PONY CLUB
AUSTRALIA

Coaching Manual Update
For coaching riders at
E and D Certificate,
including lesson plans

Equitation Science component

Dr Portland Jones

Contents

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ABN 95 090 080 265

www.ponyclubaustralia.com.au

E: marketing@ponyclubaustralia.com.au

E and D Certificate Coach's Manual Update

Introduction

Safety and Welfare

Pony Club coaches are very special people! We're responsible for sharing our knowledge and the Pony Club syllabus with new generations of horse lovers. We try to not only nurture a love for the horse but also to educate our students so that they can ride in a balanced and effective way. We help our students to develop correct habits and horsemanship skills that are consistent with the community's expectations of animal welfare and that will endure, regardless of where their riding journey takes them.

However, while it's very important that we make sure Pony Club is educational, fun and rewarding, our most important duty as coaches is to keep our students safe. Horse riding is a dangerous activity, causing 25% of all lethal injuries in children's sport. (It is statistically more dangerous than motorbike riding with 7.8 fatalities per 100,000 participants per year and the group at the most risk of injury and death are young women.) While it would be impossible to make horse riding entirely risk free, as coaches, we need to maintain our focus on improving safety wherever possible.

As well as focusing on safety we must also ensure that our students have the understanding and knowledge to make good decisions regarding horse welfare. The world is changing rapidly, and we are learning more about the horse every year. Our teaching must reflect these changes – we must be ethical custodians of the horse so that future generations of students can enjoy the horse as we have done.

New syllabus

The new Pony Club Australia syllabus has been written to both honour the contributions and knowledge of the past while embracing the improvements in training effectiveness, safety and welfare that science can bring. Implementing an Equitation Science based training program has

been proven to be the most effective way of maximising rider safety and horse welfare. Equitation Science takes the guesswork out of training and significantly enriches our relationship with the horse as it reveals his extraordinary abilities and the differences between our species.

Change can be daunting and while you may have to learn some new concepts, specifically relating to the way that horses learn, you will probably find that the new syllabus is not unlike its predecessor. It's quite likely that most of your lesson plans and activities will still be able to be used with a few simple changes. The whip and spur licence will give you more opportunities to safeguard the welfare of the horses that you teach and the dual stream K and B certificates will offer non-jumping riders a clear alternative pathway. The simple ground work component will help you to keep your students safe when handling their horses and give them the tools to manage their horse in a more effective way.

It is our sincere hope that you will enjoy learning the new material in the PCA syllabus and that your willingness to learn will be communicated to your students – instilling in them a long lasting habit of education that can, in the long run, only prove to be of benefit to the horse.

- Dr Andrew McLean and Dr Portland Jones.

Equitation Science

How Horses Move

Horses have been domesticated for over 5000 years and for all that time humans have marvelled at the way they move. In fact, over the centuries, one of the most enduring arguments amongst horse-people was whether the moving horse ever had all four of his hooves in the air at one time. Famous Greek philosophers, academics, artists and successful trainers all tried to answer the question and failed because the human eye is simply too slow to see the horse's movement in detail. It wasn't until 1878 when Eadweard Muybridge built a rig of 12 high speed cameras that the moment of suspension could be clearly seen in the trot, canter and gallop. It's interesting to consider that, because of science, young Pony Club students today can easily answer a question that went unanswered for millennia.

You've probably been asking yourself what is **Equitation Science** and how is it going to help me to teach my Pony Club students?

Equitation Science is a relatively new field of science that aims to understand the horse and how he learns. It doesn't belong to anyone – it is a field of endeavour populated by scientists from all around the world, working together to make training safer, more effective and with better welfare outcomes for the horse. It is currently one of the fastest growing sciences and is being taught to vet and animal science students in dozens of universities across Australia, Europe, Canada, the UK and the US.

Equitation Science embraces all forms of training that are evidence based and ethical. It has a strong focus on ethology (the study of the horse's natural behaviours) and learning theory (the study of how animals and people learn). It also incorporates biomechanics (which is the science of how the horse moves) and recognises the limits of the horse's cognitive (thinking) and physical abilities. It provides answers to the questions that have troubled horse people for thousands of years and in the process makes horse training safer and more effective. Equitation Science is the best way to improve the welfare of horses because it doesn't guess – as Professor Paul McGreevy says, "Equitation Science measures only the measurable."

A note on the use of 'he'.

Throughout the manuals the horse is referred to as 'he' . This is, in no way, meant to suggest that geldings are superior to mares, it is just simpler than 'he/she'. It is a convention of the language in the same way that naming the left hind first when listing the footfalls does not infer that the left hind has special functional significance.

How the horse works

At the beginning of each certificate manual is a section on ethology, or 'how the horse works'. This introduces the students to some scientific knowledge about the horse and his natural behaviours. In the E and D certificates this section is very brief and simple.

In the **E Certificate** this section is about the horse's hearing, ability to sleep standing up and ability to run soon after birth.

