

FIT FOR the purpose

In the first part of her new series, Sue Mart from Bennington Carriages offers advice and exercises for making your road drives more fun, which is ideal for those who have signed up for our Drive 500 challenge.



Emily Gent and Barry clocking up Drive 500 miles



Choose quiet lanes where there is less traffic

Many drivers enjoy competing, but find schooling at home a bit of a chore. They would much rather go out for a nice drive than round and round the arena or field doing endless circles and other movements. However, the truth is, if you want to compete you will need to include some schooling work in your horse or pony's training regime, in order to progress. Not only that, but our horses and ponies will be all the better for a bit of schooling as it will improve their suppleness, straightness and overall way of going.

for all levels of horse and pony, but avoid overdoing them so you keep your horse interested in his work. Before you rush out to start your schooling, remember to pick a quiet time – try to miss the school run! Keep an eye out for traffic at all times and only practise the exercises when it is safe to do so.

Here are a number of simple exercises that you can incorporate into your usual drive out and it will hardly feel like schooling at all. They are suitable

Help to keep the horse's attention and interest by doing some transitions within the pace.



Why not take your schooling outside of the arena this year?

Wait a moment

For some people – and horses – carrying out a good, obedient halt can be an issue, whether it is performed at the end of your dressage test or in the show ring. However, the good news is there are always plenty of opportunities to practise halting when you're out and about.

Even if the road junction up ahead is clear, it's a good idea to make a halt transition at the junction and make your horse stand for a few seconds or so, until you ask him to move off again.

Alternatively, you could pick a landmark, such as a church up ahead, then prepare well in advance for the halt by steadying the pace to let the

horse know something new is going to happen. When you get level with the landmark, ask the horse for an accurate square halt, making sure he stays still for as long as you want him to, and then prepare and move off again. If you don't get the halt you want or your horse moves off, just pick another point up ahead and quietly try again.

Back for good

If your horse or pony does not find rein back an easy exercise, this is something else you can practise when you are out and about. You can encourage your horse to step back by asking for rein back on a gentle slope, so the horse is going backwards down the hill, which will make things easier for him. Make sure that the

slope is only a very slight one, though, otherwise you could end up losing control of your horse's steps.

On the mark

Why not test your accuracy and straightness by choosing to keep a consistent measured distance, say 3ft, away from the kerb. Make sure you keep an eye on what's happening up ahead of you, though.

Vary the pace

Help to keep your horse's attention and interest in his work by carrying out some transitions within the paces. Again, you can pick a landmark up ahead and when you reach it, ask your horse to extend his stride for a few steps then collect him up again and repeat the exercise several times.

Keep a rhythm

If you are driving alongside a fence with regularly spaced posts, or a row of evenly spaced trees, count the number of strides your horse takes between each one, then aim for the same number of strides between the

next posts or trees. Then, see if you can go for one stride less between the markers (taking bigger strides) or one stride more (shorter steps).

Top transitions

If you can't find any markers, do some direct transitions between paces. For example, count 20 strides in trot, transitioning back to walk on the 20th stride, then walk 20 strides and so on. Transitions help engage your horse's hindquarters, and lighten his forehead. Stay focussed as the transitions come up quicker than you think.

Walk this way

You could well find your free walk on a long rein will come much easier as you trundle home from a pub drive, rather than in a dressage arena.

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