

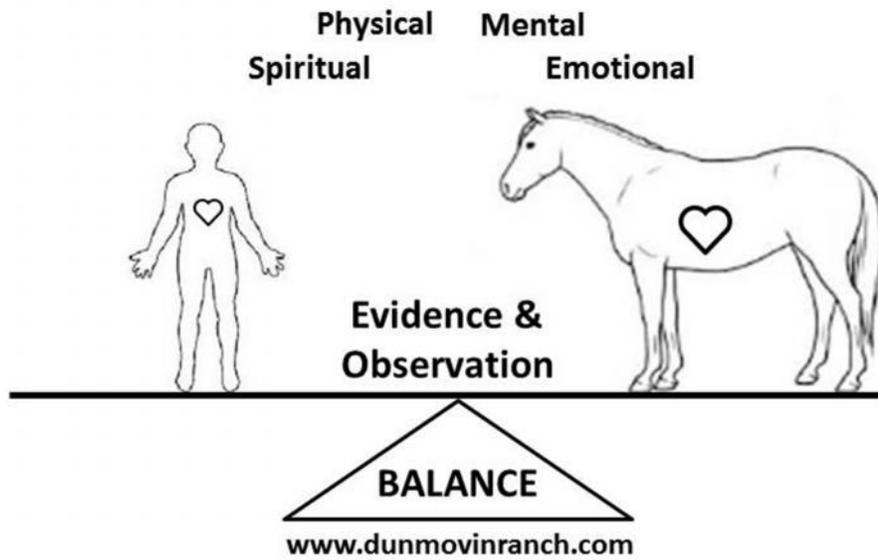
12 Months of Riding Guidance for the Equestrian

by Dr. Michael Guerini

DMR

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This publication is presented free of charge and is part of an ongoing focus to provide education and opportunities to challenge and improve both the horse and rider so that both continue to grow and develop.

If you find this small guide to be helpful -- I encourage you to share it with fellow equestrians.

Special thanks go to my Dad, Mom and to my main coach – Sandra O’Reilly (Centered Riding) – all three of these good people have helped push and inspire me to do more. I also want to thank Moonshadow (Moonie), Reba, Charm, Liz and Foxi – for helping me to learn feel and focus in riding.

There is not one definitive resource for horse and rider training. Years of experience, development of feel, learning and making mistakes, and seeking help/guidance are all keys to success.

There are a number of individuals/organizations that have contributed to my learning and a small group of these I acknowledge here. Please understand that this is not a comprehensive list because my teachers and those who have influenced me would fill pages as I have been blessed with many opportunities to learn....these are just some of my daily go-to places for learning.

Straightness Training by Marijke de Jong

Manolo Mendez Dressage

Dr. Thomas Ritter

JK Inspired – Jillian Kreinbring

Mike Corcoran Custom Saddles

Centered Riding®

Balance in the saddle

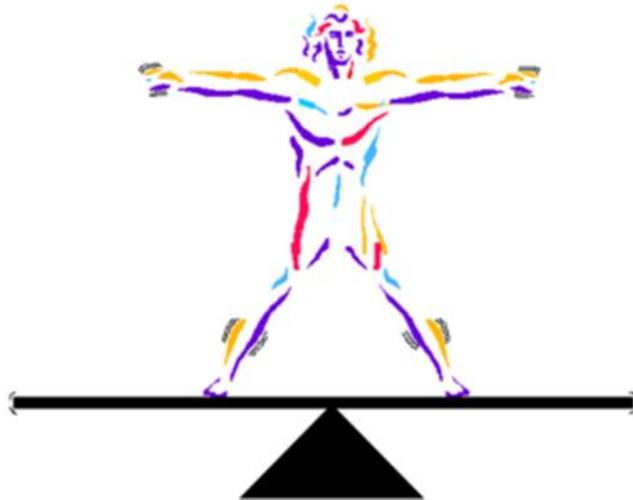


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Your seat bones must be balanced in the saddle so that you can deliver clear signals.

To get a horse to bend you must sit on the inside of the bend (you must weight the seat bone in the direction that you want to get bend). When bending your horse, keep your inside hand lower than your outside hand. Do not move your elbows behind your hip. Try to use just fingers and wrist for rein signals.

You must also turn your shoulders to match the shoulders of the horse on the bend.

Defining the Independent Seat

An independent seat starts on the ground. If riders cannot independently control their body parts before getting in the saddle, there is not going to be a sudden transformation when their feet are in the stirrups. A rider whose balance on the ground is a bit shaky or who is physically unfit will not be able to achieve a completely independent seat once mounted. Activities that help develop both strength and balance such as skating, skiing, yoga, dance, or martial arts can help riders cross train to achieve an independent seat for riding. Mounted riders can work without stirrups or reins on a longe line or in a jumping lane to achieve balance without gripping. The more control a rider develops over his or her own body movements, the more precisely he or she will be able to use body language to communicate with a horse whether on the ground or from the saddle.

Having an ‘independent seat’ means that:

- Each of the limbs can be controlled independently of each other, therefore enabling the rider to give the aids (signals/cues) clearly and concisely.
- The rider can stay in balance with their horse through different speeds and gradients.
- The rider does not have to resort to gripping with the legs or pulling on the reins to help them to balance.

When standing with toes straight, you can use seat bones and pelvis independently of arms, legs, and torso. If toes are pointed outward, it locks your hip and pelvis and nothing moves independently.

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Four basic cues/aids to think about:

Rein - This clarifies a seat or leg cue

Leg - This sets the direction

Seat - Good seat control is most important and sets the bend

Voice - Further clarification of seat or rein cue

Refinement of Cues:

Focus on moving hands instead of moving arms. When reins are moved, even if contact is not established, it lets the horse know it is time to focus and go to work.

Exercise: Tell your horse to bend using only your seat. To turn right use the right seat bone, if horse does not get it then add some right rein (as little as possible) to get it and then release rein pressure. To get sharper bend, use leg. Ask with seat first for a step or two, then use rein. This is an excellent exercise to use during cool down at a walk. You should also be able to do it at a trot and canter. During warm up (10 minutes), it is a great time to do side movements to see where your horse is stiff.

