

training tips

Jump Directions Exercises

*Part two in a five part
series with Chris Pratt*

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photos by Michelle Dunn*



The photo shows "Rosie" jumping in good form - relaxed, balanced and supple.

In our previous article (August Horse Sport), Chris Pratt demonstrated how a gymnastic exercise could be used to help address different weaknesses in a horse's jumping form. In this installment, he has designed a series of exercises using a single fence to mimic many of the

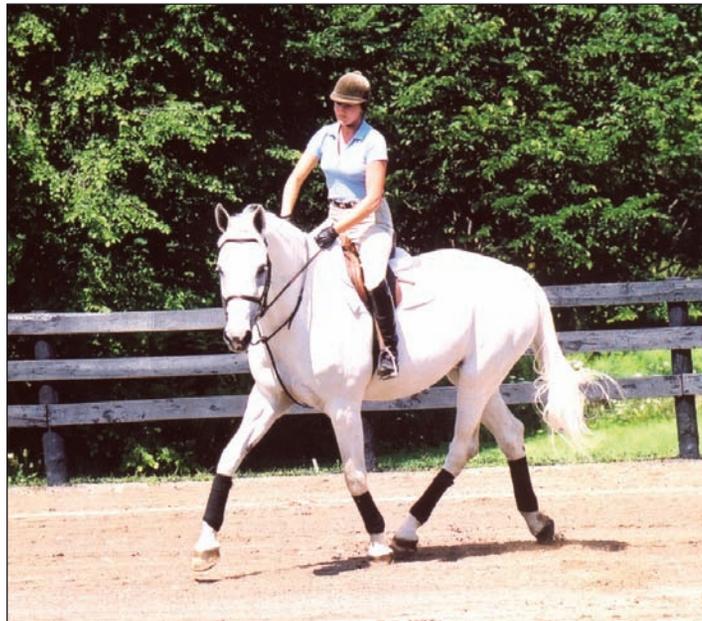
problems facing the horse and rider on course. For Pratt, it is all about simplicity - it being far easier to get carried away with complicated exercises that, more often than not, end up only frustrating and confusing both horse and rider. In these exercises, the jump is used as an exten-

sion of flatwork that will create a supple, obedient horse over fences.

To begin, the horse must be going forward into the bridle and capable of cantering a 20-metre circle without drifting to the outside or dropping her shoulder into the centre. When this is achieved the exercises can begin.

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As we focus on circles through these exercises it is important to remember a few basic tenets of a well-schooled horse. The horse must follow her nose through the circle and not her shoulder, and the horse's bend should replicate the track of the circle i.e. the horse shouldn't be straight, overbent or counterbending through the circle. It is also important that the horse be moving forward through the circle in front of the rider's legs. Forwardness is the key that can lead to a balanced, supple horse that is responsive and obedient. For so many riders, just achieving this basic "leg to hand" for-

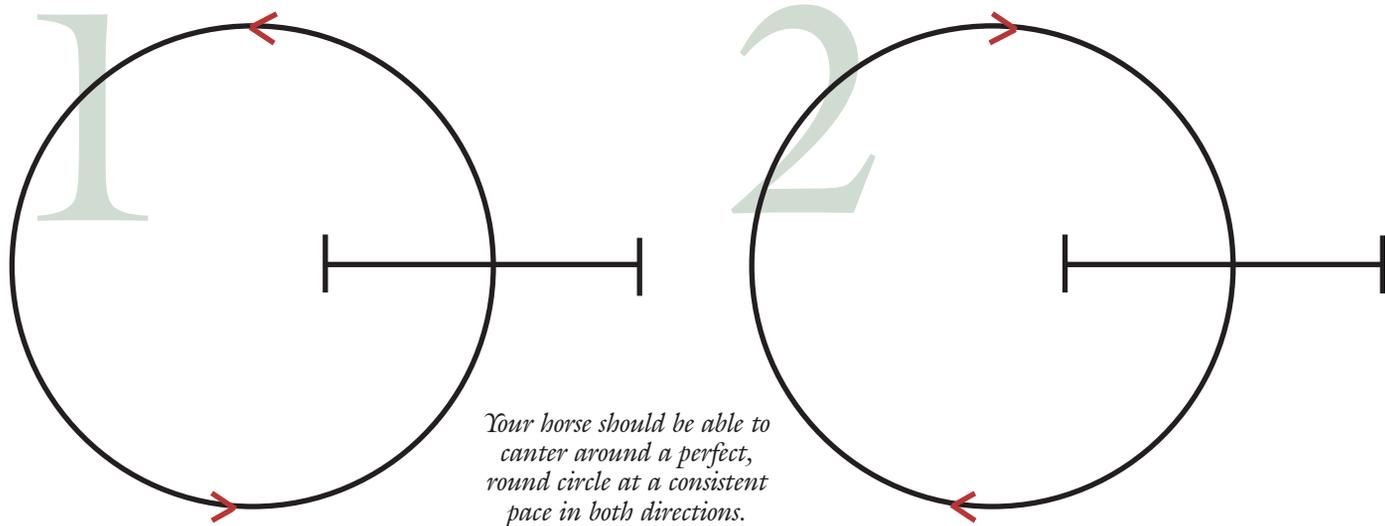


This photo demonstrates the horse stepping up behind, engaged, supple through jaw, back and neck and in front of the rider's leg while displaying free, forward impulsion.

