

STARTING YOUR Green HORSE OVER FENCES



PART II ▸ BY CRAIG THOMPSON

In the last article we introduced a young horse to jumping at the trot using low flower boxes with an emphasis on keeping the horse relaxed, regular, and straight. In this article we build on that introduction, adding a vertical, oxer, and the canter. The jumps we use this time remain simple, as does their placement: a low vertical to a low oxer on the center line of the ring, 45' apart; two flower boxes placed next to the vertical and oxer; and a taller box placed on the diagonal next to the oxer.

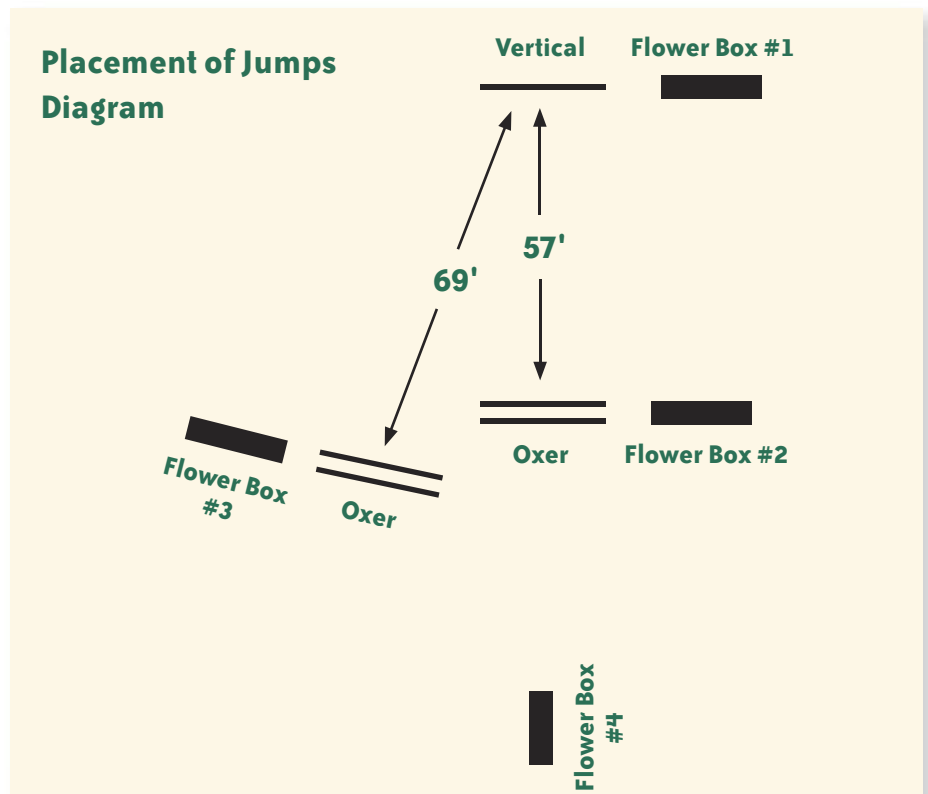
As with our last schooling session, while riding on the flat and before beginning to jump, check that you can reach each rein forward and stroke the horse's neck with your hand. If your horse speeds up when you do this, slow him and try again. When you can do this at the walk, try it at the trot. When you can do it at the trot, try it at the canter.

Ultimately you want to be able to do this between jumps at the canter, both as a reward to the horse and as a way of checking that he is relaxed and regular, even while jumping a course. Once your horse is relaxed and regular, make sure that you can go forward and back within each gait. When you go forward, try to soften your fingers, hand, and elbow. When you come back, try to maintain the softness, coming back just by using your voice and saying, out loud, "Whoa." For more on this and the more introductory jumping exercises, see the first part of this series.

Exercise 1

After implementing the exercises in the last article in this series (May/June 2005 issue), your horse should be able to trot a flower box quietly. Start now by trotting the flower box that is next to the oxer, going away from the other flower box.

For the moment, you don't want to point your horse into the line, but out of the line. When you trot the box, land and halt. By doing so, you are checking that the exercises we practiced in the last article are still a part of the horse's learning. This is important. With young and green horses, don't be afraid





to go over previous training, keeping in mind that horses learn through repetition.

