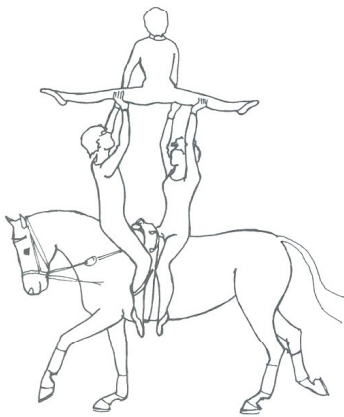


25 *How to write a kur*

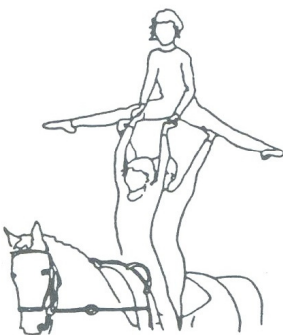
Now that your vaulters are not totally inexperienced any more, you will be preparing for the first demonstration show or stable competition.

In a show you have complete freedom over what you want to do. Ask the organizers about how much time they wish to allot for your performance and write your show accordingly. If they want to see a longer show (and don't do shows longer than maximum fifteen minutes! Your audience will get bored. . .) you will include parts in walk, trot and canter. If the time allowed does not exceed five minutes, you might want to show an all canter demonstration with only your better vaulters. Don't forget that most people in your audience are new to vaulting — they will not see the fine distinctions between exercises! Each demonstration should kindle new interest in this sport, and hopefully recruit a few new members for your club, if you're showing near home. So keep in mind that many exercises, although different in difficulty and variation of direction, look very much the same to the untrained eye. Don't include too many of those! For example: a lifted sideways split with a partner sitting backward on the neck looks much the same as a forward lifted split supported by two forward sitting partners. Although quite different in direction and complexity, don't show them both.

A brief note about making up names. You will find very soon that the lengthy official names in the rule books make it almost impossible to put a show down on paper. You have to write the show and make copies for your team, so they can learn it well in advance of the show. Invent names! Make them short and precise, even like this the documents get lengthy enough. . .



'Lifted SW split'



'Lifted FW split'

The way you start writing the show is simple: six weeks ahead of the show you choose the members of the club who will be allowed to participate. A normal show consists of eight vaulters, but depending on what you're aiming for, you can include more (which gives a nice chance to show off your 'babies' in the walk part) or, if you only have six vaulters for that top notch five-minute show, do it just with them. Less than six gets tricky: your vaulters get too many turns in a short time and get exhausted. Twelve should be the upper limit. I find it looks a bit strange to have twenty-six vaulters run in after one horse...

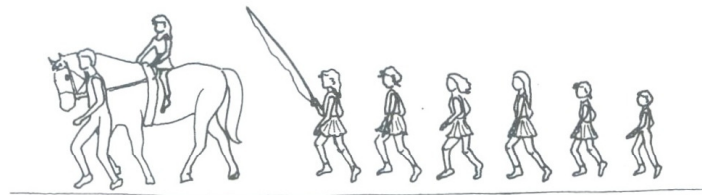
In our club the chosen vaulters then have to commit to not missing any training sessions during those six weeks, come hell or high water. You can not adequately train with half a team! If someone (or their parents) lets you down — rewrite the show quickly immediately and exclude them. The vaulters and parents must understand that in terms of quality you mean business. Remember that your demonstration will or will not pave the way for this sport in your area or country. Shows should be worth seeing. *Never* show things that do not work! Children, especially beginners will usually perform slightly worse at a show than during training because they are nervous, the horse is nervous, and applause and music distract both.

So everything must be bombproof! They, the horse, and you, have to be able to feel at ease. Choose the exercises for the show accordingly. A show which has a lower level of difficulty, but is executed really well and cleanly, will make a much better impression than attempted daring exercises (which the spectators don't recognize as such anyhow) that collapse. The worst scenario at a show is an accident. You would turn other potential vaulters away from this sport for the next ten years!

In a competition it looks different again: here you have to push for the difficulty a little, and you will have a defined time limit, but also include in the final show *only* what really works. By the time your team gets into competition, where difficulty really matters, they are also experienced enough to swallow a

change of sequence in the show and relearn quickly: take out the things which still don't work two weeks before the competition. For the last two weeks your team should only solidify and polish what has been trained before.