The Four Basics of Centered Riding, as expressed by Sally Swift, are:

Soft Eyes - Encourage visual and physical awareness, better peripheral vision, and improved “feel.”

Breathing - Using the diaphragm and breathing correctly for better posture, relaxation, and energy.

Balance or Building Blocks - Aligns the riders body for improved balance, straightness, and ease of movement.

Centering - Using the center of balance, movement and control, located deep in the body, gives quiet strength, harmony, and power, as in the oriental martial arts.

Grounding is not a separate basic but the foundation on which the Four Basics depend. Grounding gives everything else security. It is a feeling that your well-established center is dropping energy down through your legs and feet into the ground, while the energy in the ground comes up to your feet.

clear intent for effective control, direction and use of aids, and **grounding** for stability and balance, promote freedom of movement, confidence and harmony between horse and rider, and can help in solving many problems.

Thanks to Peggy Brown for approving the addition of this content.

Centered Riding® is an innovative way of learning and teaching classical principles of riding, using body awareness, centering, and imagery.

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Turning and Bending a horse

(from Dr. Thomas Ritter)

- 1) Stretch your legs down (outside leg back)
- 2) Drive with the inside calf
- 3) Sink down with the inside seat bone (ever so slightly) and knee (without excessive leaning or collapsing in the waist)
- 4) rotate your own hips and shoulders into the turn (in a spiral seat, so the outside shoulder is a little ahead of the outside hip)
- 5) If necessary, use your outside thigh, knee, and rein to support the rotation of the hips and shoulders. The rider's knees help to control the shoulders. The calves help to control the haunches.

This is one of the best descriptions I have read and it works very well for me and the method I teach.

You can learn more about Dr. Ritter at www.artisticdressage.com

Basic movements for each horse and rider

There are numerous basic maneuvers for foundation training: These help to build balance and self-carriage and communication: In all lateral work, if you can see the corner of the horse's eye, then you have enough bend and you do not need more.

- 1) Figure of 8/Infinity sign
- 2) Circle/ half turn / half turn in reverse
 - a. Focus on bend and changing diagonals
 - b. Great for setting up for lead changes
- 3) 10 stride transitions
 - a. Progressive Transitions (5 stride in each gait, then 6 stride in each gait and continue upward....all the way to 20 strides in each gait and then decreasing down to five strides once again.
- 4) Walk to Whoa/Hesitate to Back to Walk
- 5) Shallow loop serpentines (Manolo Mendez)
- 6) Shoulders Left and Shoulders Right
- 7) **S turns** through the circle
- 8) Straight lines to turns
 - a. Long lines ending in bends
 - i. Cigar shape
 - ii. Looks like cake lines
- 9) Riding in Squares and Triangle Shapes
 - a. Develop TOF and TOH
 - b. Keep forward movement
- 10) Free walk/Free Jog
- 11) Haunches Left and Haunches Right
- 12) Shoulders In and Shoulder Out
- 13) Side Passing
- 14) Roll back
- 15) Half Pass (bend in direction of movement)
- 16) Leg Yield (bent away from movement)

JANUARY

January Riding/Rider Challenge. We have 31 days to work in this month. You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day – you can also change days around if you wish. In this month, we shall continue to focus on balance, transitions, and making certain we are doing groundwork and saddle work. Focus on assessing where you and your horse are at the start of this year so you can fine-tune your goals for the year.

Day 1. Write out your riding/showing and developmental goals for the year. Walk and trot your horse from the ground. Do this from both sides ... plan to work 1/2 mile or more on each side of the horse and at each gait. If you cannot trot – then work the walk at multiple tempos. (This is much to do about harmony of horse and handler and rider fitness). Why start the month this way – time to get back in shape after the holidays.

Day 2. Walk and trot transitions in the saddle – make transitions between the gaits every 13 strides.

Day 3. Groundwork in-hand (snaffle or bosal or cavesson) focusing on walk, whoa, TOF, TOH and side passing.

Day 4. Walk and trot in the Snowman pattern (from Jane Weatherwax - 20 m circle, then 15 m circle then 10 m circle). If your horse is not at the developmental stage to properly execute a 15 m or 10 m circle – then consider making each a 20 m circle). For the proper snowman...if you start left, then middle circle is right, then last circle is left --- switch it up and start both directions.

Day 5. Take a class for Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates or find an online video and do a fitness program for you. Gather friends and do this together.

Day 6. Ground poles work from the ground with your horse. Work at walk and trot and do this on a cavesson or halter. With and without saddle is a great way

to work the horse. Make certain you are working to achieve straightness of your horse with the proper bend.

Day 7. Take a lesson with a coach or trainer and focus on your balance and the independent use of your aids.

Day 8. Groundwork over trail obstacles...we need to be constantly preparing ourselves for work on obstacles. Use one of those amazing ground pole patterns we see all over facebook ... work those patterns at walk and trot while riding your horse

Day 9. Set up one of those amazing ground pole patterns we see all over the internet ... work those patterns at walk and trot while riding your horse – this time do them without stirrups.

Day 10. Full body rub down of your horse. Touch or Masterson Method or massage encouraged.

Day 11. Ride spirals with your horse at walk and trot. Start from 20m circle (66.5 feet diameter) and spiral down (gradual spirals making the circles smaller each revolution) and go down to no smaller than a 6 m (19.7 feet diameter) circle. Stop the spiral if your horse falls out of balance.

Day 12. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 13. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 14. Walk and trot work over ground poles with and without stirrups. 4 1/2 to 5 feet spacing between the 3 ground poles.

Day 15. Walk work without stirrups while riding and focus on Turn on Forehand, Turn on Haunches, backing, side passing, and balanced halts – all without stirrups.

Day 16. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 17. Walk and trot in the Snowman pattern (from Jane Weatherwax - 20 m circle, then 15 m circle then 10 m circle). If your horse is not at the

developmental stage to properly execute a 15 m or 10 m circle – then consider making each a 20 m circle). For the proper snowman...if you start left, then middle circle is right, then last circle is left --- switch it up and start both directions.

