



Got a question?

Then ask Sue Mart from Bennington for her advice. In our new series, we're inviting readers to write in with their questions and Sue will offer some tips to help you.

Make sure your horse stays straight and forward on the long reins

Lisa from Stafford asks: "As spring approaches, can you give me some ideas for spicing up my pony's schooling ready for the season? I find I end up doing the same old things and both of us lack motivation."

Sue says

There are several ways to keep your horse or pony well schooled and enjoying his work throughout the season. At Bennington we believe variety is the key and every week our horses will do many different activities to help keep them supple, fit and happy. Remember, though, more than anything you need to have fun.

Why not start by booking a series of lessons with a good, local accredited

instructor, whether that's driving lessons or ridden, to work on your weaker areas and improve your pony's way of going? Regular lessons will help keep you motivated and give you ideas about what you can work on in between lessons.

Make a plan at the start of each week. For example, you could decide to do two ridden sessions, one polework session on the long reins, one lungeing session in a Pessoa and a hack or a drive out once or twice, with a day off

somewhere in there, too. Of course, the weather and what facilities you have may limit what you are able to do, but you can plan around those factors.

At Bennington we like to work our horses up and down a slope on the long-reins. While doing this, we always make sure the horses are working straight and into a good contact. Think of keeping the hindquarters active and engaged so that the horse works forward from the hind leg into the contact. This type of work helps with

balance and improving core strength, as well as fitness. It will also help to make your pony more sure-footed and boost his confidence.

If you have a few poles there are numerous exercises you can do to make schooling more fun, either on the long reins or ridden. Start by setting out four poles on a 20-metre circle, like a clockface. You can then work over and around the poles or why not go around the outside of the clockface making a transition from

Figure 1

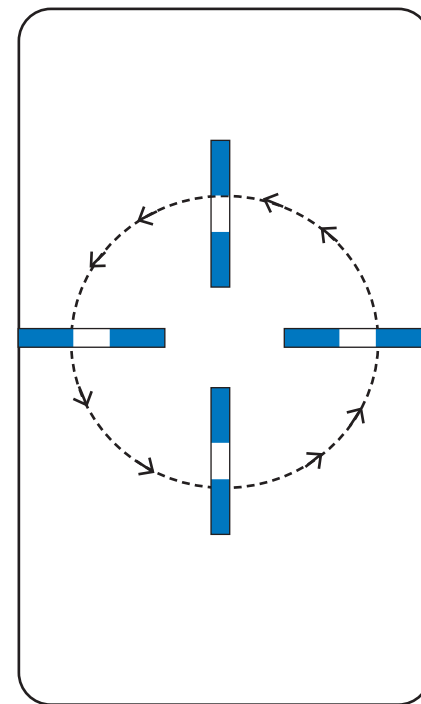
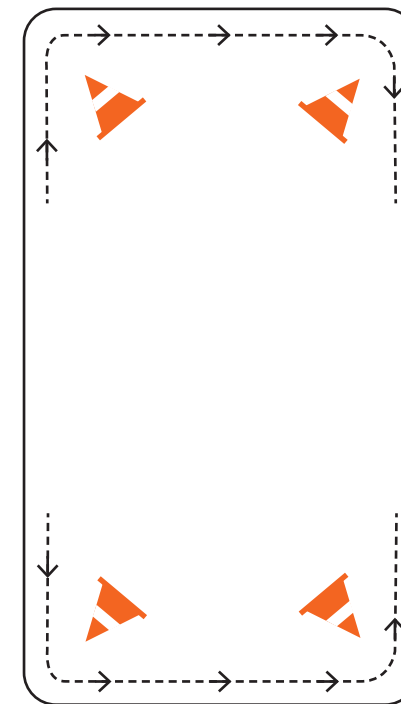


Figure 2



walk to halt at each one? Be strict with yourself about where you ask for the transition, so you know your pony is obedient to your aids. For example, do you want him to halt as his nose gets to the pole or with half of him each side of it? Prepare your transitions well in advance so your pony knows exactly what you are asking of him. You can also make plenty of changes of rein and do circles around the poles to improve suppleness. Figure 1.

One thing I use a lot is cones. I put a cone slightly in from each corner of the arena so I have to make good use of my corners, once again helping to improve suppleness as well as accuracy for your dressage tests. Figure 2.

If you're short of time or you've had a bad day in the office and you don't really feel like schooling, then why not just spend some quality time with your pony? This is great therapy for you both and will do wonders to improve your relationship. You could give him a thorough groom or take him for some grass in-hand. Or why not treat him to a nice massage with a rubber curry comb? He'll love you for it, I am sure. Happy schooling!

Do you have a question for Sue?
Email nickymoffatt@redpin.co.uk
and we'll ask Sue to help.



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