As a coach of E Certificate students you may encounter groups of quite diverse ages. The ethology section of the E certificate is designed to be simple enough for very young riders to understand but, for older riders, may lead to interesting activities and discussions. You might wish to discuss with older riders the horse's evolution and how he evolved as a prey animal that escaped from danger because he is fast, vigilant (alert) and has acute senses. This could lead to a discussion about the flight response, which is the instinct that drives the modern horse to run away from danger even though he no longer needs to escape from predators.

With your younger riders you may wish to talk about senses and, on a diagram of a horse, colour in the areas that the horse uses to see, hear, smell, taste and touch. You can also discuss the horse's sleeping patterns. Most horses will nap standing up but will lie down for deep (REM) sleep. The area required for this should be safe, quiet, comfortable and large enough to allow the horse to stretch out. Increasingly our Pony Club riders will come from non-horse backgrounds and these are useful discussions to have as they may help inform management practices. Riders could make posters for their clubroom about the horse's sleep.

In the **D certificate** your students will learn about the flight response. This is a subject that will continue to be discussed throughout their time at Pony Club because an understanding of the flight response is important for their safety and their horse's welfare. The flight response is the instinct that tells the horse to run away from danger. It can be expressed in a number of ways including bolting, quickening, rushing fences while jumping, shying, swerving, bucking and travelling in a hollow manner with a high head carriage. It is important that students begin to realise that these behaviours are not 'naughty' but are expressions of the horse's instinct to flee when he is unsure or frightened.

Suggested activity:

You could make flash cards of horses doing different things (bucking, grazing, galloping etc.) and ask the children to identify which ones are showing the flight response. Note – they will be looking for a raised head carriage, legs moving quickly and quite often a widely opened eye. If you have multiples of each card you could play bingo or go fish.

Controlling the legs of the horse so that he doesn't quicken, and can be led and ridden with light aids, is really important for both rider safety and horse welfare. Although the flight response is an instinct and therefore natural, there is little natural about the way that domestic horses express the flight response. The wild horse runs away and when he is no longer frightened he stops running. This is called acute stress and the horse evolved to cope with this. The domestic horse cannot leave behind what frightens or confuses him (poor training, two aids given at the same time, a rider giving unclear signals etc.) so he suffers from long term or chronic stress and this can lead to health problems, psychological distress and reduced welfare. Therefore it is important to prioritise minimising the flight response in every interaction we have with the horse.

Although riders at E and D level do not need to know the ten principles of training you might find it interesting to review them (below) and note that No 2 deals with the flight response. These ten principles form the foundation of all effective, ethical training systems and it is always worthwhile considering them when designing lesson plans or activities. They have been identified by Equitation Scientists as best practice principles:

Ten Principles of Training

1. Prioritise safety when around horses
2. Understand what the flight response looks like and how to manage it
3. Understand that the horse's brain is different to ours
4. Prioritise calmness and be consistent at all times
5. Find ways to get the horse used to (habituate to) the things that scare him
6. Use pressure-release and reward training effectively. Avoid punishment
7. Use voice, seat and weight aids correctly and understand their limitations
8. Train behaviours gradually
9. Only give one aid at a time. Each aid should produce one response
10. Always focus on self-carriage

Older riders could make posters of the 10 principles for the clubroom or you could make each principle the focus of a lesson, either unmounted or ridden. As an activity, riders can watch videos of horses and identify when they are displaying the flight response or make posters of signs of the flight response. Ridden lessons that emphasise the importance of a consistent rhythm are important also, even with riders at D certificate level. This is because one of the easiest ways to see the flight response is in horses that constantly quicken in hand and under saddle.

The Rider's Tool Kit

The next section of the manual is called 'The Rider's Tool Kit' and this section deals primarily with the theory of learning. You will almost undoubtedly find that you are already practising the techniques discussed in this section, and the new manuals simply formalise the way in which they are discussed.

Pressure-release

The first form of learning discussed is pressure–release. You may recognise this as negative reinforcement but in the manuals until B certificate level it is referred to more simply. Pressure –release was best described by Tom Roberts who pointed out that if you sit on a pin you don't stand up because it hurts, you stand up to stop it hurting. The horse stops when rein pressure is applied because when he stops the rein pressure goes away.

Every interaction with the horse that involves pressure of any kind, uses pressure–release and it is how the foundation responses (at E and D certificate level these are stop, go forward and turn) are both

installed and maintained, so it is an extremely important learning modality. Basically, pressure–release describes why the aids work.

The Foundation Responses

At E and D certificate level the foundation responses are stop, go forward and turn (left and right). These responses, trained and maintained using pressure-release, form the foundation of the horse's basic training; that's why they are known as the foundation responses. Problems in the foundation responses can lead to behaviour problems, so it is a good idea to check them at the start of every lesson.