Day 18. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot.

Day 19. Full body rub down of your horse. TTouch or Masterson Method or massage encouraged.

Day 20. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 21. Plan a ride with a friend or group of friends and show each other where you and your horse are mastering a new skill.

Day 22. Ride at walk and trot around 7 cones (use buckets or rocks if you do not have cones). Keep focused on bend and tempo.

Day 23. Practice halts and hesitations and stops from walk and trot...for some you can also do this from the canter.

Day 24. Ride squares and practice TOH or TOF at each corner.

Day 25. At the trot, practice three seat positions of rising/posting, sitting and two point....and keep tempo the same

Day 26. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 27. Walk and trot your horse from the ground. Do this from both sides ... plan to work 1/2 mile or more on each side of the horse and at each gait. If you cannot trot – then work the walk at multiple tempos. (This is much to do about harmony of horse and handler and rider fitness).

Day 28. Groundwork in-hand (snaffle or bosal or cavesson) focusing on walk, whoa, TOF, TOH and side passing.

Day 29. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 30. Ride bareback on your horse and work on feeling the bend and when your horse is traveling straight. Long straight lines and 20 m circles. Either video your ride or better yet – video and have eyes on the ground helping you know when your horse is not straight on the direction of travel.

Day 31. Ride a dressage pattern (Cowboy, Western or Traditional) or a ranch riding pattern or a western riding pattern and evaluate where you are doing well with your horse. Video the ride to let you go back later and review. Send the ride to your coach/trainer and have her/him evaluate the ride with you both watching.

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FEBRUARY

February Riding/Rider Challenge – one day away so get ready to start tomorrow. You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day – you can also change days around if you wish. In this month, we shall continue to focus on balance, transitions, consistency and we will add some core exercise/strengthening work for both the horse and rider.

Day 1. Count footfalls on a straight line and on circles at the walk and trot. Mark out your straight line and circles with cones (or other marker) and work on consistency of the number of footfalls from cone to cone (marker to marker) at both walk and trot. You can do this from the ground on this day.

Day 2. Walk and trot transitions in the saddle – make transitions between the gaits every 7 strides.

Day 3. Core day! Work on core exercises for you and for your horse. Hillary Clayton has a great book on core exercises for your horse. For the rider – leg lifts or sit ups might work nicely – you decide. Once you get your plan set for this day – consider doing this 3 times a week for you and your horse.

Day 4. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 5. Ground poles work from the ground with your horse. Work at walk and trot and do this on a cavesson or halter. With and without saddle is a great way to work the horse. Make certain you are working to achieve straightness of your horse with the proper bend.

Day 6. Take some time to learn (relearn) lower leg anatomy of your horse on both front and hind legs. How many muscles are in the lower vs upper leg? Can you feel for a digital pulse? Get familiar with each leg on your horse and write down info about bumps and bruises so you have notes to refer to as you get into the major riding season in your area.

Day 7. Ride staircase leg yields at the walk with your horse. Notice if your horse has the ability to move the same in each direction.

Day 8. Walk work without stirrups while riding and focus on Turn on Forehand, Turn on Haunches, backing, side passing, and balanced halts – all without stirrups.

Day 9. Count footfalls on a straight line and on circles at the walk and trot. Mark out your straight line and circles with cones (or other marker) and work on consistency of the number of footfalls from cone to cone (marker to marker) at both walk and trot. You can do this from the saddle on this day.

Day 10. Ride at walk and trot on straight lines and on circles with and without stirrups. Time for some rising/posting trot work without stirrups.

Day 11. Ride a 20 meter circle at walk and trot at three different tempos in both directions (remember those cones or markers we used on day 1 --- add those in to make certain you are affecting a change in tempo).

Day 12. Ride squares and practice TOH (Turn on the Haunches) at each corner going in both directions then work on TOF (Turn on Forehand) at each corner going in both directions.

Day 13. Walk and trot in the Snowman pattern (from Jane Weatherwax - 20 m circle, then 15 m circle then 10 m circle). If your horse is not at the developmental stage to properly execute a 15 m or 10 m circle – then consider making each a 20 m circle). For the proper snowman...if you start left, then middle circle is right, then last circle is left --- switch it up and start both directions.

Day 14. Walk and trot work over ground poles with and without stirrups. 4 1/2 to 5 feet spacing between the 3 ground poles.

Day 15. -- 2 or 3 loop serpentines (full arena) at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 16. Ride Figure 8's at the walk and Trot

Day 17. Walk and trot transitions in the saddle – make transitions between the gaits every 11 strides.

Day 18. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 19. Plan a ride with a friend or group of friends and show each other where you and your horse are mastering a new skill.

Day 20. Ride at walk and trot around 7 cones (use buckets or rocks if you do not have cones). Keep focused on bend and tempo

Day 21. At the trot, practice three seat positions of rising/posting, sitting and two point....and keep tempo the same

Day 22. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot

Day 23. Groundwork in-hand (snaffle or bosal or cavesson) focusing on walk, whoa, TOF, TOH and side passing.

Day 24. While riding, work on side passing with and without going sideways over ground poles

Day 25. Ground work with trail obstacles...we need to be constantly preparing ourselves for work on obstacles. Think of working with ground poles, tarps, build a good bridge, step over a barrel.

Day 26. Practice halts and hesitations and stops from walk and trot...for some you can also do this from the canter.

Day 27. Ride spirals with your horse at walk and trot. Start from 20m circle (66.5 feet diameter) and spiral down (gradual spirals making the circles smaller each revolution) and go down to no smaller than a 6 m (19.7 feet diameter) circle. Stop the spiral if your horse falls out of balance.

Day 28. Riding or ground work over cavaletti. Keep this at the walk today and focus on directing which front foot steps over the cavaletti first.

