



An Exercise with Chris Surbey

Chris Surbey

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One aspect of daily riding that is often overlooked is a good quality transition. Whether at the beginning of the ride making a transition from the walk to the trot for the first time, or as you are about to step into the canter on course in a competition, the transition is an important part of the connection and communication between horse and rider.

The purpose of this exercise is to improve the timing and effectiveness of the rider as well as the responsiveness and balance of the horse through a basic transition. The main focus is your ability to promptly change gears between trot and canter. To be successful, the communication between horse and rider must be clear and effective.

To set this exercise, start by setting 3 trot poles spaced 4.5 feet apart, followed by another rail approximately 60 feet away from the last trot pole (this rail will eventually become a jump). Incorporate these poles as a part of your warm-up by trotting them in both directions, focusing on maintaining an even rhythm and staying in the center of each rail.

After you have completed your canter warm up, start the exercise by trotting through the trot poles and making a balanced and organized transition to canter before the last rail. The emphasis should be on a quality transition and not on getting the transition done as quickly as possible.

Now make the last rail into a small vertical (whatever height is suitable for you and your horse's level of experience for a warm up jump). Continue the exercise, and work to keep your own nerves, as well as your horse's, in check as you work for a balanced transition. There is no "right" answer in this exercise; any number of canter strides is acceptable between the trot rails and the jump. As best you can, try to practice being patient and not to treat your flatwork and jumping as two separate ideas. Many riders will tend to rush their horse into canter when faced with a jump but in my experience, success with this exercise comes by remaining calm and organized.

To increase the difficulty level of the exercise the jump can be raised, changed to an oxer, or brought closer to the trot rails, leaving less room for error or delay in the transition. For less experienced horses and riders, the jump can be set further away from the trot rails, allowing for more time to put all of the pieces together.