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In the clear

Could your horse's focus use a tune-up? Daniel Moseley shows you how to get him thinking on his feet

There's nothing more frustrating than having your chance of a clear round and a rosette scuppered by an unnecessary four faults.

Perhaps your horse gets strong and tends to plow through the top rail of a fence or maybe he's prone to hanging a leg. Either way, the key is to train him to focus, react and think on his feet – in other words, to be more careful.

Training your horse to be more careful is all about introducing a variety of different exercises to keep him thinking, and stop him from becoming stale and switching off. It's also heavily dependent upon your own riding – you can't expect your horse to jump in perfect form

from the correct distance if you're disorganised in the saddle. While it can be tempting, particularly in a jump-off, to kick on blindly in an attempt to get to the other side as quickly as possible, take a moment to run through a checklist in your head...

- am I sitting evenly?
- is my horse straight and heading for the middle of the jump?
- is my horse sitting on his hindleg?
- have I got control of his shoulder?
- am I riding in a positive rhythm?

If you can answer yes to each of these questions, then you're well on your way to giving your horse the best chance to jump cleanly. ►

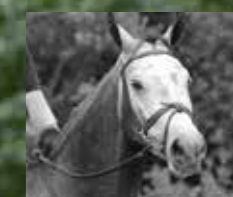


Our expert



Showjumper **Daniel Moseley** has represented Great Britain at Young Rider and Senior level at European Championships and Nations Cups, and has been on the World Class Development programme for six years. At 21, he won the prestigious Queen Elizabeth II Cup. He trains horses and riders from his base in Lincolnshire.

Our model



Daniel rides **Escapado S**, an eight-year-old KWPV gelding owned by Richard and Jo Hooper. 'Paddy' is competing at CSI*** and qualified for Foxhunters at the Horse of the Year Show in 2016.

Moving along

If you want your horse to think and react quickly while on the course, he has to be responsive to your aids on the flat, too. If you're riding down to a fence, you want to be able to put your leg on and feel your horse move immediately forward off of it – what you don't want to have to do is take your legs away from his sides to give him an enormous kick. To achieve this level of responsiveness, you need to

teach your horse to react positively to a light aid. Closing your heel and your leg around your horse should be enough to encourage him forward into trot. If it takes a considerably heavier aid to get a response, school lots of transitions with your aids as light as possible, using a tickle of the whip to encourage him to respond if needed. If you teach him to react to the smallest of aids, then you'll have far more levels of reaction to call upon when you need them.

TOP TIP

Transitions are a great way to get your horse engaged, active and responsive, whether they're between or within gaits. In fact, a jump can also be considered a transition. Just like transitions on the flat, the way you ride it determines the quality of the work that follows it.



Exercise one

How to ride it: This is a simple exercise, so it requires just the basics from you – straightness, rhythm and a good, active canter. Maintain a supportive leg as your horse figures out how to tackle the fence and be prepared for him to give it plenty of air.

What it does: The V-poles make your horse back off of the jump, which is great if your horse is prone to rushing or getting strong.

How to set it up: Remember last month's V-poles? This month, we'll be using them to back your horse off a flimsy fence and make him think about how to tackle it. To set it up, add V-poles to an upright fence that falls easily, such as a plank.



How to set it up: Set up a small upright with a canter pole placed on both the take-off and landing side, three metres from the fence. You can add as many canter poles as you like, but one on either side is the minimum. You can build up the height of the fence once you're comfortable with the exercise.

TOP TIP

This is a great all-round exercise, as the poles bring your horse's canter up and round, generating power for his take-off. It's my go-to if a horse has gone flat-out in a jump-off and needs an exercise to bring him back and get him to sit.



What it does: Having at least two poles makes your horse focus more on where he's putting his feet and what he's doing after he lands from the fence. This is a great exercise for a horse who's prone to rushing his fences, as he'll have to slow down his approach and back off a bit in order to get it right. It's also really helpful for improving your horse's shape over a fence, as the pole on the landing side will encourage your horse to drop his head and round his body to keep an eye on it. It'll teach your horse to think for himself, too – if you've ridden the exercise correctly but he makes a mistake, he'll be able to figure it out and fix it on his next attempt.

Exercise two

How to ride it: The key to this exercise is not getting too hung up on trying to see your stride. Instead, approach it in a rhythmic, active canter, and focus simply on maintaining that rhythm and your horse's straightness, throughout. This will allow your horse to find his own balance and encourage him to take some responsibility. Try to forget that the poles are there and ride the fence as though it's a simple upright on its own – this way, if your horse gets the distance wrong to the pole, he'll have to figure out how to make it work for himself.



Poles on take-off and landing are really helpful for improving your horse's shape over a fence



Exercise three

How to ride it: Bounce fences require a short, active canter, but the great thing about this exercise is that if you struggle to shorten your horse's stride without losing engagement, riding through the line will help you to find that canter naturally. Don't feel tempted to check or interfere too much – grids like this do the training for you, so just make sure you've given your horse a good, straight approach and that you remain balanced over his back through the grid.

TOP TIP

Use gridwork as a chance to practice a supportive jumping position that doesn't hinder your horse's effort. Because the fences come up quickly, particularly when set at bounce distances, it's important to maintain a neutral upper body position and allow your horse to jump up to you, rather than throwing your upper body forward. A dramatic effort from you will overburden his front end and make his job more difficult.

How to set it up: Set up three small fences on bounce distances (three metres). If you or your horse are new to bounces, start with two fences, then add in the third or, if you're more experienced, add as many fences as you like. I don't tend to do this over big fences, it's more of a gymnastic exercise over cross-poles or small uprights.



What it does: Multiple fences on a bounce distance teach your horse to jump and think quickly. If he takes too long to think about it or is slow to snap his legs up, he'll knock the fence down. The consistency of the exercise means that if he does knock one of the fences down, he should learn from his mistake by his next attempt. ■



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Improving straightness for a cleaner jump

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Spook-busting your schooling session