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MARCH

March 31 day Riding/Rider/Groundwork Challenge. Here are 31 days with something you can add to your riding each day. You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day – you can also change days around if you wish. As always – balance and transitions and variety are the keys to this plan. Thanks to Lehanne for some exercise scouting/recommendations and a few of this month's ideas come from "When Two Spines Align: Dressage Dynamics" by Beth Baumert.

Day 1. Ground work focusing on TOF, TOH and side passing. Riding shallow loop serpentines at walk.

Day 2. Ride Figure 8's at the walk and Trot

Day 3. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 4. Ride at walk and trot around 7 cones (use buckets or rocks if you do not have cones). Keep focused on bend and tempo

Day 5. At the trot, practice three seat positions of rising/posting, sitting and two point....and keep tempo the same

Day 6. Ground work only. Practice walk and whoa. Practice backing and work on ground tying

Day 7. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot

Day 8. Ride a 20 meter circle at walk and trot at three different tempos in both directions

Day 9. Ride over ground poles at walk and trot – learn the spacing that works best for you and your horse to keep a consistent rhythm (you may have to get on and off a few times but that is great practice as well)

Day 10. Ride walk and trot with and without stirrups to work on your balance

Day 11. Ride a low level dressage test for practice (Traditional, Western, or Cowboy dressage tests). If you do not have a dressage court – pick a certain element from a test and work on it specifically.

Day 12. Ride the Spiraling Circle at the walk (and if you feel it is good – then also complete at the trot). For sure go both clockwise and counterclockwise. Do a 20m, then 18m, then 16m, then 14m and finally a 12m circle and then go back up at the same size change. Really focus on stabilizing the circle and bend before you worry about going to the next size smaller or larger circle.

Day 13. Core day! Work on core exercises for you and for your horse. Hillary Clayton has a great book on core exercises for your horse. For the rider – leg lifts or sit ups might work nicely – you decide. Once you get your plan set for this day – consider doing this 3 times a week for you and your horse.

Day 14. Trot to halt to back for two steps and then ride forward once again at the trot. Repeat this up to 10 times.

Day 15. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot

Day 16. Practice halts and hesitations and stops from walk and trot...for some you can also do this from the canter

Day 17. Ride a square serpentine at the walk and then the trot.

Day 18. Take a day and watch another rider or watch a video and sit there and diagram out on paper the footfalls for the walk, then trot and then for the Right lead Canter and Left lead Canter.

Day 19. Ground work with trail obstacles...we need to be constantly preparing ourselves for work on obstacles. Think of working with ground poles, tarps, build a good bridge, step over a barrel.

Day 20. At the trot, practice three seat positions of rising/posting, sitting and two point....and keep tempo the same

Day 21. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 22. Ride walk and trot with and without stirrups to work on your balance

Day 23. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 24. While riding, work on side passing with and without going sideways over ground poles.

Day 25. Riding work over Cavaletti 8 to 12 inch high cavaletti.

Day 26. Work on moving shoulders of the horse to the left and right at the walk and trot

Day 27. Ride at walk without stirrups and focus on Turn on Forehand (TOF), Turn on Haunches (TOH), backing, and balanced halts.

Day 28. Ride at the walk and work on changing the tempo of the walk and on changing the length of stride at the walk. Have a coach or trainer or friend video you and share the experience so you can talk about how you lengthened the stride verses how you might have increased (or decreased) the tempo.

Day 29. Ride the Spiraling Circle at the walk (and if you feel it is good – then also complete at the trot). For sure go both clockwise and counterclockwise. Do a 20m, then 18m, then 16m, then 14m and finally a 12m circle and then go back up at the same size change. Really focus on stabilizing the circle and bend before you worry about going to the next size smaller or larger circle.

Day 30. Riding work with trail obstacles...we need to be constantly preparing ourselves for work on obstacles. Think of working with ground poles, tarps, build a good bridge, step over a barrel.

Day 31. Walk and trot work over ground poles with and without stirrups. 4 1/2 to 5 feet spacing between the 3 ground poles.

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APRIL

April 30 day Riding/Rider/Groundwork Challenge. Here are 30 days with something you can add to your riding each day. You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day – you can also change days around if you wish. As always – balance and transitions and variety are the keys to this plan. Thanks to Sandra O’Reilly (Centered Riding) for some exercise recommendations.

Day 1. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 2. Footfalls. Call out which front legs (and when you get good...which back legs) your horse is placing on the ground. For this exercise you can use two poles and call out which foot your horse uses to step over the logs.

Day 3. Ground work with ground poles and cavaletti. Alternate one ground pole, then a cavaletti and then a ground pole and then a cavaletti. Work over these on the ground (or send your horse over them on the ground).

Day 4. Ride spirals on your horse and ask for haunches out (haunches to the outside of the circle) on $\frac{1}{4}$ of every complete circle.

Day 5. Staircase Leg yield at walk and at trot (only trot if horse is accepting aids well)

Day 6. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot

Day 7. Take your work from Day 2 above and now work with your horse to have him/her only step over a ground pole with a specific front foot of the horse that you choose.

Day 8. Ride Shoulder-Fore or Shoulder-In at the walk (make sure you work in both directions)

Day 9. Ride trot to canter transitions...make it 15 strides between each transition.

Day 10. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 11. Work on developing a nice stretchy circle trot (Free trot circle)

Day 12. Trot to halt (or stop) then back two steps and move off forward at trot. Make it 8 to 15 trot strides before each halt/stop.

Day 13. Cavesson work with your horse to achieve suppleness and correct bend.

Day 14. Lunge line lesson with a coach or trainer so you can work on your seat. (A skilled fellow equestrian can help you on this exercise also)

Day 15. Progressive transition work. Start at transitions from walk to trot every 20 strides, then go to transitions every 19 strides, then every 18 strides....and continue down to as few a strides as you can do in between the transitions while maintaining balance of horse and rider (and then back up)

Day 16. Ride Turns on the Forehand in square patterns.

Day 17. Ride 3 loop serpentines at walk and trot.

Day 18. Take some time and go out for a trail ride on your horse....get out of the arena and experience the big beautiful world.

