



# Schooling solutions

Suitable for all levels and abilities, these exercises are great fun to drive and will work wonders for your horse's training. *Sue Mart* from Bennington Carriages explains what's involved.

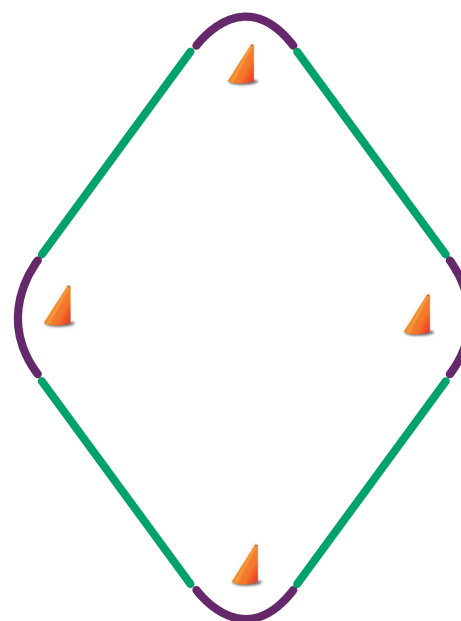
The following exercises are suitable for any type of horse or pony and can be adapted to your liking, level or the amount of time you have available. The great thing about them is you can carry them out on long reins if you don't have help from a backstepper and they can be done in walk when the ground is hard or if your horse has had a busy competition schedule recently and you don't want to overdo it. Carried out once a week, these exercises will work wonders to improve your horse or pony's suppleness, accuracy, straightness and balance and what's more, they're great fun to drive, too!

## Exercise 1 – Diamond

You'll need four cones or markers set up in a diamond shape as shown in the diagram. You can adjust the distance between the cones depending on the space you have available, but around 20m is ideal. The exercise involves driving a straight line from one cone to the next, making a turn as you get to each cone to drive towards the next one, and so on. You can really get inventive with this exercise by driving transitions from trot to walk in between the cones or changing your diamond into a circle by driving curved lines in between the cones.

**Top tip:** If you don't have enough space for a diamond, set up a triangle shape instead.

**Good for:** Getting the horse more into your outside rein, testing straightness, asking the horse to travel on the line you want to drive, and accuracy, which will help you in the cones and obstacle phases in competition.

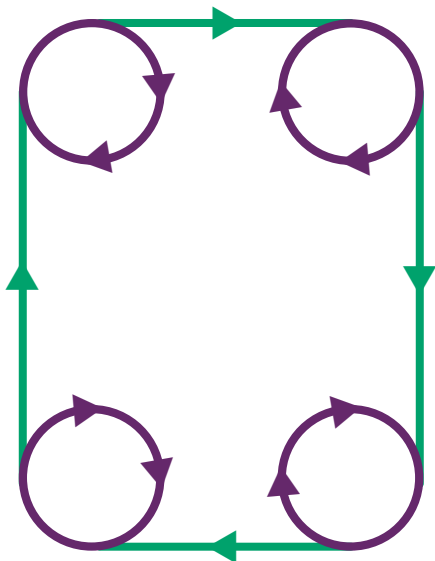


### Exercise 2 – Playing Cards

In a marked-out area of a field or your arena drive around the outside and perform a circle of around 10m-15m in each corner. The size of the circles should depend on your horse's level of training and suppleness, and we tend to walk the smaller circles and build up to trotting on the straight lines. If you want to drive the whole exercise in trot, make your circles bigger so it's not too much of a challenge for your horse.

**Top tip:** You don't have to make all your circles the same size, so why not vary them and drive some smaller ones and some bigger?

**Good for:** Testing straightness and accuracy and improving your horse's suppleness and balance.

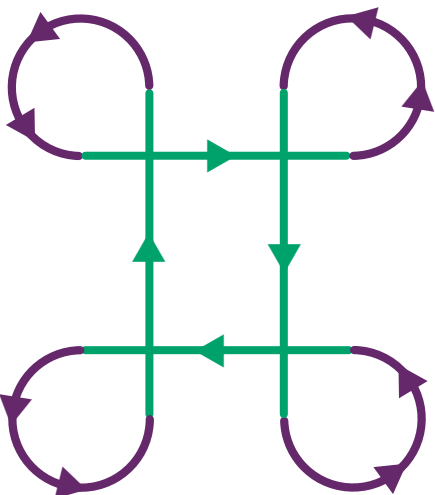


### Exercise 3 – Knotted Handkerchief

Drive a square shape in your arena or field, carrying out half circles and straight lines as shown in the diagram. Your 'knots' can be any size you like, so you could make some smaller and some bigger but once again it's best to walk the smaller circles. If you want to up the challenge, make some walk-trot transitions on the straight lines.

**Top tip:** This exercise doesn't have to be square shaped – it can be rectangular. For example, if you're driving it in a 20m x 40m arena use all the space and do the half circles in each corner.

**Good for:** Improving accuracy, straightness, suppleness, and balance.

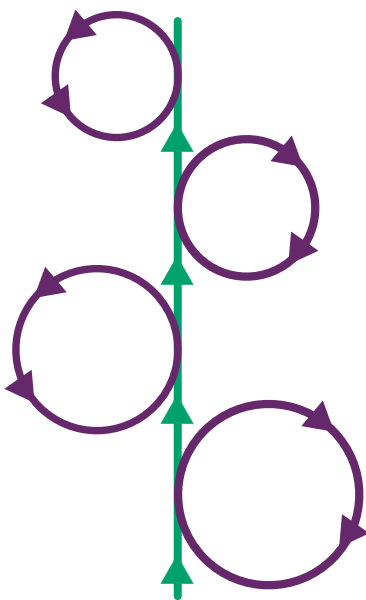


### Exercise 4 – Brussels sprout

Drive up the centre line and perform some circles of varying sizes in each direction – one to the right, then one to the left and repeat. Once you've got the hang of the exercise, it's a good idea to add in some transitions along the centre line, so trot the circles then make a walk-trot transition on the centre line before you start your next circle. You could even measure your circle sizes beforehand to ensure you keep to the sizes you set out to drive.

**Top tip:** The difficult part is driving back onto the centre line accurately each time so consider mowing a centre line in your field or harrowing one in your arena to help you.

**Good for:** Improving your horse's suppleness, straightness, balance and accuracy, as well as your own accuracy for driving a centre line.



## Top tips

- Walk all the exercises first until you're clear about how to drive them accurately.
- If you're worried the ground is too hard, stay in walk.
- These exercises can be carried out on the long-reins or under saddle if you don't have time or the support to put your horse to the carriage.
- It's essential to warm-up and cool down your horse properly at the beginning and end of each schooling session.
- In a field, ensure you choose an area that's flat and level.
- Keep your horse guessing by mixing and matching the exercises, dipping in and out of each one. That way, he won't start to anticipate what's coming next.
- If possible, ask someone to video you when you try the exercises for the first time and then ask them to do the same again in four weeks so you can track your progress.

- *To find out more about how to maintain your carriage, or to book it in for a 'while you wait' service with us, visit: [www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk](http://www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk) or call us on 01400 281280.*

## Join in with the fun

Keep an eye on the Bennington website for dates of training days run by the Bennington Carriage Driving Academy. Or why not make a stay of it and come for the weekend? We offer a range of experiences, from our 'Try Carriage Driving' days for those new to the sport, to training days for more experienced drivers.

- Visit: [www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk/driving-academy](http://www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk/driving-academy) for more details.