The run-in: Refer to the next chapter about the design of the run-in. Here, let me just mention that you should allow an additional two minutes for run-in, salute and run-out at the end of the show.



The kur itself: An optimal kur includes the following, always keeping in mind that you are choosing from exercises of an adequate level of difficulty for your vaulters:

diversity: static and dynamic exercises with a differing structure
highlights: and accents in motion

direction: diversity in direction (in regard to the direction of travel), using the whole horse, forward, backward, sideways

relation: direction in relation to the horse, diversity of inside, outside, up and down, front and back of the surcingle and the horse's back

originality: in the choice (or invention) of exercises, as well as fluidity and flair of the composition and choice of music

mix: a good use of all vaulters, and not the same group of people on the horse for too long at one time

harmony: with the horse and its movements, also with the other team mates. No hurried impression!

music: the music must fit the mood of the show. World-class teams actually perform precisely *on* the music, in which case the exercises have to fit in rhythm and speed, as well as mood, but this is very hard to achieve and can not be the goal for a beginning team.

- *Variety*: This basic rule applies to all kinds of kur, whether individual, *pas-de-deux* or team routines. The kur must be designed so that the horse never runs empty. Usually one vaulter will get two to maximum four turns in a row (in which he should have changes in direction and variety in activity, not just be a forever forward facing underman!) Include many double and triple exercises, and only a few singles. Otherwise it does not seem like a team kur. Vaulters in one configuration mount and dismount at different times, so the group actually on the horse is never the same for any length of time. But keep in mind that mounts take up a lot of energy – and time. So don't include more than necessary to assure a good flow in the kur.
- *Number of turns*: See to it that all vaulters in the show get more or less the same number of turns, or at least the same number relative to their experience and stand on the team. It is the first thing all my vaulters have always done, when a new show comes out: they count and compare their number of turns. By under-using a good vaulter, just because you can't arrange the flow of the show with enough expertise, you can really hurt the feelings of a team mate. In a 'long show' an experienced vaulter will have eight to maximum nine turns (not all in canter) and a beginner about four. In a five-minute all-canter show (with good vaulters of the same level) each vaulter will have about six to maximum eight turns.

So this is where the difficulty of writing a good kur begins: for fairly young teams, usually only certain vaulters are able to do particular exercises. Some are strong undermen, others flyers, some are courageous and experienced enough for lifts, others not yet and so on. The more even the performance of the team members, the easier to achieve equal turns. If you have three flyers and three undermen, who can take each other's place, the design of the kur will be much easier.
- *The flow of the kur*: But if not, to create this flow in the kur,

where vaulters get up to three turns in a row, adequate breaks in between and an equal number of turns, is a hard job. You have to be able to visualize the transitions in between exercises too! Often you have finally bunched the right groups of exercises together, but find out that the vaulter, who needs to stand on the back of the horse, has ended up in front – how to get him to the back? (Reshuffle on your wordprocessor . . .)

- *Use of different mounts and transitions:* The more proficient your vaulters get, the more easily this can be solved. They will be able to do assisted mounts into the middle of a configuration of two already on the horse, mounts to the front of a sitting partner, mounts *under* another partner, mounts in reverse onto the neck. Transitions *on* the horse will be made easier: one can jump over the top of another to get to the front, or roll over backwards to get behind their team mate. The variations in transitions are pretty endless. And in a good kur they are refined and taken quite as seriously as the exercises themselves. With beginners you should try to minimize the number of transitions. They are usually quite difficult for the vaulters and look very unbalanced and awkward. (Exceptions are a few easy ones, like the ‘flea’, where a sitting partner grabs a little one around the waist and swings him around to the front, or back.)



Flag on high bench
over flag

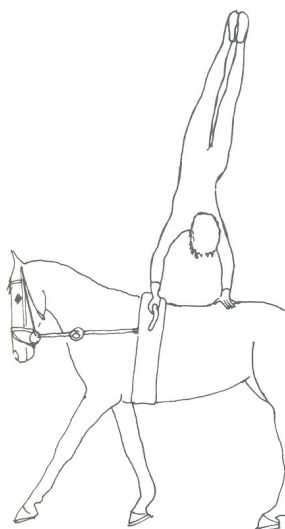
Designing different parts of the kur, example of a ‘long show’

In competition, each static exercise must be held for at least three strides, but I always find that this is a bit short for a show. Your spectators don't have the judge's trained eye, and if the exercise is held for only three strides, they have not really begun to understand yet what it is all about, let alone been able to take a good photograph for you! I train my vaulters to hold them at least four strides, and the really nice (and bombproof ones) for

five, especially the spectacular lifts. It is better to have a show with fewer exercises, but these held nicely and in an unhurried manner, than a show crammed full of rushed brief things that nobody can really see.