Hopefully your horse will trot the box quietly in a straight line and halt politely. When he does, and it may be after one try or five tries, you are ready to trot the same flower box in the other direction, into the line and pointed at the until now unused flower box. Having trotted the box going out of the line and into the halt, it should now be easy to trot the box in this new direction and halt. Your goal is to halt no more than half way down the line.

This may take a few tries. Don't forget to use your voice, saying, "Whoa" loud enough for your horse to hear and notice you.

Now trot the flower box into the line, halt, and ask him to move to the left away from your right leg. He might not like this idea so much. He may toss his head, twist his neck, or swish his tail. You may have to use your stick to tap him on the right shoulder or behind your right leg. Your goal is to get him to yield to your leg, or in fancier terms, leg-yield. I hesitate to call this a leg-yield, however, as for many riders this conjures up visions of complicated dressage and contorted equita-

The Jumps

The jumps we use to school horses come in a variety of shapes and sizes. While an entire set of show jumps isn't necessary, this series of articles is based on a minimum of five pairs of standards, four flower boxes, and 12 poles with enough jump cups to hold all the poles. The cups should be of high enough quality to not bend easily with use. The poles should be made of wood and heavy enough that if a horse hits one, it stings a bit, thus encouraging him to avoid hitting it a second time. Also, heavy poles are less likely to roll if knocked. Plastic PVC pipe does not work well for jump poles, as it is too light and smooth. Horses generally don't mind hitting it enough to be effective, and there is the danger of the horse rolling the pole and tripping himself. Flower boxes come in a variety of heights and widths. A useful dimension would be eight feet in length, eight to sixteen inches tall, and six to twelve inches wide. Stuff them with bright plastic flowers to really give your horse something to look at when schooling at home, then he won't think twice about them at events.

A ring is obviously an ideal place to set the jumps. If one is not available, consider using a fenced paddock or pasture. If a fence line is not available, consider placing the jumps near a tree line or other natural barrier. I once saw a perfectly useful schooling area in Argentina bordered completely with round bales. Avoid placing the jumps in the middle of a huge field. Young horses wander easily enough, tend to steer less than we would like, and can take advantage of wide-open spaces to their benefit and our detriment.

Exercise 1 Above: In this picture I have trotted the flower box into the line with Perrier Walk, a five-year-old American Thoroughbred gelding owned and bred by Danny and Wendy O'Brien of Wassaic, New York. Note that my stick is in my right hand, ready to aid in my effort to leg-yield to the left upon halting. Also notice the placement of the low oxer and the taller box. To start, I will use an X oxer and make it a square oxer once the horse is comfortable. If the horse stops at the oxer the first time, don't be afraid to lay the poles right down on the ground until he is comfortable. You are better off breaking the exercise down into easily digestible parts that the horse is comfortable with and can negotiate successfully. Though it's hard to tell from the picture, the taller box is actually at a slight angle to the oxer, essentially on the diagonal.

Exercise 1 Below: I have halted after the box. Perrier Walk is relaxed through his topline and straight.



tion. What you are actually doing is no different than if you wanted your horse to move close enough to a gate for you to open it without getting off. You only need a couple steps sideways, just enough to point you at the vertical that should now be in front of you. If your horse doesn't understand what you are asking, try again.

Trot the vertical, halt, leg-yield. When you can trot, halt, and leg-yield to a line that centers you on the vertical, finish the exercise by trotting the vertical. After the vertical, if your horse lands relaxed and regular, continue at the canter to the end of the schooling area and turn in the direction of the canter—right or left depending on the lead. It's quite possible that your horse will land on the right lead given the leg-yield prior to the jump, which is worth keeping in mind as you consider how what happens on the takeoff side of a jump affects what happens on the landing side. If your horse lands worried or nervous, don't be afraid to halt on the landing side, pat him, and start again.

While it may seem like an unnecessary detail, try to make yourself ride to the end of the schooling area, or at least five or six strides on a straight line, before turning. This will pay off later by giving you a more rideable, straight horse on landing.

When you and your horse are comfortable with this exercise in this direction, turn it around. Trot the other flower box into the line, halt, leg-yield to the right, and trot out over the small oxer, again cantering away. Don't be surprised if your horse jumps a bit green at the oxer, even if he was relaxed about the vertical. With green horses, every jump you add can be exciting, especially in the beginning.