In horse training, the aid simply motivates the horse to try the behaviour while it is the release of the aid that trains the behaviour. Therefore, it is important that the pressure of the aid is not released until the horse performs the behaviour. It is useful to focus on encouraging riders to give clear aids and release them at the right time. When riders nag the horse with their leg or keep a heavy, constant contact with the reins the horse receives no release of the pressure and his training deteriorates. Similarly, if the rider uses pressure randomly (one kick or a smack with the crop) this is not pressure–release; it will serve only to deteriorate the horse's training. It might be useful for young riders to think of their aids as questions and to focus on making sure the answers are always the same. So, for instance, when they apply pressure to the reins (asking the horse to slow) they must maintain and gradually escalate the pressure until the horse slows *every time* and then release the pressure. When they apply leg pressure the horse must go forward *every time* and then they release the pressure.

Each aid can be thought of as having three parts. The first part is the light aid, which increases in strength to become the second part, the heavier aid (if required) which is followed by the release.

1. Light aid – this is like saying, "Please"
2. Heavier aid – this is like saying, "Do it"
3. Release – this is like saying, "Thank you"

There is no gap between the light and the heavier aid. If intermittent pressures (such as small heel kicks) are used there must be no more than a second between each tap otherwise the horse will perceive the gaps between pressures as a release.

A Note on Intermittent Pressures

You might have been taught to use intermittent pressure to slow the horse down. That is, pull, release, pull, release. Or use alternating left/right leg pressures to increase the horse's speed. We now understand that this way of training is unclear to the horse because the release of pressure doesn't necessarily correspond to the correct behaviour. It is far more clear (and therefore safer) to apply pressure until the horse slows (even if it's just a little bit) and then release – even if the pressure has to be applied again soon afterwards. The horse must be rewarded for every good try.

Incorrectly applied pressure-release has been identified as one of the largest causes of incorrect behaviour in horses, so it is important that riders learn at an early age to apply it correctly. Even a beautifully trained school master will habituate to the pressure of the reins if they are not released when he slows/stops. This is not only unsafe it also promotes poor welfare. It is useful to remind your riders that the horse's mouth is as sensitive as ours and that a hard mouth is not a result of physical changes in the mouth but is an indication that training has been unclear. No horse is born with a hard mouth – they are made by unskilled riders.

There are lots of activities that you can do with your riders to work on pressure-release. In a downward transition from walk to halt riders can count the three stages of the aid out loud. That is, "Please, do it, thank you." Or they can count "one, two three." Older, sensible riders could form into pairs and "drive" a blindfolded partner around a simple obstacle course using just a rope around the waist for guidance.

Reward training

The next form of learning that is covered in the E and D syllabus is reward training. You may know it as positive reinforcement. Basically if you give the horse something that *he wants* after he does something that *you want,* he is more likely to do that thing in the future. This is an often overlooked but powerful form of learning. However, it is important that the reward that is used is meaningful to the horse. Shouting "good boy" and slapping the horse on the neck are not rewarding to the horse, therefore they will not increase the likelihood of the behaviour occurring again. Horses are highly tactile creatures and stroking and scratching at the base of the wither can be very rewarding, as can food. However young riders can run the risk of getting their small fingers bitten by very food motivated small ponies, so it is best to focus on tactile rewards like scratching.

In the E and D manuals there are exercises to help riders find where it is that their horse likes to be scratched or stroked. It is worth noting that some horses will not respond immediately to physical rewards – the rider will have to quietly persist until some response is shown. The importance of physical touch as a way of deepening the bond between the horse and his rider cannot be understated. In modern management systems horses are often isolated and denied the physical touch of other horses – these horses will benefit from scratching and stroking from the rider.

One of the fundamental rules of behaviour is this: behaviour that is reinforced will be repeated. When you reinforce a behaviour it is more likely to occur again.

- Removing pressure is reinforcing.
- Scratching, stroking and food rewards are reinforcing.

The reinforcement must be given at the exact moment the horse does the desired behaviour. If you would like to reinforce good behaviour in a lesson, you must reinforce it immediately after it happens – not when the pony is tied up at the float after the lesson. Carrots given to the pony back at the float reinforce being back at the float, they do not reinforce good behaviour in the lesson.

You can use reward training with riders as well as horses. Stickers can be very reinforcing for younger riders and can often be used as very effective rewards. You can also build a lesson on reward training into your existing lesson plans quite simply. For example, if you have a lesson in which the younger riders do a simple task such as halt between two cones you can ask them to scratch their horse on the neck when he halts (after they have released the rein pressure of course).

A thorough understanding of reinforcement is the most important thing you can teach your riders. This is because it will not only help to keep them safe (because their horses will be more obedient and calmer) but it will also safeguard the welfare of the horse.

Punishment

The other form of learning covered in the E and D certificates is punishment. In theory, punishment (which is an aversive pressure applied after an undesirable behaviour) reduces the likelihood that a behaviour will occur again. However, in practice it is very difficult to use punishment effectively and it can be highly detrimental to the horse's well being.

To be effective, punishment must occur at the exact instant of the incorrect behaviour. Two seconds after the behaviour is too late, you have simply punished the behaviour that occurred just before the punishment. For example, if the horse stops at a fence and the rider turns him away and punishes him, what the rider is doing is actually punishing the turning away. The horse may jump when re-presented at the fence but largely because the punishment has triggered the flight response.