Hang and flag

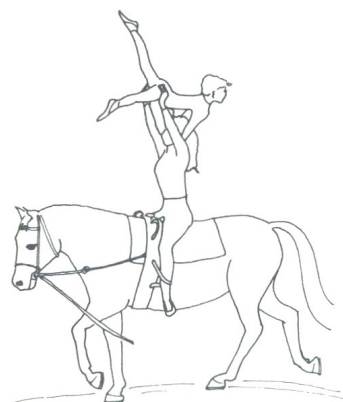


SW free handstand

- *First canter part:* Let's again assume our ten-minute team show scenario. We want to start on an upbeat note, to catch everybody's attention right away. So this will most likely be a canter piece. However, we do not want to show them the highlights right away, especially since the horse is still jumpy (applause, unfamiliar place, and you might have been able to warm him up less than at home), and the kids have the jitters. So start with things that look interesting, but are easy. For example a series of mounts, a shoulder sit, a hang and flag, and the like. This part will be approximately two to three minutes long.

- *The walk part:* Then I usually include the walk part (if there is to be any), because I want to give the horse a break, before building up the momentum again over a trot piece to the finishing highlights in canter. The average spectators (aunties and grandfathers etc.), who have not seen any or much vaulting, will take home two memories: how cute the little ones were (this is the walk part!) and how dazzling it all was – and these are your highlights at the end.

In the walk part I include my beginners, who are allowed to perform in a nice summer show (especially when this means an interesting trip with billeting and so on – nothing builds team spirit as fast as these travels together), but are not really safe in any lifts, or useful as supports in highlights of any kind. Keep in mind that mounts in walk are difficult, especially for beginners, and use as few as possible. Don't show *only* beginners: if you have a gymnast, who can do a handstand-flip over the croup, show that as well. Keep the interest going! Roll dismounts are easy in walk, somersault over the croup, full splits, leapfrog over the croup etc. (*If your horse never kicks!*)



'Skater's lift'



'Carried angel'



'Double jump'

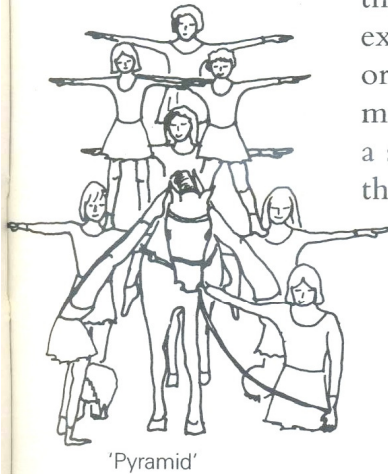
In this part you also include the more difficult lifts, which you might have practised well in walk, but which are not safe in canter yet. (Fully supported lifts, like the rocket angel, in trot are pretty bouncy stuff, so you usually show them in walk or canter.)

The walk part should not be too long, up to a maximum of ten exercises, because otherwise you lose the momentum of the show to a degree which will make it hard to build it up again. Once you have lost the spectators' interest, they leave to get a drink instead...and they won't come back.

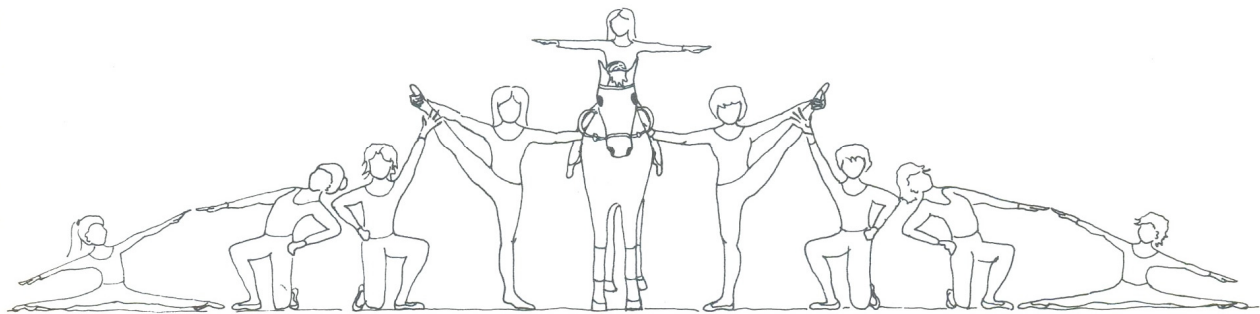
I will include a copy of one 'long show' and describe the vaulting quality of the performers at the time of that show in Appendix B, so you see more clearly what I mean.