Day 19. Practice Turn on the Forehand and Turn on the Haunches from the Ground with your horse.

Day 20. Speed control at the Walk. Work with your horse at a “granny walk” (very slow walk), normal walk and an extended walk to help your horse respond to you and your directions.

Day 21. Trot on an oval where the top and bottom parts of the oval are slower tempo and the “sides” (long lines) of the oval are at a normal trot tempo. Use cones to mark the transition points if you wish.

Day 22. Riding work with trail obstacles...we need to be constantly preparing ourselves for work on obstacles. Think of working with ground poles, tarps, build a good bridge, step over a barrel.

Day 23. Have someone take a video of you and your horse and then sit down and make notes on what you see yourself and your horse doing. Make sure to find

positive things as well as those you wish to improve upon. A good plan is to include your trainer/coach in the video review.

Day 24. Ride the Spiraling Circle at the walk (and if you feel it is good – then also complete at the trot). For sure go both clockwise and counterclockwise. Do a 20m, then 18m, then 16m, then 14m and finally a 12m circle and then go back up at the same size change. Really focus on stabilizing the circle and bend before you worry about going to the next size smaller or larger circle.

Day 25. Ride Figure 8's at the walk and Trot

Day 26. Ride a 20 meter circle at walk and trot at three different tempos in both directions

Day 27. At the trot, practice three seat positions of rising/posting, sitting and two point....and keep tempo the same

Day 28. Take a lesson and refresh (or learn) the value of the half-halt – it is not just for dressage tests and dressage riders.

Day 29. Ride walk and trot with and without stirrups to work on your balance

Day 30. Ride at walk and trot around 7 cones (use buckets or rocks if you do not have cones). Keep focused on bend and tempo

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MAY

May 31 day Riding/Rider/Groundwork Challenge. You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day – you can also change days around if you wish. As always – balance and transitions and variety are the keys to this plan.

Day 1. First do ground work to get haunches left and then haunches right – then ride to get haunches left and haunches right.

Day 2. Ride a series of ½ circles (20 m, 15 m and 10 m ½ circles – these look like a rainbow) and focus on proper bend and shape of the ½ circle.

Day 3. Ride a 20 m circle counting strides and work to have 5 circles (each direction) have the same number of strides....this will help you better understand tempo.

Day 4. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 5. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot

Day 6. Ride in a series of squares and at each corner do either a Turn on the Forehand (TOF) or a Turn on the Haunches (TOH)

Day 7. Ride a Spiraling Circle at the walk (and if you feel it is good – then also complete at the trot). For sure go both clockwise and counterclockwise. Do a 20m, then 18m, then 16m, then 14m and finally a 12m circle and then go back up at the same size change. Really focus on stabilizing the circle and bend before you worry about going to the next size smaller or larger circle.

Day 8. Groundwork in-hand (snaffle or bosal or cavesson) focusing on walk, whoa, TOF, TOH and side passing.

Day 9. Rider Fitness day – work on exercises to stretch your psoas muscle and to strengthen your core.

Day 10. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 11. Ride a cloverleaf pattern at the walk and trot. Focus on bends, horse responding to aids and on a square halt at the end of each cloverleaf.

Day 12. Progressive Transitions – start with a transition from walk to trot at 5 strides, then go to 6 strides, then 7 strides --- all the way up to transitions every 20 strides and then come back down to making a transition every 5 strides.

Day 13. Riding work over Cavaletti 8 to 12 inch high cavaletti.

Day 14. Trot on an oval where the top and bottom parts of the oval are slower tempo and the “sides” (long lines) of the oval are at a normal trot tempo. Use cones to mark the transition points if you wish.

Day 15. Walk work without stirrups while riding and focus on Turn on Forehand, Turn on Haunches, backing, side passing, and balanced halts – all without stirrups.

Day 16. Ride at walk and trot a Loopy B figure. This sounds just like it looks --- check out the first comment for a diagram on how it looks.

Day 17. Ride staircase leg yield at the walk and trot.

Day 18. Take a lesson where you work on your core and seat and body position by riding on the lunge line.

Day 19. While riding, work on side passing with and without going sideways over ground poles

Day 20. Ground work focusing on TOF, TOH and side passing. Riding shallow loop serpentines at walk.

Day 21. Ride at walk and trot the following --- Circle/ half turn / half turn in reverse (Thanks to George Morris for this exercise – check online to search how this looks)

Day 22. Ride Figure 8's at the walk and Trot

Day 23. Ride 3 loop serpentines at walk and trot.

Day 24. Walk and trot in the Snowman pattern (from Jane Weatherwax - 20 m circle, then 15 m circle then 10 m circle). If your horse is not at the developmental stage to properly execute a 15 m or 10 m circle – then consider making each a 20 m circle). For the proper snowman...if you start left, then middle circle is right, then last circle is left --- switch it up and start both directions.

Day 25. Work on an extended or lengthened trot

Day 26. Ground work with trail obstacles...we need to be constantly preparing ourselves for work on obstacles. Think of working with ground poles, tarps, build a good bridge, step over a barrel.

Day 27. Walk and trot your horse from the ground. Do this from both sides ... plan to work ¼ mile or more on each side of the horse and at each gait. If you cannot trot – then work the walk at multiple tempos.

Day 28. Lunge work on the cavesson (or serrata) where you work on tempo, inside turns in motion maintaining tempo and on keeping your horse upright/straight.

Day 29. Speed control at the Trot. Work with your horse at a slow trot and then change the tempo so that your horse is moving out at the trot.

Day 30. Plan a ride with a friend or group of friends and show each other where you and your horse are mastering a new skill....work on setting up other rides for the summer of riding fun.

Day 31. Work with a Garrocha pole, a rope, a log drag or carry a flag

Notes:

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JUNE

June 30 day Riding/Rider/Groundwork Challenge. You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day – you can also change days around if you wish. As always – balance, transitions, and variety are the keys to this plan. Adding in a little more work for Trail obstacles as we get set to ride out and enjoy the trails of the summer.

