

# EXERCISES WITH CONES

Cones are a very useful tool for training both horse and rider. There are multitudes of exercises that help the horse to develop his balance, collection, harmony with the rider, focus, precision, lateral and longitudinal suppleness and so on. The cones are also very useful for the rider's education in that they make it instantly clear if the geometry is not accurate and aid in developing the ability to ride more precisely. This leads to improved attention to the details, which in turn helps to bring the horse more correctly under the aids and on the bit.

Cone exercises are very helpful at all levels, for instance in teaching beginning riders or young horses the shape and size of circles, etc., all the way up to helping an FEI rider achieve precision and timing in the advanced competition figures.

The diagram on the last page shows the basic cone setup for a 20m by 60m arena. It can also be used very easily in a 20m x 40m arena, and it is a simple matter to adjust it for an arena that is narrower or wider, longer or shorter. The main thing to keep in mind when setting up the cones is to retain the geometric relationship of the cones.

Here is a description and explanation of some exercises to use with the basic cone setup, as well as some additional sample exercises that require the cones to be set in a specific pattern. There are multitudes of exercises for which the cones can be of great benefit, and you will find that once you start using these exercises, the only limit to the number of possible exercises is your imagination, and you will quickly begin to develop many new exercises of your own to suit your particular training program.

## EXERCISES FOR BASIC CONE SETUP

(For cones, set up in a 20m wide arena. The size of the circles and turns will vary according to the diameter of the circle and the width of arena you are using.)

**Outside Circle** - Ride a 20m circle around the outside of the cones. It is a good idea for the rider to look ahead to the next set of cones as he rides around the circle, a good habit to develop, as this tells the horse what is coming next.

**Middle Circle** - Ride a 15m circle between the sets of cones.

**Inside Circle** – Ride a 10m circle just inside the cones.

**Change Through the Circle** - Start between the wall and outermost cone on the long side of the arena, make half a 10m circle, passing between the two cones in the middle and changing direction onto a new half 10m circle, arriving between the wall and outermost cone directly across the arena from where the exercise was started. This figure looks like an S. When done twice in a row this becomes a small figure eight consisting of two 10m circles.

**Transitions** - At the end of a change through the circle (at the point where you arrive at the wall), make a transition, either from walk to trot, trot to walk, trot to canter, canter to trot, etc., or even “just” a half-halt. The timing should be such that the transition takes place exactly as the horse begins to arrive at the wall. Making the transition at this precise spot will create a more engaged and uphill transition and help the horse to remain uphill for a number of subsequent strides after the transition which in turn results in better gaits. Following the transition, continue around the 20m circle, or immediately change through the circle again. It is also beneficial to ride several transitions in a row at this point, for example trot to walk to trot while taking only a few walk steps. Once again, the number of productive exercises you can create from this basic pattern is limited only by your imagination.

**Spiral In** - Begin outside the cones, move into the middle circle, then to the inside circle. The spiral can also be done by leg-yielding in. This invites the inside hind leg to step further under the horse’s body, resulting in increased engagement.

**Spiral Out** - Begin on the inside circle, ride forward and out, passing through the middle circle and ending on the 20m circle. This can also be done in leg-yield. This supple the horse while at the same time developing more engagement.

**Canter Depart after Spiraling Out** - At the end of exercise 7 (spiral or leg-yield out) make a canter depart. Time it so that the last stride of spiral out/leg-yield is the first stride of canter to create clear and forward canter strike-offs. This also helps to create a better balanced and more uphill horse, and in this particular exercise, will, with repeated practice, produce a better, more bounding canter.

**Turn the Circle into a Square** - Ride on the middle circle in walk (passing between the cone sets). Turn the circle into a square so that the sides of the square are parallel to the sides of the arena. The horse should still be passing between the cone sets. There are a number of ways you can ride this exercise:

- a. Ride the corners either by making a normal right or left-hand turn (depending on the direction in which you are working). Use the outside rein to show the horse when you want him to go straight (to stop turning). This helps the horse understand he should follow the outside rein, which in turn helps him become more uphill since he no longer falls to the inside during the turns.

- b. Ride the corners by making a  $\frac{1}{4}$  turn on the forehand. This helps supple the horse's hind quarters and also teaches the rider the lateral and weight aids.
- c. Ride the corner by making a  $\frac{1}{4}$  turn on the haunches. This encourages the horse to step further under his body with his hind legs, leading to increased engagement. This is also a good way to teach the rider the diagonal and weight aids.

**Ride a Square in Trot or Canter** - Ride the corners as in either 9a or 9c above, while maintaining the trot or canter, or incorporate transitions into the exercise by making a transition to walk before the turn, riding the turn in walk and returning to trot or canter for the straight side of the square, and so on.

**Ride a Square in Canter with Turns on the Haunches** - Ride a square in canter while turning the corners into  $\frac{1}{4}$  turns on the haunches. This is a good way to introduce canter pirouettes. Be careful not to make the corners too sharp in the beginning, and only progress to stronger corners when you feel the horse is engaged and balanced sufficiently enough to be able to attempt it successfully.

## SPECIALIZED CONE EXERCISES

**Leg-yield to Canter Depart Followed by Circle in Canter** - For this exercise, set two cones 1 to 2m apart, straddling center line about 10m from one of the short sides. In either trot or walk, ride a leg-yield from the beginning of the long side to center line, timing the leg-yield so it finishes between the cones. At the last step of leg-yield (between the cones) make a canter depart in the direction of the inside bend of the leg yield and immediately make a  $\frac{1}{2}$  10m circle in the same direction. For example, from a leg-yield to the left, make a canter depart right at the center line and then turn right. This produces more precise and uphill canter departs, and as a consequence a better canter.

**Half Pass** - On one of the long sides of the arena, place a cone inside each of the 2 corners, 6m from the short side and 2m off the track. Set a third cone about 2m from X on the same side of the arena (8m from either letter E or B). Follow the track and after passing the first cone, ride half pass towards and around the cone near X, and then change direction and half pass back to the track arriving on the track in time to pass between the last cone and the wall before riding through the next corner. This is a good way to learn and practice change of hands in half pass and can be done in all three gaits. This exercise in canter will normally be done with a flying change just before the second half pass (at X) and another flying change when arriving on the track just before the third cone (the corner).

**Changes of Hand** - Set a series of cones on either side of centerline to practice multiple changes of hand either in leg-yield (to improve suppling and weight aids) or half pass (to improve

engagement, suppling and weight aids).