

Online HorseCollege



Student Workbook

2.R.11 Riding in Open Areas

www.OnlineHorseCollege.com

Student Name:

Student Number:

Email:

Phone:

Other Personal Information

www.OnlineHorseCollege.com

(Ausintec Academy P/L ATF Ausintec Academy Trust T/as)
Ausintec Academy

Mailing Address:-
392 Bribie Island Road,
CABOOLTURE QLD 4510
(between Brisbane & Sunshine Coast)
AUSTRALIA

Registered Training Organisation No:31352
Centrelink Approval No: 4P530
CRICOS Provider Code: Pending

Phone within Australia (07) 3102 5498
Outside Australia + 61 7 3102 5498
Request@OnlineHorseCollege.com

Contents

Introduction	Pg. 4
Two Point Seat	Pg. 5
Three Point Seat	Pg. 6
Up Hill, Down Hill and Gates	Pg. 7
National Trails	Pg. 8
Riding on Roads	Pg. 9
Riding at Competitions	Pg. 10 & 11
Troubleshooting & Tips	Pg. 12 & 13
Extension Lesson	Pg. 14
Recommended Reading	Pg. 15
References	Pg. 16

Introduction

In this workbook topics on riding safely in undulating country, beside roads and at competitions will be covered and the different types of positions which can be used when riding up and down hills will be identified and explained.

Two Point Seat

This position (also known as the jumping seat) is used when a horse is going over a jump and is desirable when riding over undulating country (hilly country) because it removes the riders weight from the horses' back and allows the rider to adjust well to changes in balance and pace as the horse goes up and down hills.

It involves the rider bringing the shoulders forward so they are positioned over the knee with the back straight and the leg brought slightly forward so that the toes are under the knee. From this the riders' shoulder, knee and toe should be in a line.



The red line in this photo shows how the rider has folded the upper body forward so that the shoulder, knee and toe are in a line.

Even though this rider has their elbow stuck out to the side, a straight line along the arm and through the rein to the bit can be seen.

The riders focus is in the direction of travel.

Two point seat is called so because there are only two points of contact the rider has with the saddle whilst in this position, which are the left and right leg.

To obtain this position:-

- 1) The rider shortens the reins. Because the upper body is coming forward so too will the hands and if the reins are not shortened the rider will have less control.
- 2) The rider bends forward with the upper body from the hips (the back remains straight)
- 3) More weight is taken on the thighs, knees and heels by lifting the seat off the saddle. The rider should be sure to keep the lower leg in position near the girth as they bring the upper body forward.

To maintain balance and security the rider should remain close to the saddle in two point seat. Suppleness in the lower body is important to be able to move with the horse without interfering with balance.

Whilst in this position the rider should keep the straight line which runs from the elbow along the rein through the wrist to the bit.

Three Point Seat

This position is like two point in that a straight line should be formed by the shoulder, knee and toe however the seat stays in the saddle (which can vary from a very deep seat to a very light seat) with the upper body folded forward. It may also be referred to as the light seat.



In the photo you can see the rider seat is in contact with the saddle and the straight line from shoulder to knee to toe.

The straight line from the elbow to the bit is maintained.

The rider is focused in the direction of travel.

The lower leg is secure with the toe pointing forwards and heel dropped down.

Three point has three points of contact with the saddle being the left leg, right leg and seat. This seat is used between jumps and when riding over undulating country. It is a position that allows the rider more influence over the horse with their seat as opposed to 2 point where the rider has no seat contact. Three point is good for horses which tend to get a little strong or fast in open areas.

To obtain this position:-

- 1) The rider shortens the reins. Because the upper body is coming forward so too will the hands and if the reins are not shortened the rider will have less control.
- 2) The rider bends forward with the upper body from the hips (the back remains straight)
- 3) More weight can be taken on the thighs, knees and heels to ease some of the weight off the seat while it remains in contact with the saddle. The rider should be sure to keep the lower leg in position near the girth as they bring the upper body forward.

Suppleness in the lower body is important to be able to move with the horse without interfering with balance.

Whilst in this position the rider should keep the straight line which runs from the elbow along the rein through the wrist to the bit.

Up Hill, Down Hill and Gates

Before entering a paddock you need to obtain the owner of the land's permission to ride there. As a general rule should you come across any gates on your ride, if the gate was closed before you went through it then you should closed it behind you again. If the gate was open, then you leave it open.



