

13 Vaulting exercises — *introduction*

We have mentioned before how important it is to plan your vaulting sessions with a great deal of variety. Therefore the following chapters do not suggest the *sequence* of exercises to practise. You will choose from them what is suitable to the expertise of your individual vaulters, always keeping in mind that minimal discomfort be caused to the horse, and maximum safety enforced for the children.

All exercises will first be trained on the barrel. The ones which *can* cause great discomfort to the horse (like scissors and flank) will be transferred to the live horse *only* when sufficient expertise is reached by the individual vaulter, so the horse will not be hurt by the typical beginners' mistakes. (Keep in mind *again* that your horse might decide to become 'unsuitable' for vaulting, if he gets too sorely tried!) You will train all exercises in walk first, then moving on to trot and canter.

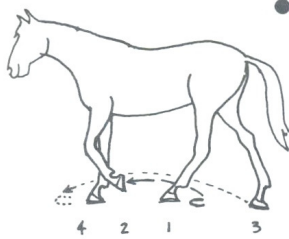
Obviously some exercises can not be performed in walk, namely all the ones which are only possible by using the optimum momentum gained from the movement and speed of the cantering horse. Complicated roll-mounts, direct jumps into high positions and series of touchdowns and mounts are examples of this, but by the time your vaulters are good enough to worry about these, they are also good enough to train the necessary grips and hand changes on the barrel, make up for missing momentum by using a small trampoline, and then move directly onto the cantering horse.

As the trainer of a beginners' team you deal with different problems. In compulsories as well as in team kur exercises you want to teach correct technique — and that sometimes means

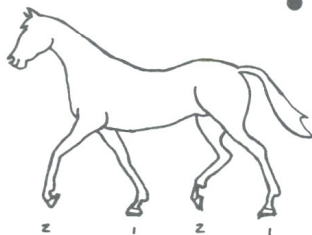
quite a bit of talking! In walk, you have time for this. And of course the children feel safer trying out something new in walk first, before moving into trot or canter. The *amount* of verbal explanation you will use, will again depend on the age level, the understanding abilities and concentration span of your vaulters.

Some exercises are actually more difficult in trot than in canter, but I have always found that it is nevertheless better for the children's psychological attitude to let them proceed walk–trot–canter, because they *perceive* this as safer. The safer they *feel*, the safer they usually *are*.

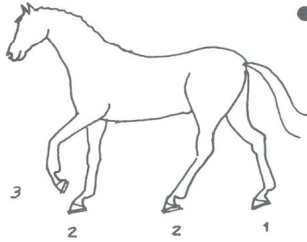
If you are not a vaulter yourself, just consider this for better understanding of the difference the paces make to the vaulter:



- *Walk*: is a four-beat rhythm. See the drawing for the sequence of hooves. If the horse is active and 'steps under' with his hind feet, the track of the hind hoof will step over and past the track of the front feet. The croup will then move in a more pronounced way than in canter. All exercises other than mounts are easy in walk. With more sensitive horses it is good to give the vaulters a leg-up, to prevent the horse from being thrown off balance by excessive hanging and crawling of the beginner. However the beginner has to get a chance to learn the correct jump-off and necessary hand changes on the grips, before he can try it in canter, so the horse will have to put up with a bit of this. Give the beginners a push though to minimize the discomfort of the horse by taking off some of the weight. Train mounts on the barrel (with a small trampoline if you have access to one) as much as possible.



- *Trot*: is a two-beat rhythm. Since the left front hoof moves with the right back one in an exactly parallel way, the horse's back is very even and straight. The vaulter has to deal only with one movement, namely up-down, which makes trot ideal for practising relaxed knees in the stand. The children get used to greater speed – an active trot is about as fast as a collected canter. The momentum gained for mounts is consider-



able, though it is harder to train the exact jump-off point for the best action quantum.

- *Canter*: is a three-beat rhythm. It is the only gait with a 'lead'. Vaulting needs an even canter, on the correct lead (that is, the left lead) where the horse balances himself on the curve of the circle. Hindquarters should be active and step under deeply, so the main weight of the vaulters is supported by them, and the back has an evenly swaying movement. Counter canter or disunited canter can not be tolerated for vaulting. Counter canter produces a 'staccato movement', because the horse is unbalanced around the corner. Disunited canter results in a 'wiggled' line along the horse's spine and a throwing movement, which makes it very hard to stand. (Your lunger must recognize and correct this immediately.)

In all paces, whether walk, trot or canter, the vaulter will pick up the same gait as the horse when approaching and mounting. Other paces, like amble and pace are not used in vaulting.

Compulsory exercises

Compulsory exercises form the ground work for vaulting, demanding the basic skills each vaulter must learn, before going on to more complex free-style movements. They are designed to show off balance, flexibility, jumping power and arm control as well as correct sense of timing in the swing exercises.