Punishment is non-directive, that is it might tell the horse what *not* to do but it doesn't tell him what to do. The horse that has been punished for biting might not bite anymore but he might rear instead. The horse that is punished for refusing might not refuse but he might learn to rush his fences.

Punishment can also create very powerful associations between the horse and the person that punishes him. The horse is not particularly good at solving complex problems but he does have an extremely good memory and he won't forget a memory of fear. So, it is far better to try and use other training methods first before resorting to punishment.

Ground work ('On the Ground')

The most significant change to the new Pony Club syllabus is the addition of ground work. You might feel daunted by the prospect of teaching this but if you can lead, halt and step a horse backward you can teach your students ground work.

The rules for safe ground work are the same as the rules for safe handling from the previous manuals. These rules include never wrapping the rope around fingers/hands/waists/necks and wearing appropriate safety clothing, including a helmet and gloves. Many serious accidents occur while horses are being handled, so ground work is an important skill for young riders to learn. It would be quite appropriate for you, as a coach, to wear a helmet when coaching ground work to set a good example for young and impressionable riders.

It is also really important to ensure that handlers and their horses maintain safe distances at all times during ground work lessons. Young children can get distracted easily and their peripheral vision is not as well developed as an adult's, so this maintaining this can require almost constant vigilance!

Teaching ground work also gives you an opportunity to discuss the fit of gear with riders (and often their parents). Nosebands should not be adjusted too tightly; you should be able to get two fingers stacked on

top of each other between the noseband and the nasal bone on the front of the horse's face. Tight nosebands are uncomfortable and can cause long term damage to the soft tissues, nerves and even the bones of the horse's head.

A Note on Handlers

If the young rider is still on the lead or has recently graduated to riding on their own it would be wise to have a parent handler on the ground during ground work lessons. Young children have less peripheral vision than adults and can find it difficult to maintain safe distances between their horses.

At **E certificate** level ground work is simply leading the horse and being able to stop with a degree of accuracy. There are lots of games and activities you can use with young riders to practice correct leading: stopping between two cones, stepping on stepping stones while leading the pony, unmounted games such as 'What's the time Mr Wolf' and 'Grandmother's letter box'. As long as you prioritise safety, ground work exercises are only limited by your imagination.

Beyond E certificate level, when training in-hand (in fact, when leading anywhere), you should use one of the two ground work positions. In the early stages of ground work training we use Position 1 (see below) because it allows us to see every movement that the horse makes which helps us to reinforce the correct responses with greater accuracy. Teaching young riders these positions and how to move from one to the other could be the subject of several lessons.

As an activity you could make posters of the positions. Or, before beginning ground work you could make a horse out of two pushed-together chairs or a drum and get the children to practise position one and two. You could attach reins to your 'horse' and ensure that the children are able to handle the lead rope safely.

Position 1:

- The student should stand on the horse's near side. They should be facing **backward**, looking toward the horse's left hip.
- The student should stand beside the horse, never directly in front, in case he gets a fright or strikes with his front legs.
- The reins should be held in the left hand, at most 15cm from his chin.
- This position is used when training set back and park. It is also used when holding the horse for the farrier and vet – although of course the handler would change sides so that they are on the same side as the vet.
- During all ground work, maintain an upright body position and focus.

Position 2:

- The student should face **forward** (the same direction as the horse), standing on his near-side, next to his cheek.
- The student's feet should be about 1m (3ft) or less from the horse's hooves.
- The reins should be held softly in the student's right hand, at most 15cm from the horse's chin, with the excess rein in the left hand.

Position 1 (here showing step back)

Position 2 (here showing stop)

Foundation responses

At **D Certificate** level, the foundation responses are stop (includes step back and slow), go forward and turn (left and right).

The first exercise is step back. This is a particularly important movement for ground work because it can help to quell expressions of the flight response. Also, because the muscles used in a backward step are the same as those used in a correct downward transition, it strengthens those muscles and creates correct habits that will help with under saddle training.

The rider should start in position one and apply pressure towards the horse's chest without moving their feet. As soon as the horse steps back the rein pressure is released and the horse is rewarded with a scratch.

When training and teaching, remember the KISS principle:

KEEP IT SIMPLE for STUDENTS – both human and equine.

A Note on Following

A lot of horses learn to follow the handler's legs and feet and while this may seem like a good idea it can create confusion for the horse. For example, if the horse is trained to follow the handler's feet when he is loaded onto the float, tied up or mounted the 'rules' of training have been broken. If horses are trained to stop, go forward and turn from light signals, not only are they calmer and more obedient, we are also adhering to the KISS principle!

The pressure used to achieve the step back should always start lightly and increase until the horse begins to take a single step backward. Some (small) students may need help to achieve the first few steps of backward. It's worth remembering that if the student cannot step the horse backward the probability that they can stop the horse quickly in an emergency situation is also very small. Therefore the step back is an extremely important component of safe training.

Once the student can achieve a single backward step it's time to work on two steps (that is, a step backward from both front legs). You can think of this as 'buy one get one free'. Pressure is applied as previously, but instead of releasing as the first leg moves backward, keep increasing the pressure until

the second front leg begins to move backward and then release and reward. Pretty soon you'll find that the horse will take two steps backward from one pressure. This is important because it means that he has taken a whole stride backward which strengthens the behaviour and makes it clearer.