Do the right thing by the landowner who has given you permission to ride on their land and avoid disturbing, harassing or chasing any livestock. Not only will you avoid stressing out the animals and upsetting the landowner but you will also avoid exciting your horse and injury from recklessly galloping around on uneven ground.

When travelling down hill you should keep your shoulders back, lower leg forward, fingers closed around the reins and hands down. This is to keep your weight over the hind quarters of the horse so you don't add to the burden of the front legs and don't topple over the horse's head. You may need to allow the horse a longer rein going down hill but you should still keep a contact with the horse's mouth (no floppy reins).

Going up hill lean forward (the degree of the slope will determine how far you need to lean forward) on steep slopes you will need to be in 2 point position but on gradual slope you may only need to lean forward enough to ease your weight in the saddle. This is so you ease the burden on the horse's back and hind quarters whilst going up the hill. The lower leg stays underneath you, reins shortened with the hands up the neck of the horse to allow it to stretch and use its head and neck to get up the hill (again the degree of the slope will determine how far you need to allow your hands and the reins up the horse's neck).

National Trails

In Australia we have bush land that is accessible for recreational activities for the public such as bush walking, horse riding, motor bike riding and four wheel driving. Many of these places are used for some or all of the activities listed above, for example national trails are accessible by bush walkers, horse and motor bike riders. Another common ground is forestry tracks which can be accessed by all four of the recreational activities previously mentioned.

You are therefore likely to sooner or later encounter another member of the public out on a trail ride. Sometimes this can be quite dangerous due to the speed of which motor bikes and four wheel drives may be travelling. Unfortunately there is not much you can do other than to stay alert, use your ears to listen for oncoming vehicles and keep to the side of the track as they pass (see next chapter for more detail about riding on roads).



Riding on Roads

Sooner or later when riding in an open area you will need to cross a road or ride along side a road. Many road users will be aware that you are sitting on a large animal commonly known as a horse but what they fail to realise is that the horse is capable of individual thought, quick reactions and when frightened can be dangerous (and not just for the rider!).

In most countries a horse and rider are considered to be a vehicle with the same obligations. It is a legal requirement that when riding or leading a horse beside a road you travel in the same direction as the traffic however it is safer to ride or lead in the opposite direction of travel of the traffic so the horse can see oncoming vehicles.

It is good practice to stay well off to the side of the road and use hand signals to let others know of your intentions. To signal you are turning right you should hold your right arm out to the side at shoulder level, fingers together (and vice versa for turning left), if you need to request vehicles to slow down use your hand, palm facing downwards in a pumping action. If you are stopping (and it will affect traffic i.e., traffic is unable to pass you) you need to signal by raising your arm, hand up in an L shape.

Avoid cantering on concrete or bitumen as it will be quite slippery and is not good for the horse's legs.

Wear brightly coloured clothing to make you more visible to drivers. There are high visibility and reflective clothing on the market for both you and your horse. It is also advisable to avoid riding on the road at dawn and dusk when there is low visibility.

Avoid taking young or inexperienced horses out on roads. Your horse needs to be responsive to the aids. Nervous or novice horses that are new to being ridden on roads should be accompanied by a more experienced horse which the novice should follow or stay on the side away from traffic.



Riding at Competitions

The competition environment can create nerves for both horse and rider. Riders often have a hundred things on their mind while the horse is in unfamiliar surroundings with many unknown horses and there are strange noises, sight and smells. This can prove to be very stressful for some horses and may exhibit some behaviour that is uncharacteristic of the individual such as whinnying, pawing the ground, bucking, rearing, kicking, shying, even diarrhoea.

Most horses improve with experience however there may be the odd few that always remain excitable in the competition atmosphere. There are actions you can take to help yourself and your horse adapt to the pressure of competition.

Competition Preparation



Regularly taking your horse out to new places when there is no competition is a good way to get your horse accustomed to going on new 'adventures'. Working your horse at the competition venue prior to the competition day will help to familiarise your horse with the surroundings it will be required to perform in.

Horses like routine so use the same grooming, saddling, bridling, warm-up, training and cool down habits you do when you work your horse in its normal surroundings.

But note that some events will close their venue to competitors as the competition date approaches (e.g., cross country courses for eventing) therefore it is wise to investigate if this applies to you.

Floating

If your horse doesn't load or float well this will add to the stress of the competition day. Spend time training and improving loading and unloading technique and go on short, frequent float trips to help the horse become better accustomed to travelling. Use a 'float buddy' if your horse tends to be nervous or anxious. Float buddies are another horse who loads and travels well than can act as a companion when travelling.