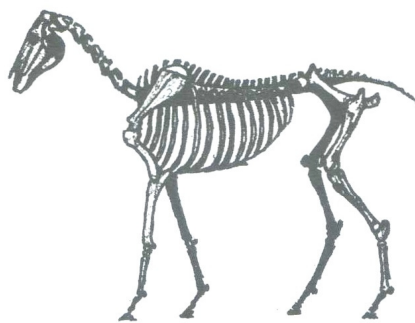
You will try to train all of these exercises 'whole-part-whole'. This means that after the introduction (and perhaps demonstration) of the whole exercise you'll take it apart into its components and train those separately. After the individual parts are well understood and the underlying technique is grasped you will re-assemble them and practise the complete exercise. The reason a trainer arranges it this way is that the vaulter can not retain and concentrate on more than two or three things at one time at the most.

The six prescribed compulsories consist of a mix of static and dynamic exercises:

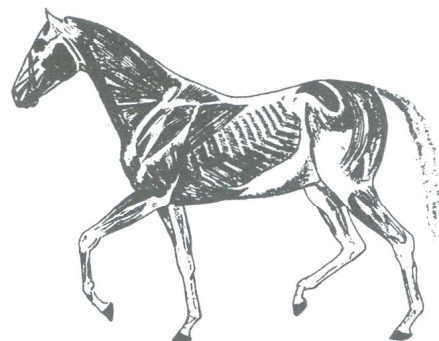
- *Static compulsory exercises:* The seat, the flag and the stand are static. This means the exercises must be fully balanced and held in a quiet pose for four canter strides. It also means that excessive swinging motions to get *into* those exercises are usually seen as a minus point by the judges.
- *Dynamic compulsory exercises:* The mill, the scissors and the flank are dynamic exercises, that is, they consist of motion. Here the maximum action quantum must be used to achieve speed, height and push-off power. Timing is essential in dynamic exercises. Accuracy and arm strength are necessary. However, many vaulters, especially strong males, have a tendency to overdo the strength factor by stopping at the high point, which for them equals the position of the handstand. This is *not* the purpose of a dynamic exercise and will not get the highest scores! Although extreme scope (i.e. height) is rewarded in an exercise, the movement of a dynamic one must be fluid and continuous.
- *One and two-phase exercises:* The compulsory exercises can be grouped into one and two-phase exercises: the seat, the flag, the mill and the stand are one-phase, that is, they are fully performed in one go without pause. The scissors and the flank consist of two parts, and the time spent preparing for the second phase is not specified in the rules. However, the less time is wasted in *any* in-between phases (which also applies to time spent between mount and exercise, or finished exercise and dismount etc.), the better the scores will be (*if* the exercise is performed correctly).
- *Prescribed dismounts: basic dismount and vault-off:* Compulsory exercises have prescribed dismounts, of which there are two: the 'basic' dismount and the 'vault-off'. The exercises in the first block of the compulsories, consisting of basic seat, flag

and mill, all are followed by the 'basic dismount', if performed individually. The ones of the second block, the scissors, stand and flank, are followed by the 'vault-off' dismount. In practice sessions the trainer should always adhere to this rule in order to minimize confusion of junior vaulters. In none of the compulsory exercises may the vaulter have contact in other places than the grips. It is a good idea to include this consistently in the training, as bad habits (even if they are friendly: like patting the horse from the backward seat in the scissors) are so hard to get rid of! If your vaulters get used to patting the horse *during* a compulsory exercise, they will have the tendency to do the same during a competition and lose points this way.

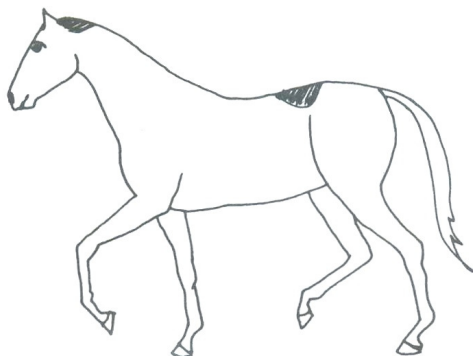
- *Consideration of the horse:* In *all* vaulting exercises consideration must be shown to the horse. The trainer must insist that all exercises, starting with the compulsories, be practised in a fashion that any movement, and particularly landings on the horse's back after high swings, are soft. S/he must insist that vaulters stand in the correct spots on the horse's back and don't hurt him in the sensitive kidney area. Vaulters should understand the basic make-up of the horse's body, where sensitive organs are, what the skeleton looks like, and where important muscles are located.



Where is the elbow?
Where is the knee?



Which muscles do we
need to develop for vaulting?



Which sensitive areas
must we avoid?

Before starting *any* exercise on the horse, ensure that he is properly warmed up (as well as your vaulters) on the opposite (the right) lead for at least ten minutes, or until you can see that the horse relaxes along his back and is quiet and prepared in his mood. Check that the equipment is fitted correctly, and sensitive spots protected. In particular make sure that the buckles of the girth do not rub behind the legs and that the withers are covered with some padding under the surcingle. Use only equipment permitted by the rules, excepting different side reins as discussed in chapter 7. Make the vaulters check all these things *with* you, as the horse is their team mate and they carry responsibility for his well-being if they want to use him. If using regular side reins, adjust them to the correct length on both sides, when you turn the horse onto the left lead after warming up. Before the first vaulters go on, ensure that the surcingle is tightened. If vaulters get caught with their feet in the stirrups and the surcingle is starting to turn on the horse, very nasty situations can ensue, where they get dragged under the horse without being able to free themselves.

Now you are ready to start!