If the horse is not standing square with the front legs you will notice that the leg that is furthest forward will step back first. This is because it was the last leg to stop. You will also probably notice that some horses are heavier when one leg (often the offside foreleg) is forward. It is well worth addressing this and ensuring that the horse is symmetrical in his responses.

Why the lead rope, not the chest?

Many riders use pressure on the chest to step their horses backward and this is a useful aid. However, it is important for safety that the horse also stops from lead rope pressure only – because this is the pressure that will stop him in a hurry when required. If the horse gets a fright while being led, the safest and easiest way to stop him immediately is to apply pressure to the lead rein.

Make sure that the student can achieve two backward steps from a single, light pressure regardless of which front leg is the most forward in the halt.

All horses are lateralised, that is, their legs work in diagonal pairs. So, what happens to the right front leg also happens to the left hind and what happens to the left front leg also happens to the right hind. Each of the diagonal pairs works a little differently. One pair is often harder to slow and the other is more difficult to quicken. This is why horses are often asymmetrical – because they take slightly different length steps. When the horse is really asymmetrical he may appear lame. This is often known as bridle lameness – a gait asymmetry that is caused by crookedness not pain.

The next exercise will be to practise downward transitions from walk to halt. The students will be in position two for this exercise. Set up pairs of cones around the arena and ask the students to halt their horses between the cones. Ideally the students will be able to halt within two to three steps of their horse's front legs. If they can't do this, return to the step backward exercises because this will help improve the stop.

Students should also be able to slow their horses when leading them. The aid for this is the same for stop/step backward but lighter.

Once the students can stop and slow clearly it is useful to get them to practise going forward as well. The aid for go forward on the ground should be a slight pressure on the head collar in the direction of travel. The rules of pressure-release apply just as much to the go forward aid as they do the stop aid so make sure that your students release the pressure as soon as their horse takes a step forward.

For horses and ponies that are reluctant to go forward it is very important to be extremely clear about the release of the pressure – even if the handler has to apply the aid again immediately afterwards. Remember, the release of the aid is the most important component; the pressure just motivates the horse, the release is what trains him.

Once your students can go forward and stop their horses from light signals you can practise turn. Try and encourage the students to turn the horse away from themselves – that is, to turn to the right. That is the safest way to turn because it is unlikely that the horse will stand on their feet or run them over. (In reality, your students will turn their horse both left and right in normal management situations. If the horse has a reliable stop response, he will become much safer in all handling situations, including turning to the left.)

You can use the following instructions to teach your riders how to turn their horse on the ground:

- Take your right hand sideways (not backwards) to the right and as your horse steps in that direction release the pressure.
- You might have to use three or four turn aids to get around a corner but it's much clearer for your horse if you release the pressure as he turns and then ask him to turn again rather than keeping your turning aid on for a long time.
- Practise your right turns until these are reliable and not hurried before practising your left turns.
- Take your right hand sideways (not backwards) to the left to ask your horse to turn to the left.
- Make sure he doesn't quicken his pace as he turns because this will make him more likely to step on your toes.
- If he seems to get closer to you during the turn, ask him to turn then slow him with the lead rope or reins.

Tip: Most horses only drift towards the handler if they are quickening.

You can create exercises for your riders to practice. For example, you can place your cones in a square with sides of about 10m and ask your riders to walk around the outside of the cones. You can incorporate the other things they have learned as well, using the cones to mark the place where you want them to stop, slow or go faster. Asking the riders to also lead their horses around the inside of the cones will help them develop accuracy.

Once your students can stop, slow, go and turn there are lots of exercises and games that they can play that will assist learning. Try an unmounted treasure hunt or a ground work obstacle course (halting between cones, walking between parallel poles etc.). You could also use a metronome to set the rhythm for walking, and by altering the rhythm help the students to walk slower and faster. Note: most horses will walk in hand at between 45 and 55 beats per minute. But you could set it as slow as 30 BPM to teach them very slow walk.

In the D Certificate manual, there is a very simple ground work dressage test that you can use to test your student's leading skills. You could use ground work dressage tests to introduce school figures and concepts such as riding corners/centre lines. Sometimes it is useful to teach ideas and concepts when the student is not distracted by riding.

Riding ('In the Saddle')

Taking an Equitation Science perspective doesn't mean abandoning the knowledge that has been developed over decades by Pony Club coaches of the past. Equitation Science adds an understanding of how horses learn and provides solutions to some of the problems commonly encountered by riders. While the focus of the new manuals is slightly shifted towards improving training practices, you will see that much has remained the same:

- The importance of a good position cannot be overstated. Riders must be balanced and be able to maintain a stable position. This not only allows them to apply the aids effectively it also helps to keep them safe.

- Good, safe practices are always important. Riders must wear appropriate clothing and prioritise their safety and the welfare of their horse at all times. Correct procedures for mounting, dismounting etc. should always be followed.

