

Show Pre

By Brian M

This is the time of the year that I really enjoy. Horses are fit, fresh and getting ready to go to the first proper horse shows of the New Year. The horses and riders have done a lot of flat work over the last few months, and the jumping work has mostly been small jumps, gymnastics and control exercises. In our first shows, we start to introduce bigger wider jumps, more fill and more courses.

I really enjoy the course design aspect of teaching and training. I find it very energizing to come to the barn knowing that there's something set that asks a lot of questions, can be done a few different ways, and will hopefully produce fun, productive and interesting lessons.

In our Equimark business, most of our students jump 1.20-1.30m and are mounted on horses that more or less know their job. With that in mind when I'm designing courses and exercises, I mostly focus on what I think the riders really need to practice to grow in their development, understanding and readiness to ride in the show ring.

For the most part I start with the hypothesis that the riders need to practice more than the horses. Once I've designed the course, how much of it we practice before jumping it as a whole will depend on the level of the horse and rider. The greener the horse or rider, the more I will break the course up and practice most of it individually before putting it together as a whole.

The set course will usually last us several lessons. In the first lesson for each rider over a given course, I'm more inclined to practice certain parts and break it up before jumping it as a course. The second lesson over this course, I'm much more likely to go directly to the entire course after just a few warm up

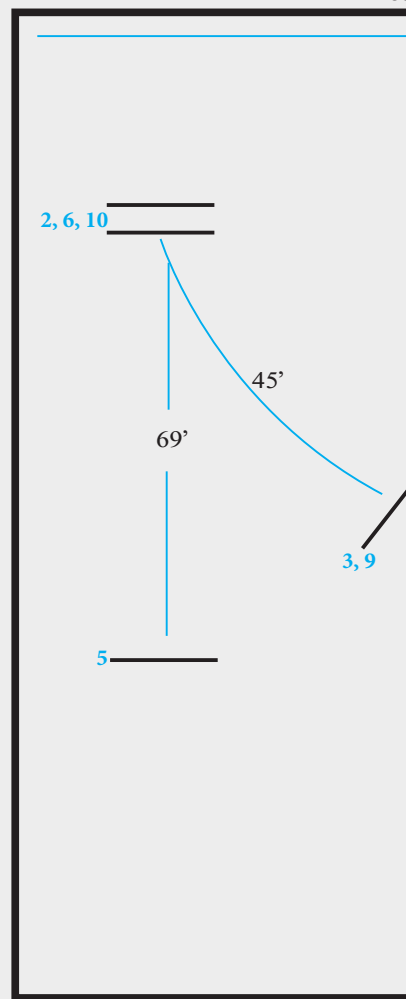
jumps.

The diagram here is an example of one of the training courses I've designed. When you examine this course there a few things to keep in mind:

1. This is designed for an indoor arena that's approximately 80' x 195';
2. The height of the fences will be approximately 1.10-1.25m;
3. The horses and riders that I teach over this are relatively established with several years' training and showing experience already under their belt.

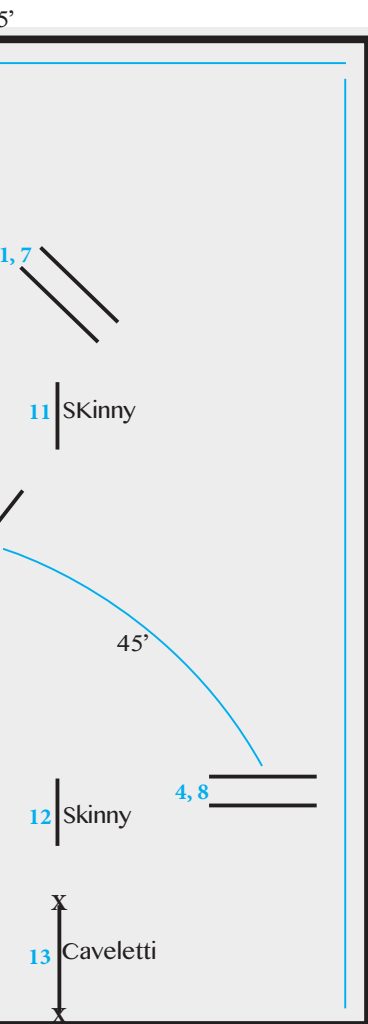
I will take you through the jumps one at a time and explain what their purpose and what my thinking was with jump height, placement and measurement of distance.