ward-going is the hardest part of all and often (sadly) it is never truly achieved.

Flatwork leading to these exercises should emphasize suppleness in either direction, achieving a well-balanced horse on both reins that moves forward from the leg and responds to the hand.

Once the horse is demonstrating self-carriage and forward freedom on the flat, more complicated patterns such as serpentine, lateral work and different sized circles can be thrown into the mix. The horse should be able to respond to different questions on the flat that mix together rhythm, balance and suppleness without getting upset or resisting. Then it's time to throw a jump into the mix.



Pratt advocates using a jump on a circle because it emphasizes all the exercises that are done on the flat to create a supple, rideable, relaxed and responsive horse. Here, he created a series of exercises using a minimum of materials that test and reward a horse without being taxing.

Initially, begin with a cross-rail on a

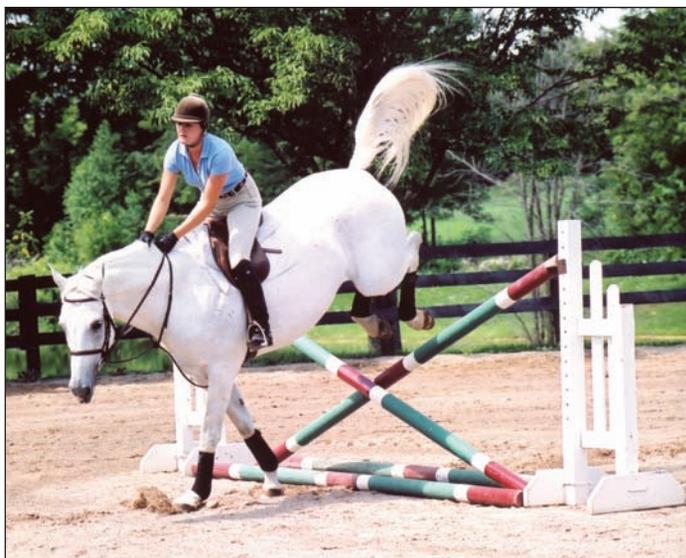
20-metre circle. As you canter the circle, the jump should fall in the same line as the circle. The horse's rhythm should be consistent through the entire circle, the jump merely being another stride. The horse should land on the same lead as she was on before the jump, maintaining a continuous bend through the circle. Using a cross-rail makes it

easier for both horse and rider to find the centre of the jump. Try not to place the jump against the wall or fence though, as that can encourage the horse to drift or straighten at the rail. Keeping the horse bent through the air, keeping the rhythm consistent and the motion forward are all necessary to the exercise.

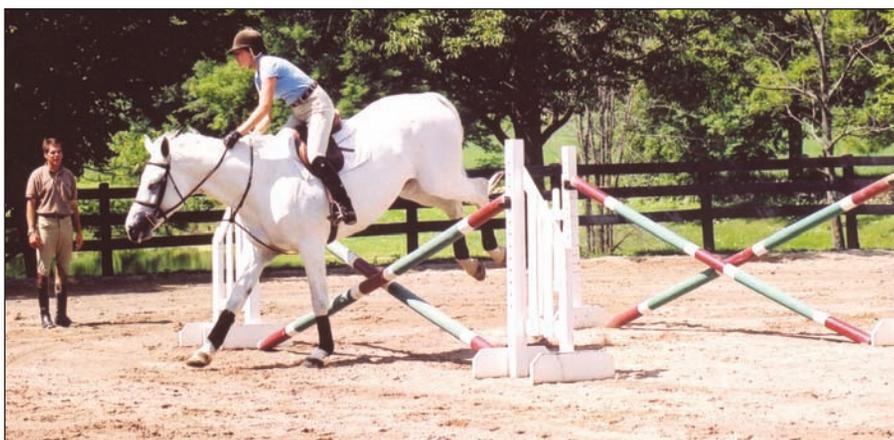
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If your horse rushes or evades in other ways, try starting with a rail on the ground. As the horse relaxes and becomes more obedient you can then progress to the cross-rail. After the horse is relaxed and doing the exercise on one lead take a short break and resume the exercise on the other lead. Since most horses are not naturally ambidextrous, much like their human counterparts, it is important to achieve an equal degree of suppleness and obedience on both leads.