Exercise 2

When your horse can quietly trot both flower boxes, as well as leg-yield to the vertical and oxer and canter away quietly, it is time to put the vertical and oxer together. From a relaxed, regular trot, trot the vertical into the line, towards the oxer. On landing, continue at the canter. Having cantered away from the vertical and oxer in Exercise 1, this shouldn't be too hard, as your horse should already be thinking land and canter.

To make things easier for him and to help you maintain your equitation even if he jumps somewhat green, as you trot the vertical keep your eye on the oxer. As you land over the vertical, bring your eye up beyond the oxer, keeping the oxer at the bottom of your vision and looking toward where you will be going on landing, which is toward



Exercise 1 Above: This picture shows our crude version of the leg-yield, with the tail swishing, the neck twisted and the topline and jaw resistant. But it doesn't matter right now. With a bit of practice, this will become smoother and the resistance will disappear. For now the important thing is that the horse moves sideways, which is evident in this picture as Perrier Walk moves his left hind and right front away from my right leg. Note that even as the horse looks away, my eye and head remain directed to where we are going, the vertical.



Exercise 1 Above: Following the leg-yield, in this picture we have trotted the low vertical and are now cantering away from it. The leg-yield helped to set up the right lead canter, which we will want later in our schooling session. We will now head toward the end of the ring and then turn right.



Exercise 1 Above: Here we have turned the exercise around. Having trotted in over the flower box that is positioned next to the vertical, I have leg-yielded the horse to the right and trotted out over the low X oxer. The horse's hind feet and tail, as well as my somewhat untrusting position, tell you how he jumped the oxer the first time—green! But don't be disturbed by a green horse acting green. Though inexperienced, this horse is very athletic and a great jumper. While he is showing his inexperience here, he is also showing his instinct, specifically, a desire to jump up and avoid touching the rails, both great traits in an event horse!



the end of the ring. With the vertical and oxer placed 45' apart, most horses will trot into the line and canter out in four strides. However, since your horse doesn't know where he's going, don't be surprised if he does five strides down the line the first time.

When you land after the oxer, take a quick read on which lead he has landed, ride toward the end of the ring, and then turn in the direction of the canter lead. Having made the turn, return to the trot and repeat the exercise. If your horse jumped green or awkwardly at either the vertical or the oxer, don't panic. Remember, young horses are green and awkward.

The second time you trot into the line, try to improve on your first effort. If your horse did five strides down the line the first time, on landing over the vertical ask him to move up just like you did on the flat before jumping. If he landed on the left lead over the oxer and you tried to turn right, try to read his lead on landing and turn in the direction he's headed. For our configuration of jumps, we would like him to land on the right lead. To encourage this, and to help you and your horse to think about something other than the jumps under you, try opening your right rein as you jump the oxer and look to the

Quick Tips

The Tack

- A comfortable, high quality jumping saddle
- A well-fitted bridle with flash noseband and rubber reins
- A breastplate and possibly a standing martingale
- A jumping stick

The Jumps

- Five pairs of standards
- Twelve wooden poles
- Four flower boxes

Exercise 1

- Relaxed, regular and straight
- Stroke the neck by reaching forward
- Forward and back at the trot, touching the walk if necessary

Exercise 2

- Trot the flower box next to the vertical going away from the oxer
- Stay straight, regular and calm
- Right leg, stick in the right hand to keep horse straight

Exercise 3

- Trot both flower boxes
- Halt on landing if necessary
- Guard the side not framed in by the vertical or oxer

Exercise 2 Above: Here we see the oxer, now made square, from a different angle. Having jumped the X oxer a time or two, Perrier Walk is now relaxed and about to give a very educated effort at a small square oxer. Notice his relaxed expression, ears pricked forward with interest, and my trusting position. The difference between the horse's effort in the previous picture and this one is simple—education.



Exercise 3 Above: Having learned from the previous exercises, Perrier Walk is well prepared to jump a new effort without having it spoon fed to him. This taller box is a good test, as it isn't framed in by standards, meaning that the horse must be truly straight. I also can't make it smaller, which means I'd better have the necessary tools at hand to jump it, namely a relaxed, straight horse that is in front of my leg. This would be an easy place for a horse to try to run out to the left, but by earlier teaching the horse a rudimentary leg-yield, he should well understand that if he tries to drift left, I will correct him by closing my left leg. Having landed after the square oxer on the right lead canter, I was able to continue through the turn to this box. The horse's ears, in this case pricked back towards me, show suspicion, but my position shows that I trust him. Further, I have looped the rein forward, just like we would do on the flat, encouraging him to use his neck over the top of the jump. On landing, we will come back to the trot, leg-yield to the right, and finish the exercise by trotting the flower box that is positioned by the vertical.

right even as you ride to the end of the ring. Remember, horses generally do what we tell them. The more you tell him to land on the right lead with your equitation, the more likely he will. Whether you master landing on the right lead or not, when you can trot in and canter out of the line easily, you are ready for Exercise 3.

