

OPENING UP!

By Jenny Richardson BHS AI

Here, I want to share with readers a ridden exercise to help 'open up' a short-striding horse - it is useful for both flatwork and jumping.

Try and use as big a space as possible, e.g. an enclosed field or a large arena. The idea is to maximise the area, and allow the horse to 'open up' its shoulders, so a larger space is preferable. This is a bit like interval training, so should also increase the horse's stamina over time, and boost its respiratory system. For the unfit horse, build the exercise up gradually.

1. Once warmed up, take trot and ride the horse forward, with a non restrictive contact; try to maintain a straight line from your elbow to the bit, so the hands do not restrict the flow of impulsion. Stay in balance with the horse and remember the first element in the scales of training - rhythm!
2. Ride a large square or rectangle, and along one side, encourage the horse to lengthen the trot. The idea is to allow the horse to stretch its frame and lengthen the strides, opening up the shoulders and really using the quarters. Make your rising bigger, and allow with the hands, keeping the legs on.
3. Along the next side, bring the horse back to working trot - he must still be striding out with impulsion, but his strides will cover less ground. These transitions within a pace aim to improve the horse's capacity for flexion longitudinally, e.g. through the back and neck, and should also help lighten the horse's forehead. Alternate with step one.



4. Having alternated the first two steps in trot, ask for working canter along one side of the square or rectangle, sitting in the saddle. This canter should be short and bouncy, the type used in a show jumping arena, rather than a lazy or slow canter. Keep the legs on and 'hold' the horse together to contain the energy and impulsion.
5. Lengthen the canter along the next side, coming out of the saddle into a forward seat, and really riding on. This shouldn't simply be a fast, flat pace - we are aiming for the horse's shoulders to open, and for him to take larger strides, powering forward with the quarters. Keep the weight down into your stirrups for control and stability, and alternate with step three.

Trouble shooting

- On the lengthened paces, try to avoid the following:
- The horse raising his head and neck high up, or



hollowing and stiffening through his back.

- Losing rhythm or changing the tempo.
- The horse 'running', causing loss of balance and confidence.
- Letting the steps become unequal or irregular.
- Pushing him beyond his capability, to the point he loses confidence.

Top tip

If you have access to hills, riding up the hills in a forward-going canter will also help strengthen the horse's quarters and supple up the shoulders.

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