Pratt emphasized that it is important for the horse to stay loose during these exercises, displaying a supple, soft outlook while still going forward.



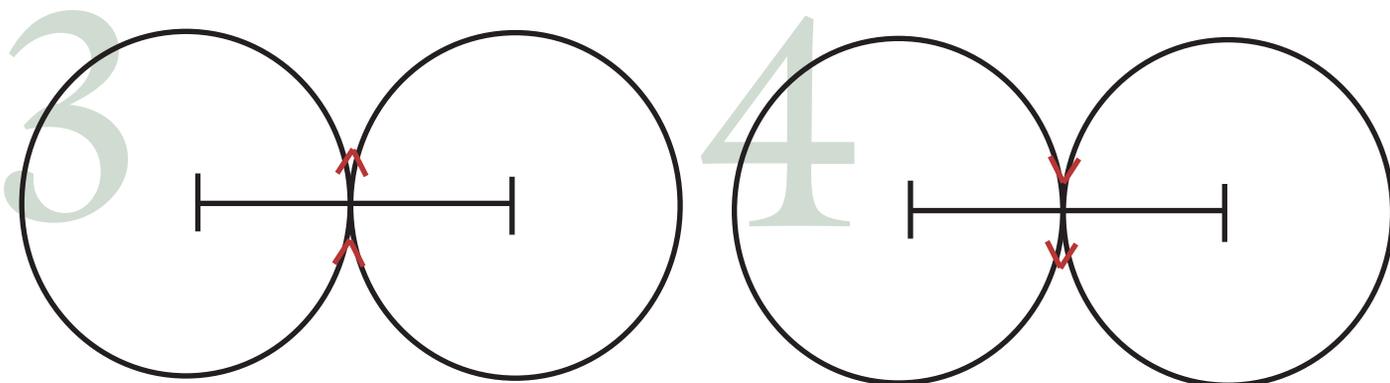
Cantering a cross-rail to the left Rosie lands on her left lead, maintains her bend and follows through freely with her haunches.



When this part of the exercise is easily achieved, and as the horse gets stronger, the exercise can be given some variation. The jump itself can be changed to a vertical, an oxer, or even a 10-foot bounce. The bend and the horse's balance become very important here as the more difficult or bigger obstacle will need more strength from the horse to maintain a consistent, balanced rhythm.

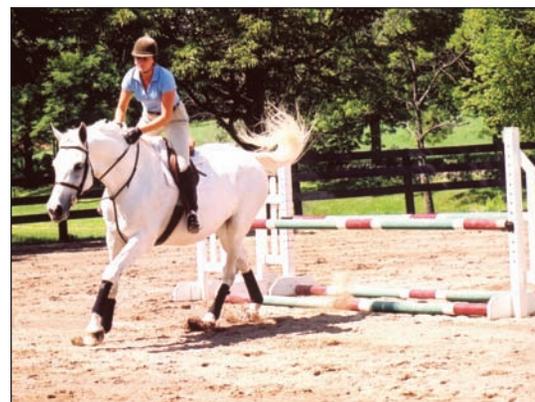
Here, Rosie jumps the bounce exercise on the right lead, maintaining the bend and balance through two consecutive obstacles.