Hopefully by the end of this article you will have a feel for how the course elements are related and how each part poses a slightly different challenge together this makes a comprehensive riding and jumping exercise.



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Fence 1.

This is a square oxer set so it can be jumped in two directions (this will also be fence 7). This will be one of the bigger, wider jumps on the course. The tendency of horses and

riders is to start slow and finish fast, which is not ideal. By having a wide first jump, I'm asking the riders to have the horses alert, on their aids and out in front of them from the start. The prepared rider should not have a problem doing so as the long diagonal approach makes this much easier than if I had asked them to jump this jump off a short turn.

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Show Preparation Fences 2, 3 and 4

This is an oxer-vertical-oxer line set as a bending line to the left at 45°, followed by a bending line to the right set at 45°. This will also be fences 8, 9 and 10 going the other way, so all three jumps need to be set so they can be jumped in both directions. Early in the course, and coming off quite a short approach, the first part of this line will ride forward and on a direct line in 3 strides. As long as the rider controls the track immediately on the landing side and gets their horse's eye on the next jump, the second part of the line will ride relatively comfortably in 3 strides. This is probably the most technical related line of the course, and the success of this line rests not only upon the riders ability to have lateral and longitudinal control over the horse, but also a certain degree of technical understanding about pace, track and distance. As this is a technical question these jumps will not be set particularly big relative to the other jumps on the course.

Fences 5 and 6

This is a relatively straightforward line of vertical to oxer set at 69°. In the indoor environment, setting a line of jumps 3' shorter than normal usually equals an "on stride" feeling, so this line will ride comfortably in 5 strides. If I were to set the line at the conventional 5 stride distance of 72', it

would ride quite forward. I will set fence 5 as a tall vertical, both to incorporate practice and comfort jumping a little height and to also ask the riders not to let their concentration drop after the difficult line of fences 2,3 and 4. Providing a decent jump over fence 5, the relatively simple 5 stride distance to fence 6 should be no issue.

Fence 7

This is the first fence now jumped in the other direction and off the short right approach. As I mentioned earlier, this is the biggest and widest jump on the course. Placing it here asks the horse to jump wide off of a short turn. Depending on the horse, there may be a slight loss of balance and a tendency to get strong after fence 6, as we approach the halfway part of the course. The riders will need to assess the feeling of the horse after fence 6, and rebuild a balanced canter in the corner immediately, however they will need to keep the impulsion and the rhythm in the corner approaching fence 7. I'd like to see the rider have some awareness of the distance before committing to a track when jumping off of the short turn.

Fences 8, 9 and 10

This is the double bending line (jumps 2,3,4) 45° bending to 45° jumped the other way. Prior to this point on the



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course, I've asked largely forward questions of the riders. With that in mind the last half of the course will emphasize control. When the riders come to the bending lines for the second time, I'm going to ask them to add a stride and do 4 strides to 4 strides. I recommend these jumps be set relatively small. After fence 7 there's a little time to regroup before fence 8, and it would be in the rider's best interest to take advantage of that time to calm themselves and their horses down, rebalance the canter and establish a shorter stride prior to approaching fence 8. It's helpful to turn slightly early and jump fence 8 a little left to right, so that the rider can look and steer slightly left so the horses get their eye on fence 9 without landing too much on the direct line. As the rider jumps fence 9 they need to maintain light contact with the horse's mouth, and steer a little out in the line while at the same time making sure that the horse gets their eye on fence 10.

Fence 11

This is a tall skinny vertical set on the centre line of the arena. This is a very good control test late in the course. The riders really need to think about the

balance of the canter as well as their lateral control of the horse, as it is important to jump this jump slow and straight.

Fences 12 and 13

Jump 12 is another tall skinny vertical set on the centre line. It requires the same approach as fence 11, however it is coming from the other lead to make sure that the horse and rider can execute this test off both leads. Fence 13 is a cavaletti set quite close to the rail in the centre of the short side of the arena. I'm going to ask the riders to count their strides from 12 to 13. We will probably have practiced this once in warm up prior to doing it in the course, so we should have a stride count in mind. This is to ensure that the riders remain disciplined and focused at the end of the course. Counting on a circular bending line is a wonderful exercise for pace and track awareness.

I hope you enjoy this course, and my breakdown. Best of luck to all of you in your 2017 show season!



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