



2016 COMMITTEE/FACULTY CO-TEACHING MEETING

The Instruction and Ridden Development of Young Event Horses (4-, 5-year-olds)



Maute House Farm in Grass Lake, Michigan

Present from ICP Committee: Robin Walker, Phyllis Dawson, Eric Horgan, Mary D'Arcy, Jim Graham, Joan Simmons, Sue Hershey

Riders: an instructor of YEH riding, a rider/trainer of YEHs, and several amateur riders/owners of YEHs

Horses: many 4- and 5-year-olds, mostly Thoroughbreds and Thoroughbred crosses

Specific exercises are presented in red.

Horses differ: Whether instructing or riding, learn to read each horse in order to develop him/her effectively, positively, humanely.

Recommendations for YEH flatwork development. Always ride wearing a well-fitted, buckled helmet and with safety in mind.

General maxims:

- Sit in the middle of the horse. Ride with sensitive hands. Go with horse's natural balance at first. Lighten the seat as necessary.
- Connection: ride horse with a long enough neck, nose out, up in the back. Invite horse to reach for the bit, to go to it.
- Ride the horse straight, neither overbent longitudinally or laterally nor unevenly bent laterally. For straightness, focus upon riding the horse's rib cage on the track, and avoid overbending the horse's neck.
- Develop steady working gaits with a long enough step. Attend to each specific horse: for example, many horses offer a better trot after they have cantered with a steady, not too quick stride.
- Stretch horse during a ride – to go out and down to the bit (nose forward), to invite him to raise his back, to relax him.

Developing the YEH's understanding of half-halts and lateral work:

- **Exercise to begin half-halt education with YEHs:** Without altering the tempo at trot, alternate 10 strides of longer steps with 10 strides of shorter steps using gradual, not sudden, transitions between step lengths. Ride this exercise also at canter and walk. Educate horse to consistent seat/aids for lengthening and for shortening his steps; horse and rider understanding of those transition aids are the basis for effective half-halting. Alternate a smaller number of strides at each step length as horse becomes stronger and more responsive to the seat/aids.
- **Introduce YEH to turn-about-forehand at walk and/or turn-on-forehand at halt.** Work first from the ground if desired or necessary to educate horse to move away from a lateral aid.
Turn-about-forehand at walk is ridden with the inside fore describing a small curved track with each of its steps and the outside fore a somewhat larger one. **On a box-shaped track, walk and turn in each corner using a 90-degree turn-about-forehand** to educate horse to lateral leg aid for stepping under and across with inside hind leg. Flex the horse toward the side of the sideways-pushing leg. Time rider inside leg aid as horse lifts each hind leg, starting with the inside hind; hold lightly with outside rein until the inside hind starts crossing over. Walk straight upon completing each turn. Ride this in both directions. **Or, ride a 180-degree turn-about-forehand at the walk on a straight line.**
Turn-on-forehand at halt educates horse to lateral leg aid for stepping under and across with inside hind leg. Flex the horse toward the side of the sideways-pushing leg. Time rider inside leg aid as horse lifts each hind leg, starting with the inside hind; hold lightly with outside rein until the inside hind starts crossing over. The outside rein keeps the horse straight in the neck and allows the outside foreleg to step forward while the inside foreleg is picked off the ground and returned to the same spot. (von Blixen-Finecke, *The Art of Training*, 75-8)
Both movements ridden correctly (turn-about-forehand and turn-on-forehand) supple and engage the horse. Further, by introducing the horse to engagement of his inside hind with a briefly holding outside rein, the rider educates him to the aids/connection common to other lateral movements, like leg yield and shoulder-in.

- **Introduce YEH to use of lateral leg aid for leg yield at the walk and the trot.**

Exercise for leg yield at walk and/or trot: Riding parallel to an arena long side, move forward and sideways along a diagonal line, applying the inside leg aid each time the horse lifts a hind leg from the ground, starting with the inside hind. Maintain straightness of horse's body and neck; as connection becomes more consistent, slightly flex horse laterally away from direction of movement without bending the horse's neck. Coordinate aids so that the horse moves equally forward/sideways with both his hind end and his shoulders, maintaining body and neck parallel to the long side of the arena. "The inside feet step regularly and evenly in front of and across the outside feet." (German National Equestrian Federation, *Principles of Riding, Book 1*, 95)

To focus YEH and rider mostly upon the sideways movement, ride leg yield in the head-to-the-wall position at walk and/or trot at a shallow angle to the wall. The rider maintains straightness of horse's body and neck as the rider applies the inside leg aid. This leg-yield reveals which direction of sideways movement is more difficult for the horse. Address that difference in a developmentally positive way.