- *The trot part:* In the trot part you show mainly exercises with standing partners which don't work in canter yet. All stands are much easier in trot because of the even up and down movement of the horse's back, as mentioned before. So this part can well prepare the audience for the highlights soon to follow, because it can be very interesting! But in some of the easier exercises (like the 'family round', that is, 'sitting, kneeling, standing') you can again show off your junior vaulters. Make this part short: it is no real break for the horse – rather a kind of transition, which allows you to show certain things which would not shine in walk, but don't yet work in canter. About six to seven exercises should be the limit.

- *The second canter part:* By now your horse is not fresh enough to buck any more...but he is also not fresh enough to make this part too long! Maximum ten exercises should do for the highlights. Try to build exercises up in height toward the end, if your team is able to do lifts and stands. The very end should be whatever draws the most gasps – it need not be the most difficult exercise. If you have good flyers, use something like the double jump (over sitting partner), which spectators always see as particularly courageous...



- *The salute and run-out:* The run-out is not as important as the run-in, but the salute even more so: this is when most pictures are taken! If your horse is quiet enough, build up a pyramid. If not, align the children in a decorative way on both sides of the horse, with one little one up top, some standing with leg extended into the air, kneeling next to it, and doing full splits or the like. (Not if you are showing outside in potentially muddy weather!) Prearrange with the organizer, if and when a small gift (chocolate bar, anything will do) will be given to the vaulters as thanks for the show. (I always insist on this; it can be done very quickly and sets a festive end to your performance.) This means that your team has to align in a neat row again, and should receive such gift with equal bows or curtsies. It makes a very professional impression when one can see that all this has been thought of and practised for in anticipation, and does not throw your embarrassed youngsters into a fluster and confusion.



Writing a kur for a competition

In competition you are dealing with different kinds of kur, depending on whether you put together a single (individual vaulter), a double (*pas-de-deux* vaulting) or a team kur.

In most countries rules are set for recognized competitions. In any competition on a higher level, all exercises will be shown in canter. But if such rules do not exist, or you are just starting out, you might try to arrange stable competitions with other clubs around you as often as possible, and these competitions should



be defined in the invitation of the promoter to suit your vaulters' needs. Depending on the organization of the sports in your country, your provincial vaulting association will be able to help you in this, as they will have examples on file. In any case, you should submit your format to your local association and get it sanctioned by them (you may otherwise not be covered by your insurance for the event).

In these local events, you can show compulsories as well as all kurs in walk or trot or canter, just make up categories for it to find a fair level to judge them on. We usually don't let vaulters enter the same event (single kur or compulsories) in two different categories (in walk and canter), because then the better vaulters would forever win in all categories and the juniors don't have a chance to ever place. Refer to the example included in Appendix B to see such an invitation, which tries to provide a fair chance for everyone.

- *A team kur for competition:* Writing a team kur for a competition is similar to writing a show, with the difference that you are dealing with a set time limit. This is internationally set at five minutes maximum for canter, but in walk you might be allowed more time, as set out in the invitation. You still only pick the exercises which really work in a bombproof way. Flow of the kur is the same as for a show, the horse never goes empty, and all the other things mentioned above. But this time, don't keep your best highlights to the very end! In case of a fall and necessary remount, you might be slightly short of time at the end – and when the judge rings the bell, the vaulters must finish, or whatever is shown after three more canter strides does not count for scores any more. So you don't want to risk your best exercises – those that score highest for the technical merit mark – in case you're running out of time!
- *Writing a pas-de-deux kur:* So far it was not even stated in the international rules that a *pas-de-deux* routine *must* be performed by a male and a female vaulter, although that was always the

intent. Internationally, this will change now. But for stable competitions we should definitely allow vaulters of the same gender together, because so many clubs don't have *any* male vaulters! Internationally, the age limit for individual and *pas-de-deux* routines is set at sixteen years and up, but this also does not have to apply to stable competitions. You will see that your children will really enjoy doing a *pas-de-deux* kur with a close friend; it is a very different way to work together from team work!