Changing direction figure-eight



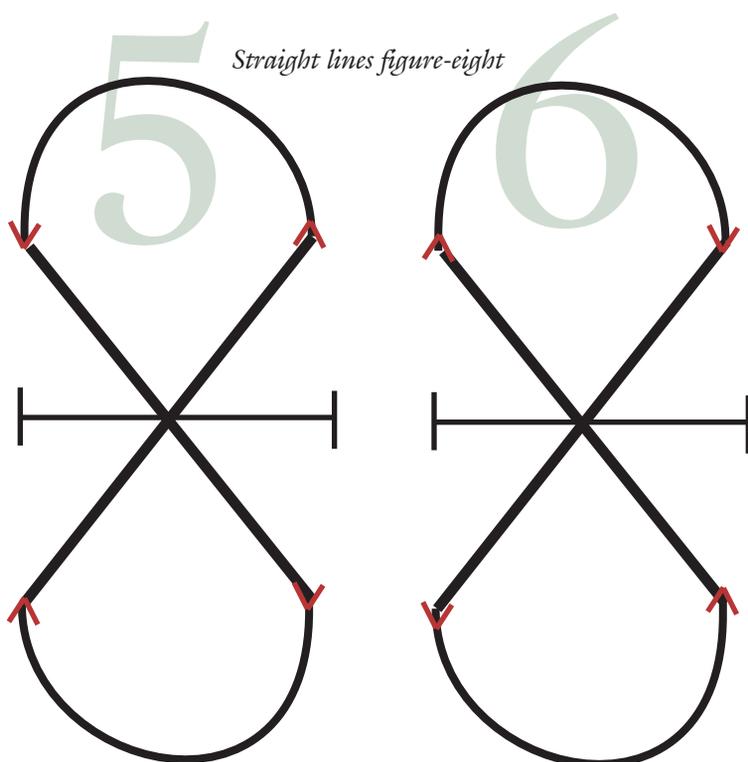
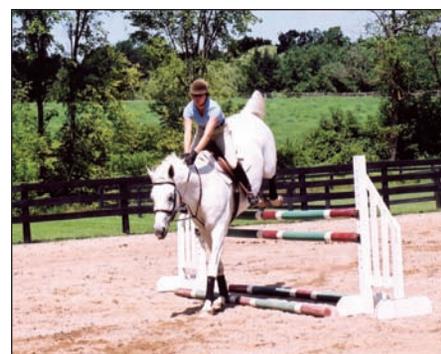
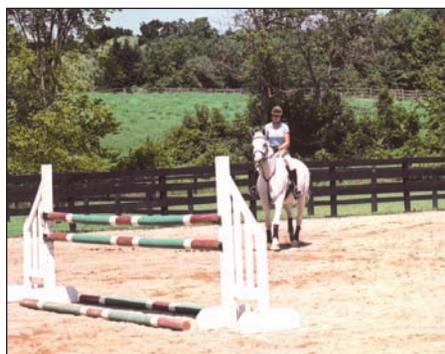
Pratt also likes to emphasize a horse's obedience, balance and dexterity by creating a figure-eight pattern over the single jump. This entails the horse leaving the ground on one lead and landing on the other lead. The rider must use the stride that the horse is in the air to change the horse's bend whilst maintaining the same rhythm. Although the exercise seems easy, it is not, requiring a lot of concentration from both horse and rider to achieve perfection. Once the single jump is mastered it can be changed to the 10-foot bounce or an oxer to demand further technique and discipline.

Over this square oxer that is the centre of a figure-eight pattern, Rosie canters away on the left lead with proper bend and nose following the circle after an approach on a right lead circle.



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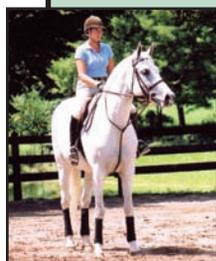
From left, Rosie approaches the vertical on an angle, having three straight strides to the fence from the figure-eight pattern. Our rider is riding forward to the jump with balance and the horse is now straight one stride out of the turn; at the take off point Rosie is totally straight while meeting the jump at an acute angle; Rosie jumps straight across the jump, landing on path that will continue for three straight strides before turning right to maintain the figure-eight pattern. Note: Rosie has landed on the left lead and will need to perform a lead change before the turn to continue the exercise.



To finish, Pratt likes to challenge the horse's mastery of all these exercises merely by changing the shape of the figure-eight and angle that the horse approaches and departs from the jump. A figure-eight pattern is still made, but now the horse has a straight approach and departure from the jump. Such a simple exercise can incorporate many weaknesses and strengths associated with completing an entire course. By asking the horse to approach the jump from both angles on both leads, land on the correct lead or change leads after the jump, and maintain a consistent, even pace throughout, you are addressing every one of the basics involved in riding a complete course. The rider and horse must remain 100 per cent organized at all times for the approach and departure to remain consistent, avoiding the "snowball effect" where both pace and direction can deteriorate rapidly. When the horse is moving on the straight line she is meeting the jump at a 45 degree angle and changing her lead in the air, these exercise have been perfected. Again, it is best to start with a cross-rail, progress to a vertical and finish with a square oxer that can be jumped from both directions. Patience is the key when dealing with any horse young or old. The idea of perfecting a simple exercise is much more productive than attempting and failing an intricate, complicated exercise and often much more rewarding!

Trainer Bio

Since our last article with Chris Pratt he has managed to compile some impressive competition results. He won the \$25,000 Scotia Trust Grand Prix in Collingwood with Sue Grange's Markant and was fifth with his other ride Rivendell. In the Modified Grand Prix, he was second with Nero and third with Ishan. At Ottawa's Capital Classic, Pratt won the Modified Grand Prix with Rivendell, who also won the Modified Grand Prix at Hendervale. He also won Open Jumper classes at Blainville with Markant and Ishan.



Our demonstration rider for this article, Jennifer Jones, has continued the winning ways that made her a successful rider in the U.S. She rode Albro Creek Farm's Rutherford to the championship in the Pre-Green Hunters at Blainville, Ottawa and Collingwood and was reserve champion at Blainville on her own Sno White in the Combined Working Hunters.