Day 1. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 2. In-hand ground work over and around trail obstacles. Pick five obstacles and work your horse on the ground around these obstacles.

Day 3. Walk and trot work over ground poles with and without stirrups. 4 1/2 to 5 feet spacing between the 3 ground poles.

Day 4. Walk and Trot springs. (Ride a circle and then go up the rail about 10 feet after the end of the circle and start a new circle)

Day 5. Walk work without stirrups while riding and focus on Turn on Forehand, Turn on Haunches, backing, side passing, and balanced halts – all without stirrups.

Day 6. Ride over and around trail obstacles. Use the five obstacles from Day 2 and work your horse on the ground around these obstacles.

Day 7. Ride at walk and Trot – a large circle (60 feet across) then ride a small circle (25 to 30 feet across)

Day 8. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 9. Groundwork in-hand (snaffle or bosal or cavesson) focusing on walk, whoa, TOF, TOH and side passing.

Day 10. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot

Day 11. Walk and trot your horse from the ground. Do this from both sides ... plan to work ¼ mile or more on each side of the horse and at each gait. If you cannot

trot – then work the walk at multiple tempos. (This is much to do about harmony of horse and handler and rider fitness).

Day 12. Practice halts and hesitations and stops from walk and trot...for some you can also do this from the canter

Day 13. Plan a ride with a friend or group of friends and show each other where you and your horse are mastering a new skill.

Day 14. Ride a series of half turns at walk and trot – make sure to ride both directions. A half turn should look more like an ice cream cone than a tear drop or light bulb.

Day 15. In-hand ground work over and around trail obstacles. Set up five new obstacles that you did not do on Day 2 and work your horse on the ground around these obstacles.

Day 16. At walk and trot ride a leg yield on a circle – make sure to go both directions.

Day 17. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 18. Ride squares and practice TOH (Turn on the Haunches) at each corner going in both directions then work on TOF (Turn on Forehand) at each corner going in both directions.

Day 19. Ride over and around trail obstacles. Use the five obstacles from Day 15 and work your horse on the ground around these obstacles.

Day 20. Check out that your horse will ground tie (and if not...work on teaching your horse to ground tie – recommend you start this in a pen)

Day 21. Ride bareback on your horse and work on feeling the bend and when your horse is traveling straight. Long straight lines and 20 m circles. Either video your ride or better yet – video and have eyes on the ground helping you know when your horse is not straight on the direction of travel.

Day 22. Ride walk and trot with and without stirrups to work on your balance.

Day 23. Full body rub down of your horse. TTouche or Masterson Method or massage encouraged.

Day 24. Ride serpentine with a halt in the middle. Ride first ½ of serpentine at walk, then second half at trot...each time you make it to the centerline...halt and change the gait.

Day 26. Work with a Garrocha pole, a rope, a log drag or carry a flag – great for trail practice

Day 27. Ride spirals with your horse at walk and trot. Start from 20m circle (66.5 feet diameter) and spiral down (gradual spirals making the circles smaller each revolution) and go down to no smaller than a 6 m (19.7 feet diameter) circle. Stop the spiral if your horse falls out of balance.

Day 28. Ground poles work from the ground with your horse. Work at walk and trot and do this on a cavesson or halter. With and without saddle is a great way to work the horse. Make certain you are working to achieve straightness of your horse with the proper bend.

Day 29. Ride over Cavaletti

Day 30. Ride staircase leg yields at the walk with your horse. Notice if your horse has the ability to move the same in each direction.

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JULY

July 31 day Riding/Rider/Groundwork Challenge. This month we explore the alphabet and your ability to plan and see your spacing and arena location as you ride. Can you use each shape of the Alphabet and ride that shape.

Things to include – walk, trot, canter, extended trot, backing, bends, needle point turns, rollbacks...and the list goes on! Use your imagination and get riding the alphabet...PLAN YOUR FOOTFALLS AND PLAN YOUR BENDS AND PLAN WHERE YOU NEED TO BE TO MAKE THE PERFECT LETTER!

A B C D

E F G H

I J K L

M N O P

Q R S T

U V W X

Y Z

Notes:

AUGUST

August 31 day Riding/Rider/Groundwork Challenge. You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day – you can also change days around if you wish. As always – balance, transitions, and variety are the keys to this plan.

Day 1. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 2. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 3. Walk and trot work over ground poles with and without stirrups. 4 1/2 to 5 feet spacing between the 3 ground poles.

Day 4. Walk and Trot springs. (Ride a circle and then go up the rail about 10 feet after the end of the circle and start a new circle)

Day 5. Take a lunge lesson ride with a good instructor in your area so that you work on balance and seat and leg position

Day 6. Ground work over Cavaletti

Day 7. Ride staircase leg yields at the walk with your horse. Notice if your horse has the ability to move the same in each direction.

Day 8. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 9. Ride serpentines with a halt in the middle. Ride first ½ of serpentine at walk, then second half at trot...each time you make it to the centerline...halt and change the gait.

Day 10. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot

Day 11. While riding, work on side passing with and without going sideways over ground poles

Day 12. Ride a low level dressage test for practice (Traditional, Western, or Cowboy dressage tests). If you do not have a dressage court – pick a certain element from a test and work on it specifically.

Day 13. Ride the Spiraling Circle at the walk (and if you feel it is good – then also complete at the trot). For sure go both clockwise and counterclockwise. Do a 20m, then 18m, then 16m, then 14m and finally a 12m circle and then go back up at the same size change. Really focus on stabilizing the circle and bend before you worry about going to the next size smaller or larger circle.

Day 14. Ground work on the cavesson or halter with trot over ground poles and cavaletti.

Day 15. Ride trot to canter transitions...make it 15 strides between each transition.

Day 16. Take a day to pamper your horse and work on you as a rider. Try some new stretches and work on range of motion of your body.

Day 17. Ride at walk and trot around 7 cones (use buckets or rocks if you do not have cones). Keep focused on bend and tempo

Day 18. Ride a 20 meter circle at walk and trot at three different tempos in both directions

Day 19. Ride trot to stretchy trot – changing horse frame every 8 to 12 strides. Have a spotter to make certain you are keeping your horse engaged in the rear and not allowing your horse to fall on his/her forehead.