Remember if you are in doubt or encounter problems you are unable to cope with seek the advice and experience of a professional.



Riding at Competitions (cont.)

Competition Day



The day has come to strut your stuff so begin it by being organised. The better organised you are the less likely you are to become flustered. Check the vehicle and float (lights, tyres, brakes etc) the day before. Make a list of all the gear you will need then gather all these items and pack it in the vehicle and float the day before (everything should be clean and ready to use).

On the morning of the competition stick to your normal routine as much as possible and allow enough time for the horse to have its breakfast before you load it into the float (if possible also hitch the float up to the vehicle the night before then it is one less thing to do in the morning).



Having enough time to get organised to do what you need to is very important. If you are running late you will be rushed and stressed. Allow your horse some time to settle once you've arrived, lead the horse around the venue, let it have a pick of grass. Simple lunging and ground work exercises are useful for getting your horse to switch on and focus on the work it needs to do.

Know your who, what, when, where, why and how's. For example who: myself, what: dressage test 1.A, when: at 10.30 am (gear check at least 20mins before), where: outdoor sand arena, why: because I love it and worked hard to get here!, how: by staying calm and focused.

Points to Remember

- Stick to the arena rules when using warm-up areas and bear in mind that not everyone will know or be aware of the exact same rules.
- Be courteous and forgiving to other horses and riders, they too may be nervous and excited.
- Give riders on exuberant and excitable horses and people lunging extra space.
- Be courteous and respectful to judges, stewards and volunteers.

Troubleshooting & Tips

Both 2 point and 3 point seat can be used in a variety of different circumstances. You should aim to establish an effective, secure and balanced seat at all times.

Here are some points to remember when riding in forward seat (2 and 3 point):-

- Gripping with the thigh and knee should be used in emergency situations and should otherwise not be needed
- The lower leg provides stability and security and is critical to the rider's base of support
- Balance and base of support are established with the lower leg, thigh, seat, upper body, head and eyes (looking in the direction of travel)
- The rider should not need the reins to balance and therefore should be independent of them to allow the rider to maintain a contact which can feel and follow the horse
- The effectiveness of forward seats is dependant on the lower leg and rein contact which is backed up by the seat and upper body which allows good use of the aids



If you are new to 2 and 3 point chances are it is going to take some time to perfect your balance and gain strength and effectiveness in these positions. Start in the slower paces first and work your way up to the faster paces. You can use a chunk of the horse's mane to help find and steady your balance (hold onto the mane but don't lean on the neck as you won't develop your balance and if the horse puts its head down you're likely to follow!). Test yourself to see how long you can remain in 2 point in walk.

If you can stay in 2 point without sitting down for five complete twenty metre circles then you are ready for trot. You should be able to stay in 2 point for five circles in trot before attempting canter.

Troubleshooting & Tips (cont.)

Riding up and down hills can be challenging (more so down hill for most riders!) for less experienced riders therefore start with small slopes, in walk and build up from there progressing to trot and if confident canter. Your horse should maintain the same pace that you have set. For example if you walk down one side of the hill then you should walk going up the other side (and vice versa).

Horses will often get a little excited upon reaching the top of a hill at canter and may pop in a playful leap or buck. Keep this in mind and take appropriate precautions such as warming the horse up in canter on flatter ground before going up and down hills and by keeping the lower leg well forward, shoulders back and fingers closed around the reins when reaching the top of a hill.

Despite being well warmed up and worked in at trot some horses will still be playful and exuberant when first asked to canter and this is usually typical of horses in good spirits, especially those whom haven't been ridden out of the arena in a while. As a rider you can cope with this by asking for short periods of canter, starting with maybe four strides of canter then returning to trot then gradually increasing this number as your horse becomes more settled and controllable.



Extension Lesson

Image you are attending a competition in a couple of weeks. Make a list of all the gear and equipment you might need to take with you on the day.

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Practice 2 point and 3 point position at walk and trot.

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Practice remaining in 2 point seat while you more your horse from trot to walk and walk to trot. Can you stay in 2 point without sitting down through these transitions?

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Set up five cones or markers in a straight line then in 2 point seat see if you can weave and guide the horse around them in walk and trot.

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Recommended Reading

Publication:-

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Horses

Author:-

Sarah Montague and PJ Dempsey

Websites:-

<http://www.horserides.org/horse-road-safety.html> - Road Safety

http://www.athra.com.au/Site/Docs/Docs/HorseSARoad_Safety_Book.pdf - Horse & Road Safety

www.horseroadsafety.org.au/ - Road Safety

References

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