Exercise 3

Training horses, like training riders, is largely a process of putting together building blocks. Done correctly, each of the exercises in this series builds on the previous exercise. With that in mind, the third exercise should be a natural extension of everything the horse has done so far. If at any time you run into trouble, don't be afraid to go back and repeat the earlier exercises. For example, if your horse tends to be strong on the landing side of a jump, don't be afraid to halt on landing a few times. Conversely, if at any time your horse is behind your leg or just crawling over the jumps, don't be afraid to land and depart from the jump at a forward canter.

Exercise 3 begins the same as Exercise 2. Trot the vertical into the line, canter out over the oxer. On landing, ride to the end of the ring and turn right. If your horse has landed on the right lead, continue on a right hand turn at the canter to the taller box that we've placed on the diagonal. (Note that we've used a taller box for this article, but you could also use a low flower box or a low vertical.) But what if your horse has landed on the left lead? No problem. In fact, if your horse lands on the left lead, you are presented with a great opportunity to put together some of the earlier exercises. On landing, trot, leg-yield to the left away from your right leg, and then canter off to the right. Try to do this before turning right at the end of the ring.

You have already practiced all these parts. Coming back to a halt after a jump is harder than coming back to the trot, so that shouldn't be too hard. Leg-yielding at the trot is no different than from the walk or halt, and need be no more sophisticated than if you were pushing your horse sideways to avoid a hole or rock in a field. And you've already been cantering away from the jumps.


Once you've picked up the right lead, continue to the right and jump the taller box. Don't dwell on looking for a distance right now. The box is small enough to allow quite a wide margin for error. Instead, focus on keeping one rhythm, just like you did when warming up on the flat, and staying straight, just like you did when cantering one flower box to the other in the first exercises detailed in the last installment of this series.

On landing after the taller box, come back to the trot, leg-yield your horse away from your left leg for a step or two, and trot the flower box that is next to the vertical. If you overshoot the flower box, halt, leg-yield your horse back to a line that will lead you to the flower box, and then continue the exercise. If you need to, halt a couple times after the taller box. However, in the ideal scenario, the leg-yield will help soften the horse and you, allowing for a nice, regular trot to the final flower box. After the flower box, if you are on a sluggish horse, canter away; if you are on a bit of a quick horse, halt before turning after the flower box.

Play with this exercise or pattern until you and your horse can complete it with ease and fluidity. It may happen in one schooling session; it may take several days. At this point in the game, try to quit while you are ahead, which is when your horse does it better than he did the first time, but before you tire him out and take the pleasure out of practicing for him.

When you can put together these pieces, you are well on your way to putting together an entire course, which we tackle in the next installment in this series.





LESSONS
TRAINING
CLINICS
SALES

✽

CROSS-COUNTRY DESIGN
AND CONSTRUCTION

✽

LOOKING FOR RESULTS
WITH YOUR YOUNG HORSE?
HOW ABOUT THESE
NUMBERS?

1 Month—February 2005
3 events—Pine Top, Sporting Days,
and Paradise Farm Horse Trials
9 starts—3 wins, 2 seconds, 1 third

*Make plans now for your young
horse to be ready for the USEA
Young Event Horse Series and
Championships.*

✽

540.454.4065
PURCELLVILLE, VIRGINIA

NATURAL ULCER CARE





Manuka LR™

Effective Treatment for Ulcers

A unique infusion of Manuka Honey from New Zealand and DGL Licorice, proven to be effective on equine ulcers. It works effectively as an antibacterial agent and specifically, by inhibiting the growth of and ultimately destroying the casual agent, *helicobacter pylori*.

**To learn more,
call (toll free)
888.638.8262**



Equiglobal USA Ltd.
213 Haverhill Road
East Kingston, NH 03827

www.emeraldvalleyequine.com