In a *pas-de-deux* kur (which hereafter I will call double) the two vaulters only mount *once*, although ground jumps in between exercises are permitted, as long as the vaulter stays in contact with the grips. These ground jumps should be touchdowns – a quick down and up sequence – which does not involve any running alongside the horse.

As the same rules for an 'optimal kur' apply as mentioned earlier, you will see right away that transitions can now not be avoided! They rather take on a great importance and have to be executed fluidly and without bumping into each other – which is not as easy as it sounds! A good double takes on a dance-like quality at least part of the time. Many symmetrical exercises can be included, but also changes in direction and highlights such as lifts.

In an international competition the double kur consists of two rounds. The first round has a time limit of a minute, and will emphasize, but not be limited to, synchronized and mirror-image exercises. In the second round there are no restrictions, but the time limit is two minutes maximum. Each static exercise must be held for at least three canter strides. Synchronized exercises are the ones where the two vaulters do moves at the exact same time and in the same rhythm, which creates this dance-like quality. Mirror-image exercises are the likes of a double flag (on neck and back of the horse) but with difference in direction. Another example would be a double sideways shoulderhang, performed on the inside and outside of the horse. There are also mirror image dynamic exercises,

swings and transitions, as well as dismounts (for example a double roll dismount, one vaulter to the inside, the other out).

I am including an example of a little double trot kur in Appendix B, which was written for a two-minute competition for two small eight-year-olds. They performed this almost flawlessly and with smooth transitions (after vaulting for about a year). Since it is difficult to describe all the transitions on paper, try out a kur like this on the barrel with two of your vaulters, and you will quickly understand, which transitions are necessary. Watching videos and writing down the exercises (there is your homework as a trainer!) is a good way to learn, especially in double routines, where it is easy to copy on the barrel. (In a team kur it is much harder, since your vaulters may not be able to do the same things as the vaulters on the video in terms of ‘bunching up’ the exercises, but trying to copy is an excellent way to learn about actual levels of difficulty.)

- *Writing an individual kur:* You should include individual routines in your training sessions frequently, because the children very much like to shine alone in between team sessions. Teach your vaulters early to write their own individual kurs. It teaches them a lot about necessary transitions – and you will never have time enough to write all the single kurs for all your club members. . . . When singles are performed in canter, ground jumps can make them interesting, inside and outside the horse preferably. Have a healthy mix of static and dynamic exercises! Nothing is more boring in a kur than a vaulter who basically does nothing but sitting exercises, and the only dynamic feature (which does not qualify as such) is the waving of arms. Use the neck, the back, the stirrups. Use all directions. Include some mounts, fast transitions, high (shoulderstand) and low (hangs) exercises.

The included example in Appendix B shows a little routine written for a Walk Single, for an eight-year-old, who had

vaulting experience for a year and a half. Let someone copy it on the barrel and work out the transitions. Then let the vaulter write down for next time, what she remembers... That is the way to start.

Although a lot of work, writing good *kurs* is a lot of fun. Whether show or competition, offer your vaulters something new every time. It is true that *kurs* can only be perfected to world championship polish after having been trained the same way for quite a long time. But for a beginning team it is much more interesting to do new things frequently, and to pass the exercises around. If a vaulter has the feeling that 'this is *my* exercise, and nobody else should get it', she has been performing it too long exclusively. To build a good team, which can also function, if one or two vaulters fall sick before a competition, you need a broad base. This means that no vaulter will be irreplaceable, that you have two or three performers for each exercise.

In most cases, you will first show to a public mainly made up of riders, and if you show a lot in the same general area, you will have the same spectators over and over again. It will be the greatest credit to you if these people notice that each and every show is different, and *better* than the last. And that you have changed the music again. And people *do* notice. (The judges in competition even more so! You don't want them to start yawning the second your music comes on because they already know which *kur* will follow!) The parents (those valuable supporters of your efforts) will certainly notice if their child is doing different exercises in each show, or if they are stuck in the same routines over and over again, so that it isn't worth the trouble to bring their camera to the event any more.

After the first five shows you write, you'll become an expert and the progress needs much less time. So don't despair over the work load too early! This is the most creative part of your job: show your sense of choreography!