To develop YEH's responsiveness to lateral aids, ability to bend, suppleness, and connection: ride some leg yield steps out from a circle track at any gait. Leg yield out during the several strides crossing an arena center line on a 20m circle ridden at A or C or twice per circle across the center line when the circle is ridden at B or E. Ride the lateral steps from the inside leg to the outside aids. Return to the circle track without losing the horse's correct inside bend. (This exercise thanks to George Williams.)

Educate the horse to respond laterally with his shoulders to rider thigh pressure so that the horse carries his shoulders above his forelegs, improving the horse's whole-body coordination and the quality of his movement and bending. Lengthen the rider's upper legs by hanging them down from the hips. Pressing evenly with the appropriate thigh and slightly weighting that seat bone, the rider repositions the horse's shoulder that is leaning in or bulging out. Thereby educate the horse to carry his shoulders over/above his feet during both straight and lateral work – which will be necessary during future collected work.

Exercises for other YEH flatwork development goals:

- **Exercise to encourage YEH to travel with a longer neck and with his nose in front of the vertical:** If the horse is too much against the contact, moves with a too-short neck, and/or holds his nose at or behind the vertical, release the rein forward that is tighter. The horse is likely to stretch his nose forward toward that now softer rein. Then release the other rein forward to accept what the horse has offered and to reward him with a softer connection. Release forward again, if necessary. Do this at any gait. This will allow/produce a longer neck and a more open throat angle. Maintain this while riding to confirm this posture and connection. Ride the horse forward on a long enough step to continue to develop that connection.
- **Exercise to lighten/collect a YEH horse at canter:** Lighten the horse's shoulders by using leg/seat aids during the first beat of the 3-beat canter stride, not the last beat; touch the horse just behind the girth with the outside leg during the stride's first beat. Ride the horse's shoulders up and out, not down, as he completes each stride.
- **Exercise to develop even bending at walk:** Place 4 12' poles on the ground in a box shape. Ride in a walk circle around that box, with the rider attentive to the symmetry of that circle track. Then walk inside that box each way with aids focused upon even bending of the horse's whole body to supple his back, shoulders, and neck.
- **Exercise to improve YEH's attention and ability to step along a curved track attentively, evenly, and with appropriate bend. This exercise can improve the horse's cadence, as well.** Set 5 or 6 heavy square poles in a fan shape, spacing the poles evenly and c. 7 feet apart at their outer edge. At the inner edge, set the poles close enough that a horse can move walk-step by walk-step over each them on a curved track. Consider positioning the poles in an arena corner – where horse is already accustomed to tracking on a curved line.
Ride this at the inner edge at the walk in both directions and in the middle at the trot in both directions. Raise poles at outer ends, inner ends, or both, depending upon what best suits next steps with the

horse. Ride through this exercise until the horse is comfortable moving attentively and with regularity and suppleness in both directions.

Note any difference between quality of the horse's movement and carriage in one direction as opposed to the other direction. Analyze that difference and develop the horse with appropriate further flatwork to improve the regularity of his movement and the suppleness and even/equal bending of his body in both directions.

- **Exercise to avoid over-bending the neck while turning:** During turns, ride the horse from the outside aids to avoid over-bending the horse's neck to the inside. This developed habit will pay dividends when jumping because the horse will be straighter when his rider turns him onto the line of approach to a jump.

Recommendations for YEH jumping development. Always ride wearing a well-fitted, buckled helmet; wear a vest; and be mindful of safety. Never jump without another person present, preferably an adult with a working phone.

General maxims:

- Train the horse to jump in a relaxed manner from both the trot and the canter.
- Develop the jumping canter so that a line from the horse's nose to his hip bone is parallel to the ground.
- Ride straight and forward to the fences with balanced, energetic, yet relaxed strides that are not too quick.
- Focus the horse on the fence and use enough leg early to ask the horse to carry the rider there; approaching the fence, maintain leg for support or for additional encouragement, if necessary.
- Ride with the long-term goal of developing canter "gears"; for instance, utilize at canter the 10-steps-longer, 10-steps shorter exercise (described above) to begin developing more than one canter.
- Try always to select jumps that are an appropriate next step based upon each horse's jumping experience, development, and attitude. Horses differ: read the horse.
- Consider using this developmental order with a YEH: school flatwork in an arena; school flatwork in a field; school jumping in the arena; then add jumping in that field over appropriately selected cross country fences.
- Jump banks up before down.
- To develop horse willingness to jump into water, first enter that water. Next, jump onto dry ground in front of that water; then, jump into that water.