- School figures are a great way to train both horse and rider because they encourage accurate and thoughtful riding.

- Being able to ride safely in a wide variety of different situations is important.

The foundation responses are the basic behaviours that all horses should be able to perform easily and from light aids. Studies have shown that many accidents are caused by a failure in the way the foundation responses are trained and maintained. It is a fallacy that the training of well established 'school master' horses doesn't need to be maintained. Although older, well trained horses will often perform well when initially ridden by unskilled riders, all horses will eventually learn incorrect habits if ridden incorrectly. Even a very young child can and should maintain the training of their horse. Careless application of the aids and unrelenting pressure are damaging to a horse's wellbeing and will eventually lead to a deterioration the horse's training.

As you know, one of the most important skills for your students to master is the ability to hold a light, even contact without pulling backward on the reins. You can practise this skill with younger riders before moving on to more complex skills. You could even practise this unmounted by holding onto a pair of reins at the billet end and asking the student to hold the reins as though they were riding. This way you can help your students get an understanding of what a correct, light contact feels like without the distraction of the horse.

The first thing that you should do every lesson is check that your students can stop. The halt is an often overlooked exercise but it is very important. If the students are holding a light contact they should be able to halt by simply closing their fingers more firmly around the reins and (from the walk) by stopping their arms from following the movement of the horse's head and neck.

Stop / downward transitions are a really vital part of training because they help to minimise expressions of the flight response and keep riders safe. Poor stop responses are associated with a wide variety of incorrect behaviours such as bucking, shying, tension, rushing and bolting.

It is very useful to ask your students to give their halt a mark on a scale of one to 10 based on how much pressure it takes to achieve it (if one is very light pressure and 10 is the heaviest aid possible). Anything over a five out of 10 needs your immediate attention as a coach because this pressure is potentially quite painful for the horse which means that the rider is inflicting pain with every downward transition. This is not only unethical it is also unsafe because a horse in pain will be unpredictable.

Ideally, the horse should be able to stop from walk within a stride – or within two steps of the front legs. It can be helpful for the coach to count the front leg steps for the students to make it easier. Or, in the rhythm of the walk, the coach can count out the three phases of the aid, "Please (light pressure). Stop (stronger pressure). Now (release pressure)." Riders should also scratch or stroke their horse's wither/neck as a reward once the halt has been completed.

Practise these halts until you are confident that your students can stop reliably. In order to improve accuracy you could ask your students to stop between two cones, or between two parallel poles.

Of course you can't practise downward transitions without also practising upward transitions. The signal for go forward is pressure with both legs below the knee. If the horse doesn't respond to light pressure from the rider's legs they might have to use the pressure of their heels. And if he doesn't respond to that, the rider might have to vibrate the heels against his sides. Don't forget it is really important that the pressure starts off very lightly and is released as soon as the horse goes forward. Poor go forward responses are associated with several incorrect behaviours including rearing, napping, jibbing and refusing jumps.

A note on whips

Even in the hands of a small child a whip is a potentially very destructive tool. It is important that children understand how to use the whip correctly. The whip should rarely, if ever, be used as a tool for punishment; that is, a single hit after a certain behaviour to discourage that behaviour from happening again. Rather, the whip can be used as a tool of negative reinforcement; that is, light taps increasing in frequency until the horse goes forward. Students should only use a whip if they understand how to use it correctly and humanely. This is why the whip licence was introduced.

Riders should practise their upward and downward transitions walk/halt/walk until they are light and reliable. Make sure you vary the time that the horse stays immobile in the halt – sometimes the halt should be brief and sometimes longer. This is a good way of ensuring that the horse will be obedient when a longer halt is required.

The following is an excerpt from the new **D Certificate** manual and it explains clearly the way to deal with a horse that is reluctant to go forward:

> *'Some horses are always slowing down. These horses are often called 'lazy' but really it's just a problem with their training. They need to be trained to maintain the tempo of their legs until the rider gives them the aid to slow down. If your horse is constantly slowing down it can be quite tempting to keep nudging him with your leg to keep him at the required speed – a little bit like pedalling a bike up a hill. But your leg aid should always mean 'go forward', it shouldn't mean 'keep going'. Every single time you use your leg your horse's legs should move faster. If you use your legs all the time without releasing (like pedalling a bike) your horse will learn to ignore you. Ideally you want your leg aids to work as though you were riding a skateboard down a hill – one small nudge and you glide along for ages.*
>
> *If your horse slows in the walk, do an upward transition to trot and, after a few strides, ride a downward transition back to walk. Remember not to pedal! Make sure you only use your leg to mean go forward. It's a little bit like daring your horse to slow down and when he does, correcting him with an upward transition. If you're very careful to use your leg correctly, pretty soon he will learn to maintain his own tempo. Just remember, you are the drummer in the band and you decide on the tempo of your horse's legs.'*

As a coach it can be really tempting to allow riders to 'pedal' their horses in a lesson, because they slow the whole ride down. But it's really useful to teach riders that there is an easier alternative.

