around the volte, the rider straightens the horse and rides on a diagonal line back to the track.

Training Advice

The advice for riding the half circle is the same as for riding proper circles, corners and other changes of direction. However, when returning to the track on the diagonal line, make sure that the horse is straight on both reins, the rider is sitting equally over both seat bones, the rider's legs are both at the girth and the horse's hind legs are following the tracks of the fore legs.

Common Mistakes

Riders may inadvertently proceed more than 180 degrees around the arc of the circle before returning to the track on the diagonal line.

Serpentines Along the Wall

Definition

Also called a "broken line," the serpentine along the wall can be made up of one or two shallow loops.

When riding a single loop serpentine along the wall, the loop will be 5 meters (16 feet) away from the track, (the quarter line), and centered at the half-way mark (the B-E markers). (see diagram)

When riding a double loop serpentine along the wall, the loops are 2.5 meters (8 feet) away from the track, or half of the quarter line. The apex of the loop should be half-way to the B-E marker so that the first loop ends and the second loop begins at the B-E marker. (See diagram)

Gymnastic Purpose

The gymnastic purpose of riding loops is the loosening and suppling effect of the changes of flexion and bend.

Qualities Desired

The quality of the gaits should be maintained while the horse shows a proper change of bend, accepting the connection from the rider's inside leg to the outside rein equally on both sides.

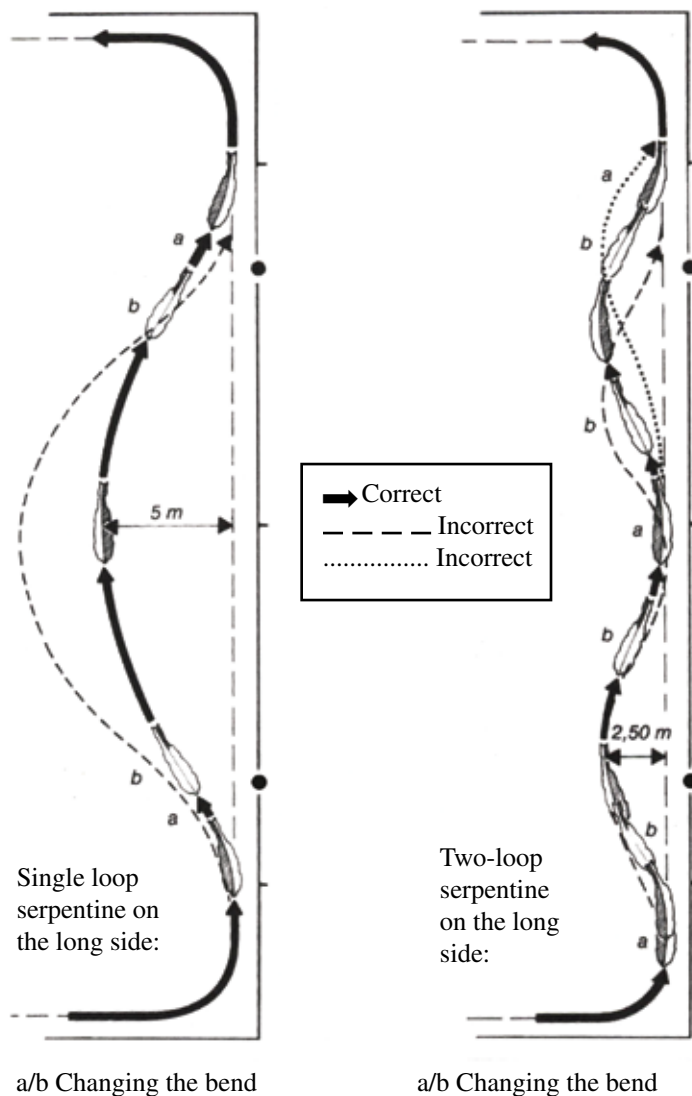
Aids

The aids for riding loops are the same aids as the bending aids described above in the sections on circles and corners.

Training Advice

After riding through a corner the rider straightens the horse for a moment, and then guides the horse on to the shallow loop beginning at

Source: Principles of Riding



the corner marker. The change of bend should occur halfway between the start of the loop and the deepest point of the loop. The first half of a loop should be a mirror image of the second half, whether riding single-loop or a double-loop serpentine.

Common Mistakes

One of the most common mistakes made while riding loops is that the rider after reaching the deepest point of the loop, leg-yields the horse back to the rail rather than riding the true line of the loop. This diminishes the suppling effect of the changes of bend in the loop.

Another common mistake is riding a straight line to and/or away from the apex of the loop, rather than the correct line with proper changes of bend.

Serpentine Through the Whole Arena

Definition

“The serpentine through the whole school consists of several half circles of equal size with a straight section between. The length of the straight section depends on the number and so the diameter, of the loops. In this sort of serpentine, the horse is straightened at the end of each loop, and then bent again at the beginning of the next half circle. The horse finishes on the same rein if there is an odd number of loops, and on the opposite rein if there is an even number of loops.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 106]

“The serpentine consists of half circles connected by a straight line. When crossing the center line the horse should be parallel to the short side. Depending on the size of the half circles, the straight connection varies in length.” [*USEF Rule Book DR110*] (see diagram)

Gymnastic Purpose

“Serpentines through the whole school, depending on the number of loops and their width, help to develop looseness (Losgelassenheit) or to prepare the horse for collection.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 106]

The constant changing of flexion and bend in a serpentine “is a valuable suppling exercise for both horse and rider.” [*Principles of Riding*, p. 106]

Qualities Desired

The qualities desired in the serpentine are the same as in the simple loop, i.e. proper changes of bend, purity of the gaits and correctness of the figures.