Various jumping exercises for YEHs:

- **Exercises for jumping YEHs from trot:** To create regularity of trot tempo and step length, **align ground poles (square, if possible) at 4 to 4.5 feet apart.** Establish regular rhythm and tempo over the trot poles. Raise them to add suspension/cadence and to increase hind end strength. (Initially, walk over ground poles set at the horse's walk distance to accustom that horse to stepping calmly and regularly over each pole in succession; start first with a single pole and then add successive poles. Initially, add trot poles successively also, at a distance appropriate for trotting.)
A sequence of fences, first one jumped from trot: 3 or 4 ground poles ending 8' before an X or vertical, 18' to vertical, 21' to an oxer.
Practice trotting with commitment and without tension to XC obstacles like logs, ditches, banks, and water.
- **Exercise to help some YEHs figure out how to jump:** When first jumping, **trot the horse to a low fence and canter away upon landing.** Some horses understand more quickly how to complete their jumping arc when landing in canter, not trot.
- **Exercise for riders of horses who are or might be hesitant, lookie, or shuffley with their feet before fences:** To focus the rider upon developing seat and aids that are supple, clear, and in-the-moment, place a pair of cones several meters both before and after a small jump so that the ride line to and away from the jump runs straight between those two cone pairs. After the rider develops an even-tempo trot or canter with sufficient impulsion, focus that rider upon maintaining that tempo and impulsion between the two pairs of cones. By riding in the moment, the rider will direct the horse to maintain the quality, tempo, and length of step all the way to the base of the fence, and after it. Eventually, this rider will correctly anticipate/feel

a horse's pre-jump tendency before it is manifested – and will influence it accordingly. That is the Zen of developing YEHs.

- Exercise to introduce the bounce concept to a YEH: Start with two logs or two poles on the ground (square poles, if possible, to avoid their rolling). Depending upon whether the horse will approach in trot or canter and upon the horse's stride length, set them 9 to 11 feet apart. Adjust that distance as necessary. When raising the poles, set the first jump lower than the second or set both of them low. Raise the heights when developmentally appropriate. Develop a consistent tempo and stride length with sufficient impulsion; maintain an encouraging lower leg from start to finish, and don't remove the leg as the horse jumps the first element. Maintain a connection to communicate with and support the horse, but do not inhibit him with an over-firm rein. Ride positively away from the second element. (*Blyth Tait, Cross Country Clinic, 82-4*) Add a third and a fourth bounce fence when that is developmentally appropriate for horse and rider.
- **Exercise to raise the height of YEH fences:** When a YEH is jumping lower heights confidently, athletically, and safely, toward the end of rides that have included some jumping, simply raise the height of a fence or two and ride to them with the same consistent balance, impulsion, and stride length that the rider has developed as this horse's current best jumping canter. Ride with an assistant on the ground so that time and energy are not lost because the rider must handle the jumps. In other words, do not risk losing the YEH's attention and readiness due to dismounting to change fences.
- **Exercise to alter a YEH's tendency to be too quick and too forward before and after jumping:** Select a curved jumping line between two jumps set at a height appropriate for the horse. Position the jumps at 6 or 7 strides apart on a right-bending line, for instance. Jump each one separately and then together as related fences. If the horse is tense and hurrying upon landing after the first jump, ride him from canter to walk there. Do this several times, turning him once left, once right, etc., until the horse starts to wait for the rider's instruction about which way to turn or whether or not to canter on over the second fence. Then ride both jumps again on the right-bending line. Add this kind of exercise to the horse's jumping-day routine until he "gets it" – learns to wait for his rider's instruction.
- **Exercise for horses who jump too far out from a bank into water:** Place a small pile of rails 2 strides from the edge of the bank. Trot or canter over that. Move the rails closer to the bank edge for a 1-stride and then for a bounce. The horse will then be more likely to just drop into the water instead of jumping out into it. Teach YEHs also how to maintain their balance and impulsion when moving through water at trot or canter. First, know your water. Then approach the water with confirmed balance and impulsion and ride to maintain those through that water and beyond it. The rider must factor into the riding the effect of water height, water drag, and the quality of the footing. Often those require the rider to produce more impulsion during the strides in the water.
- **Responses to horse disinclination to enter water:** Below are some alternatives for a green and/or resistant horse, with the long term goal being the positive education of that horse with respect to entering any water.
 - Generally speaking, first accustom a young or green horse to entering water by walking through every rain puddle available, starting first with puddles on ground that is familiar to the horse.
- If the horse is likely to resist entering a more significant water >>
 - Include a lead horse.
 - If you have used the normal forward aids with no success, wait at the edge of the water until the horse's willingness improves.
 - If no success, select a smaller and more inviting water to enter (and take a lead horse with you, if possible).
 - Try again another day at either the same initial water or an easier one.

*Sue Hershey
July 31, 2016*