Being able to ride at a slower than usual pace is useful, even for younger riders. The horse should slow from light aids and should maintain the slower gait without constantly being slowed. Slow trot can be very calming for anxious horses if the focus is on achieving self-carriage. You can use a metronome to set a slower rhythm in the trot (70BPM is quite slow) or you could find pieces of music that match that tempo and ask riders to ride in time.

The Training Scale

Sometimes, as a coach, it is difficult to know the right order in which to address any training/obedience problems that your riders are having. If the horse is rushing and shying, do you try to fix the rushing first or the shying? If the horse is lazy and naps, do you fix the laziness or the napping first?

This is where the Equitation Science training scale comes in. This training scale is useful for Pony Club riders because it deals with behaviours in their most basic form and it is relevant to both ground work and ridden behaviours.

The training scale is not introduced until C* level but it can be very useful (in an informal way) for younger riders too. You can think of the training scale as a series of questions.

1. Does the horse do what it is that we want him to do? For example, in an upward transition from halt to walk, does the horse walk forward? If he doesn't, you need to help the rider achieve this. In the training scale this level is called *basic attempt*.
2. Does the horse do what he is asked immediately from light aids? For example, does the horse walk forward from a light squeeze of the rider's legs? If he doesn't, then repetitions of the aid, ensuring that a clear release of pressure is given, will improve this. Ideally the pressure used for aids should be about a 2/10 or 3/10. In the training scale this level is called *obedience*.
3. Does he maintain a steady rhythm? Rhythm is a much overlooked part of training and yet it is extremely important for calmness. Horses that consistently quicken are almost undoubtedly displaying the flight response. As a rough guide the walk should be about 55 beats per minute, the working trot 75 and the working canter 95. These tempos could be up to 5BPM faster for ponies. This is *rhythm* level.
4. Does he stay straight? Straightness has two components; the first one to address is maintaining line. Most horses are asymmetrical and will drift off line consistently in one direction. Riders should pay attention to this and make sure that their horse can maintain a line without constant

maintenance. The second part of straightness is through the body. On a straight line the horse should be relatively straight, and on a circle his neck should be very slightly curved to the inside. Correct flexion (bend at the poll) and bend (bend through the spine) is achieved through turns. In the training scale this is *rhythm* level.

5. Does the horse maintain a consistent posture and length of rein? It is not important for the horses of young riders to be 'on the bit' but they should aim to be able to work with a light, even contact on the reins. You will find that once the other criteria are in place and the rider is able to maintain a balanced, consistent position, this criteria will be easy to establish. This is *contact*.
6. Can the horse demonstrate all of the criteria, above, in all situations? If the horse gets anxious on the cross country course, rather than focusing on the anxiety it is useful to address what the horse is actually **doing**. So, the rider would start at the beginning of the training scale and work through the levels until the horse obedient to light signals, able to maintain a steady rhythm, demonstrating straightness and maintaining an even contact. This level is called *proof*.

Obviously very young riders will probably find the concept of the training scale too difficult to understand, however, as a coach you can use it to help your students stay safe and develop good habits.

Turn is one of the foundation responses. Incorrect turn can lead to shying (because a shy is biomechanically just an unsolicited turn step), napping and running out at jumps.

Not all riders understand what actually happens in a correct turn. For these riders it can be useful to start your explanation unmounted. On some soft ground or grass ask your riders to get down on their hands and knees. Ask them to crawl around a cone on the ground and ask them what they do to make the turn happen. They will turn by moving their inside hand away from their body. This is the same for horses. A correct turn happens when the horse moves his inside foreleg away from his body during the swing phase (that is, the part of the step when the leg is in the air).

You might wonder why it is important to know this? Sometimes horses turn by swinging their hindquarters to the outside and this is incorrect and often leads to incorrect behaviours. Because the rider rewards the turn with a release of the pressure of the turning rein it is important that the rider doesn't release the pressure until a correct step is taken.

To turn correctly, the rider looks in the direction that they are turning and opens the turning rein slightly away from the horse's neck. The outside rein stays against the outside of the horse's neck and can be used to prevent excessive neck bend. At no stage should the turning rein ever be pulled backward, as this tends to encourage excessive bend in the neck and is too similar to the aid for stop.

Turning the horse from a rider's leg aid is confusing for the horse because turning refers to sideways movement of the horse's front legs, which can be produced mainly with the rider's rein. Movement of the horse's hind legs can be produced mainly with an aid from the rider's leg aid (pressure from one of the rider's legs, not both legs together). Sideways movement of the hindlegs is called yielding. Turning and yielding are so biomechanically different that a horse could not be expected to discern between the same aid being given for turn and yield. This would result in a level of confusion that would undermine the aim of training light and clear responses and pose a welfare concern. Sadly, applying leg and rein aids simultaneously often leads to horses being labelled as stiff, 'dull to the leg' or 'hard mouthed'. Having different aids for turn and yield removes confusion for the horse, makes training faster and safer, and gives the horse the best opportunity to respond to the rider's demands.

It is useful to practise turn at walk as it is easier for riders to see when the inside foreleg takes a step. You can set up four cones in a square with sides of about 18m and ask riders to walk around the square, practising their opening turning rein at each corner.