Aids

The aids for the serpentine are the bending aids described in previous sections, coupled with straightening aids.

Bending:

To ride a serpentine correctly the weight aids are most important for turning the horse. On entering each new loop the horse has to be both flexed and bent in the new direction by shortening the new inside rein and changing weight and leg aids.

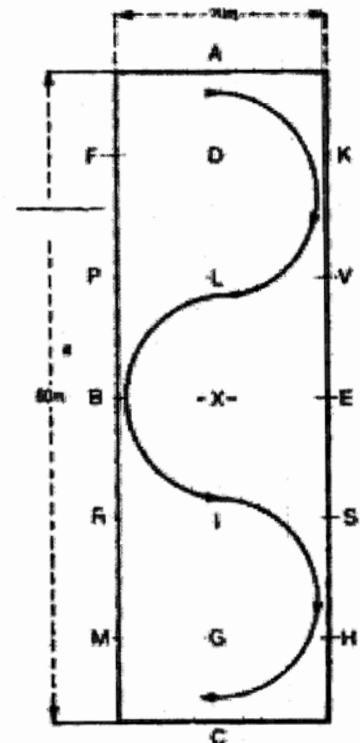
Straightening:

To straighten the horse, the rider should allow the horse out of the bend so that it is equal on both legs, both reins and both seat bones, with no curvature in the horse’s body. Changes of bend should be prepared for with half-halts.

Training Advice

“The first loop is started by moving gradually away from the middle of the short

Source: USEF Rule Book



Serpentine of three loops

side of the arena, and the last loop is finished by moving gradually towards the middle of the short side. Starting and finishing by riding into the corners is incorrect.” [*Practical Dressage Manual*, p 59]

“In another type of serpentine, which is not used in tests, each loop is joined directly onto the next, without a straight section...the horse crosses the center line at an angle so that the loops are pear-shaped...the flexion and bend are changed smoothly as the horse crosses the center line. This serpentine helps to promote skillful riding, as well as making the horse more supple and ‘through’ (Durchlässigkeit). In fact it is a valuable suppling exercise for both horse and rider.” [*Principles of Riding*, p 106]

Common Mistakes

Some common mistakes are making loops of unequal widths and sizes, tempo changes, losing the purity of the gaits, and incorrect bending. In addition, allowing the horse’s shoulders or hind quarters to fall in or out can create a loss of balance, straightness, and difficulties in producing a correct figure with smooth changes of bend.

Figure Eight

Definition

“This figure consists of two exact voltes or circles of equal size as prescribed in the test, joined at the center of the eight. The rider should make his horse straight an instant before changing direction at the center of the figure.” [*USEF Rule Book* DR110]

Gymnastic Purpose

The gymnastic purpose of the figure eight is the same as has been previously described in the section on serpentines.

Qualities Desired

The horse must show correct changes of bend without affecting the balance, rhythm, or any other qualities described in the training scale.

Aids

The aids for the Figure Eight are the same as the bending aids previously described in the sections on corners, circles and serpentines.

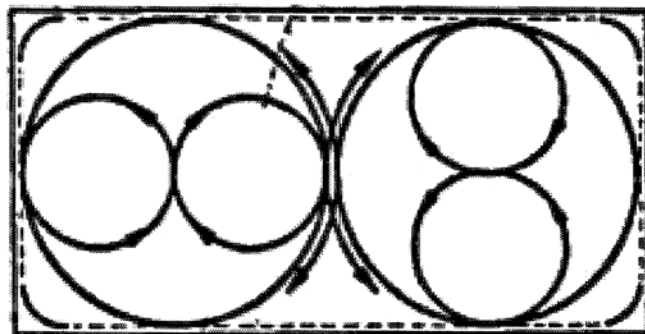
Training Advice

The two circles of the figure eight must be of equal size. Figures of eight with smaller circles or voltes help to promote collection by increasing the engagement and carrying power of the inside hind leg. The rider needs to be sure that the horse follows a single track throughout the figure, i.e. the horse’s hind legs follow the same path as the forelegs.

Common Mistakes

The most common mistakes are incorrect or nonexistent changes of bend. As described in the definition of figure eight, the horse must be ridden straight for an instant at the exact joining of the two circles or voltes so that the new circle or volte is begun with the correct bend and the horse following the true line of the figure.

Source: *Practical Dressage Manual*



The Figure of Eight

Centerline and Quarterlines

Definition

The centerline is a line ridden between A-C, or C-A. Centerlines can be used as changes of direction. The quarterline is a line ridden 5 meters to either side of the centerline.

Gymnastic Purpose

The additional gymnastic purpose of riding centerline and quarterline is to test and improve the horse's straightness and obedience to the aids, as well as his impulsion.

Qualities Desired

The qualities desired when riding center and quarter lines are that the horse remains balanced and traveling with sufficient impulsion to carry him through the turn, then straightens on the intended line and continues straight on that line. When turning off the centerline there should be no deviation before the turn. The horse should remain in balance and with correct bend throughout the turn.

Aids

The aids and preparation for turning onto the centerline or quarterline are the same as those of riding a turn onto a straight line.

Common Faults

If the horse is losing balance or impulsion in the turn onto the line he may fall over his outside shoulder or dive in on his inside shoulder. This will cause overshooting or undershooting the line. This tends to lead to overcorrecting all along the line, another common mistake.