



Smooth Triple Gymnastic

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By Lynne Stephenson

While at home in the winter we try to come up with some great exercises to keep the horses jumping well and through their back, as being stuck in the smaller indoor arenas can leave us feeling cramped.

One of my favorite exercises I like to set is a simple triple combination that is slowly built up. To start, set the following jumps in a straight line along a long wall: a cavaletti, 18' to a relatively small oxer, and then another 18' to another cavaletti. Be sure to set standards beside the cavalettis, as the cavalettis will become jumps with rails as the exercise progresses. Please also note that you should increase the distances as the



jumps get larger.

One of the ideas of the exercise is to start with the oxer low and wide, to encourage the horse to jump well through their back without needing too much interference or encouragement from the rider. The rider should simply allow the horse to jump well.

As the oxer in the middle increases in size towards the horse's upper limit of scope or ability, the rider should then start to add leg at the base of the oxer to simulate leg pressure in the ring. This added leg pressure should encourage the horse to jump up and across harder and with more power than when the jumps were lower. The horse should not start to jump 'at it' or flatten its arc when the rider applies leg. If this is happening the rider's coach should evaluate the rider's timing or amount of leg pressure added. It should be just the right amount of pressure to keep the feeling of the initial smaller oxer.

Also it is important to remember that as the third element (the vertical after the oxer) gets bigger, the rider should not do the work for the horse by pulling to encourage them to back up. The horse should help itself, and if the correct leg pressure (or lack thereof) is applied at the oxer, the horse should remain in good balance to be able to do so at the vertical.

Some helpful tips for a rider's coach to consider when troubleshooting this exercise are as follows:

If the horse is still jumping a bit stiff through the back, changing the approach to a curved line can help encourage curvature and suppleness in the horse's spine and a more helpful and relaxed topline. Shortening the approach out of the corner or circling to the first element can help this.

It is important that the rider maintain a following arm through the exercise – it is important to maintain an even flowing rhythm both in and out of the exercise, and be sure to avoid pulling into the exercise. If the horse wants to be over-eager into the exercise, allow the short distances and smooth even feeling to encourage the horse to stay in rhythm.

At the oxer in particular, a rider can widen their hands to encourage straightness and balance without being too direct or without interfering with the horse's ability to jump.

This is a great exercise to teach your horse to jump well through their body and learn to manage their own balance and to check the balance of a non interfering rider. Keep remembering to sit still (no pushing or pulling to accommodate distances) and let the horse's movement, stride and balance improve on their own.

Please remember to always jump with a knowledgeable and trustworthy instructor, and always wear a helmet!