Day 20. Plan a ride with a friend or group of friends and show each other where you and your horse are mastering a new skill.

Day 21. Ride squares where two sides are walk (or trot) in straight lines and two sides have you side passing....then reverse direction and ride the opposite way to work on side passing in the direction not done on the first square.

Day 22. Walk and trot work over ground poles with and without stirrups. 4 1/2 to 5 feet spacing between the 3 ground poles.

Day 23. Riding work with trail obstacles...we need to be constantly preparing ourselves for work on obstacles. Think of working with ground poles, tarps, build a good bridge, step over a barrel.

Day 24. Ride Loops and Tear drop shapes at walk and trot – with and without stirrups.

Day 26. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot

Day 27. Core day! Work on core exercises for you and for your horse. Hillary Clayton has a great book on core exercises for your horse. For the rider – leg lifts or sit ups might work nicely – you decide. Once you get your plan set for this day – consider doing this 3 times a week for you and your horse.

Day 28. Ground work focusing on TOF, TOH and side passing. Riding shallow loop serpentines at walk.

Day 29. Trot to halt to trot transitions with and without stirrups.

Day 30. Set up one of those amazing ground pole patterns we see all over the internet ... work those patterns at walk and trot while riding your horse – this time do them without stirrups.

Day 31. At the trot, practice three seat positions of rising/posting, sitting and two point....and keep tempo the same

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SEPTEMBER

September 30 day riding and ground work exploration challenge. Enjoy and take notes on areas for future improvement (to share with your trainer or coach) or things that peaked your interest and you want to explore in more detail.

Day 1. Ground work focusing on TOF, TOH and side passing. Riding shallow loop serpentines at walk.

Day 2. Transitions at walk, trot, Canter

Day 3. Stair-case leg yield at walk. Work on riding circles at the walk for perfect geometry

Day 4. Ride Figure 8's at the walk and Trot

Day 5. Work on simple lead changes at the canter

Day 6. Ground work only. Practice walk and whoa. Practice backing and work on ground tying

Day 7. Shallow Loop serpentines at the trot

Day 8. Work on TOF at the walk and execute this by working in a square pattern

Day 9. Work over ground poles at walk and trot

Day 10. Work with trail obstacles on the ground

Day 11. While riding, work on side passing with and without going sideways over ground poles

Day 12. Ground work over Cavaletti

Day 13. Work on trail obstacles while riding

Day 14. Full body rub down of your horse. TTouch or Masterson Method or massage encouraged

Day 15. Ride spiral circles at walk and trot, both left and right

Day 16. Ride a low level dressage test for practice (Traditional, Western, or Cowboy dressage tests)

Day 17. Work with a Garrocha pole, a rope, a log drag or carry a flag

Day 18. Ride long straight lines with nice bends at the end of each line (looks like cigars)

Day 19. At the trot, practice three seat positions of rising/posting, sitting and two point....and keep tempo the same

Day 20. Ride squares and practice TOH at each corner

Day 21. Work on moving shoulders left and right at the walk and trot

Day 22. Ride walk and trot with and without stirrups to work on your balance

Day 23. Ride a ranch riding pattern (check out the NAWD RHWD patterns for even more variation)

Day 24. Ground work focusing on tempo with you practicing from both sides of the horse keeping an even tempo. Have a metronome help you keep time

Day 25. Riding work over Cavaletti

Day 26. Ride at walk and trot around 7 cones (use buckets or rocks if you do not have cones). Keep focused on bend and tempo

Day 27. Ride a 20 meter circle at walk and trot at three different tempos in both directions

Day 28. Work on an extended or lengthened trot

Day 29. Practice halts and hesitations and stops from walk and trot...for some you can also do this from the canter

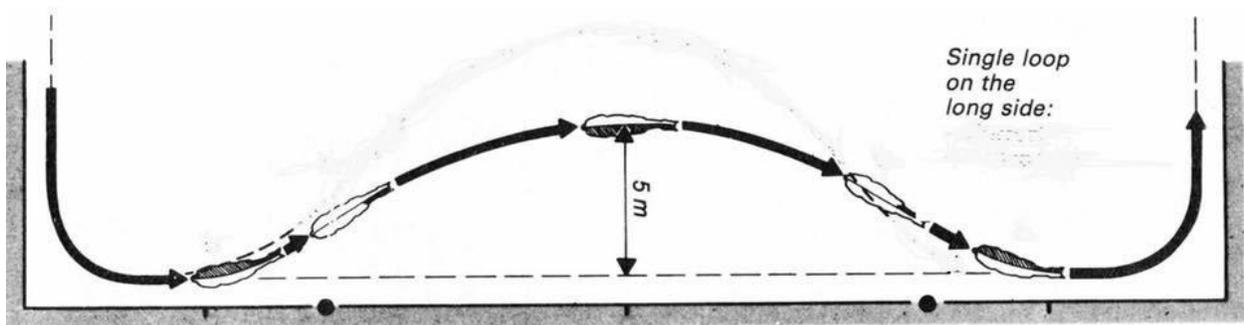
Day 30. Ride S turns through a circle at walk and trot

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OCTOBER

For October -- we will focus on the Shallow Loop Serpentine (as I understand, a favorite exercise from Manolo Mendez). Let us add some variation with different gaits and seats of the rider. Repeat this list twice in the month and the bonus day on the 31st -- do your favorite day ridden bareback. Here is a photo to remind you of what the shallow loop serpentine looks like and the list of work -- only 3 to 5 minutes a day needed.



Shallow Loop Serpentine – 15 days (3 to 5 minutes a day)

- 1) Complete at the walk with stirrups
- 2) Complete at the rising/posting trot with stirrups
- 3) Complete at the sitting trot with stirrups
- 4) Complete at the walk without stirrups
- 5) Complete at the rising/posting trot without stirrups
- 6) Complete at the sitting trot without stirrups

7) Complete 10 strides at walk, 10 strides at rising trot, then repeat each gait (with stirrups)

8) Complete 10 strides at walk, 10 strides at rising trot, then repeat each gait (without stirrups)

9) Complete at the free walk

10) Complete at the free trot

11) Complete at the walk on the buckle

12) Complete at the rising trot on the buckle

13) Complete at the sitting trot on the buckle

14) Complete 10 strides at walk, 10 strides at rising trot, 10 strides at sitting trot, then repeat each gait (with stirrups)

15) Complete 10 strides at rising trot, 10 strides at sitting trot, 10 strides at half seat at trot, then repeat each gait (with stirrups)

For October – repeat this 2 x and on the 31st – pick one of the above and ride it bareback

Keys to success: even tempo, proper bend, be soft

Half seat – OR – two point

On the buckle = very loose rein

Notes:

NOVEMBER

November Riding Challenge. This month we celebrate "No Stirrups November" and so we focus on riding without stirrups as part of our plan. I gave a few days off because of the holiday (so only 26 days are listed). You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day.

4 days of lunge lessons---get with your coach (trainer or other qualified person) and take 4 days of lunge lessons and work on walk and trot with you riding the horse on a lunge line and make sure to work with and without stirrups.

4 days of walk and trot in circles (20 meter circles are best). Alternate one circle with stirrups and one without at walk, then repeat at rising(posting) trot with and without stirrups and then repeat with sitting trot with and without stirrups. Make sure you ride left and right circles.

4 days of walk and trot work over ground poles with and without stirrups. 4 1/2 to 5 feet spacing between the 4 ground poles.

4 days of walk and trot in straight lines where you change position (with and without stirrups) every 12 strides. (This is the bonus with footfall and no stirrup work)

4 days of walk work without stirrups and focus on Turn on Forehand, Turn on Haunches, backing, side passing and balanced halts. If you are ready add in some leg yields without stirrups.

4 days of transitions without stirrups. Walk to trot to walk transitions ... work on these with and without stirrups. Add in trot to canter transitions without stirrups if you have a good seat.

2 days of bareback riding (that for sure gets you without stirrups). Have a coach, trainer or qualified person lead you on a lead line for safety if you need.

Notes:

DECEMBER

December Riding/Rider Challenge – one day away so get ready to start tomorrow. I gave a few days off because of the holidays (so only 28 days are listed). You do NOT need to do all this on one day and you can choose to do one or more (mix and match) on any given day. In this month, we shall focus a little more on rider preparation and fitness.

Day 1. Groundwork with a halter focusing on TOF, TOH, and side passing.

Day 2. Review articles and information on the Riderfitness.com website to find new inspiration that will help you continue to prepare or improve yourself as a rider.

Day 3. Walk and trot transitions in the saddle – make transitions between the gaits every 17 strides.

Day 4. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot.

Day 5. Ride a dressage test or ranch riding pattern for practice.

Day 6. Groundwork in-hand (snaffle or bosal or cavesson) focusing on walk, whoa, TOF, TOH and side passing.

Day 7. Take a class for Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates or find an online video and do a fitness program for you. Gather friends and do this together.

Day 8. Walk and trot your horse from the ground. Do this from both sides ... plan to work ¼ mile or more on each side of the horse and at each gait. If you cannot trot – then work the walk at multiple tempos. (This is much to do about harmony of horse and handler and rider fitness).

Day 9. Set up one of those amazing ground pole patterns we see all over the internet ... work those patterns at walk and trot while riding your horse.

Day 10. Groundwork over Cavaletti.

Day 11. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 12. Shallow Loop serpentines at the walk and trot – seek proper bend and relaxation of the horse.

Day 13. Ground work over trail obstacles...we need to be constantly preparing ourselves for work on obstacles.

Day 14. Take another class for Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates or find an online video and do a fitness program for you. Gather friends and do this together.

Day 15. Walk and trot in straight lines where you change rhythm (the gait) (with and without stirrups) every 14 strides. We practiced no stirrups in November and need to keep all that we gained in that work.

Day 16. Walk and trot your horse from the ground. Do this from both sides ... plan to work ¼ mile or more on each side of the horse and at each gait. If you cannot trot – then work the walk at multiple tempos.

Day 17. Take a lesson with a coach or trainer on how to work your horse properly using a lunge cavesson.

Day 18. Ride spirals with your horse at walk and trot. Start from 20m circle (66.5 feet diameter) and spiral down (gradual spirals making the circles smaller each revolution) and go down to no smaller than a 6 m (19.7 feet diameter) circle. Stop the spiral if your horse falls out of balance.

Day 19. Full body rub down of your horse. TTouch or Masterson Method or massage encouraged.

Day 20. Walk and trot in straight lines where you change rhythm (the gait) (with and without stirrups) every 14 strides. We practiced no stirrups in November and need to keep all that we gained in that work.

Day 21. Walk and trot work over ground poles with and without stirrups. 4 1/2 to 5 feet spacing between the 3 ground poles.

Day 22. Work on riding straight lines at walk and trot. Make sure your eyes are up and that your seat bones are even and that you are balanced. Have a spotter to make sure you are keeping your eyes up and looking ahead.

Day 23. Walk work without stirrups while riding and focus on Turn on Forehand, Turn on Haunches, backing, side passing, and balanced halts – all without stirrups.

Day 24. Ground work with your horses where you walk and trot (if you cannot trot, then simply walk) and do this over ground poles. Work on the timing of your footfalls and those of your horse being in harmony as you both cruise over ground poles.

Day 25. Take another class for Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates or find an online video and do a fitness program for you. Gather friends and do this together.

Day 26. Walk and trot your horse from the ground. Do this from both sides ... plan to work ¼ mile or more on each side of the horse and at each gait. If you cannot trot – then work the walk at multiple tempos.

Day 27. Ground work in-hand (snaffle or bosal or cavesson) focusing on walk, whoa, TOF, TOH and side passing.

Day 28. Walk and trot in 20 m circles where you change rhythm (the gait) (with and without stirrups) every 7 strides.

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