It is important that the horse does not bend his neck much further than the point of his inside shoulder during the turn as this will unbalance him. Also, the horse should maintain the same tempo through the turn – again you can use the metronome or music to test this. The rider should stay balanced in the deepest part of the saddle, looking ahead around the turn.

In all of the foundation responses, it is important that the horse does the behaviour (go, stop and turn) when the aid is applied. But equally, it is just as important that the horse doesn't do the behaviour without an aid (ie. he stays in self-carriage). So, if asked to halt, the horse should halt until given the aid to walk on – he shouldn't just walk off on his own. When the horse is asked to go forward he should go forward until the aid for slow / stop is given, he shouldn't just stop on his own. The same is true for turn. The horse should travel straight unless he is given the aid for turn.

You will find that most horses drift consistently in one direction, probably to the right. This is not because the horse is less supple or weaker this way it is generally because the horse's central pattern generator (the neural networks that govern movement) makes the right front leg/left hind leg pair (or the left front leg/right hind leg pair) more inclined to quicken.

Initially at walk and then at trot ask your riders to ride straight between two points and check if their horse stays on their line on his own. If he drifts off line, get them to correct the horse by opening the opposite rein. If the riders are consistent the horses will quickly learn to maintain a line on their own.

It can also be useful to build a very small arena (about 20m x 8m) out of cones and ask your riders to ride around it (one or two at a time) without losing line or changing rhythm. If they can do this competently at walk you can ask them to do it at a slow trot too.

You will probably find that you can add work on the foundation responses into your existing lesson plans and outlines very simply. You will find that when your students' horses have clear, reliable foundation responses that they will be calmer and safer in all situations. Not only that, a horse that is obedient and responsive to the rider's aids is much more fun and rewarding to ride.

Horse Management

The management section of the manuals includes the same subject matter as the previous certificate syllabus but has been updated to reflect modern understanding and practices.

Lesson Plans

In the following section you will find some lesson plans to help you get some practical ideas for how you might teach the new syllabus.

Lesson Plans

E Certificate ground work

Lesson One: Staying safe during ground work

Topic and goals:

Identify safe ground work practices. These will include never wrapping the lead rope or the reins around any part of the handler's body, managing excess rope/reins safely, wearing correct safety equipment including a helmet, boots and gloves, staying focused, and maintaining safe distances between ponies.

Equipment:

Large sheets of butchers' paper, coloured markers. Classroom or outside seated environment.

Lead ropes and reins.

Introduction:

Instructor will explain safety principles. Include brief discussion of what the pony can see (blind spots in particular) and ways to stay safe. Also safe rope handling practices.

Main activities:

One at a time the students can gather the rope safely in their hands – instructor can demonstrate first. Both lead ropes and reins should be used, making sure the students know how to carry excess rein safely (i.e. looped across their palm, not around their hand). Then, on butchers' paper draw a horse and handler. Children to draw (or tell the instructor what to draw) various safety features including helmet, boots, gloves, hair tied away, no mobile phone, safe distances, correctly fitted bridle etc. If preferred you could use A4 sheets of paper with printed, colouring in-type pictures of horses and handlers on them, and the children can do their own pictures individually.

E Certificate ground work

Lesson Two: Pressure-release and reward training

Topic and goals:

Pressure-release and reward training are an intrinsic part of handling and riding horses so it is really important that your students (even very young ones) understand them. One of the most important aspects of pressure-release for your students to understand is that it is the release of pressure that trains the horse. The three phases of the aid are also important (light aid→stronger aid→release of the aid). They should also understand that slapping the horse on the neck and yelling "good boy" are not rewarding, rather they should focus on stroking or scratching the horse's neck.

Equipment:

The instructor will need to be safely attired as though for ground work (helmet, gloves, hair tied back, boots etc.). You will need an assistant to bring you a pony correctly turned out for ground work, half way through the lesson.

Introduction:

Explain how pressure release works. Explain three phases of aid. It can be useful to use Tom Roberts' great analogy – why do you stand up when you sit on a pin? Not because it hurts but because when you stand up it stops hurting. You could do a demonstration asking one of the students to sit down on something that you can pretend is a pin… Also explain reward training and the importance of using rewards that the horse wants.

Main activity:

Demonstrate correct ground work. Explain the release of the aid, increasing the pressure if necessary and the immediate release. Explain and demonstrate correct reward training, scratching and stroking the pony at the base of its neck. Explain timing of the reward – not after the lesson, but immediately after each good effort. Many children learn most effectively by watching (visual learners) so it is important that you show safe practices, patience and clarity.

E Certificate ground work

Lesson three: First ground work lesson

Topic and goals:

If you have prepared your students with lessons one and two, their first ground work lesson should be fun. The goal of this lesson will be to establish some basic understanding of ground work principles and safety, and to begin developing their ground work skills.

Equipment:

To help the students understand safe distances you should allocate each student a cone and ask them to stand by it. Cones will be set out across the midline (the B-E line) such that safe distances can be maintained. You will also need cones to mark out a triangle that the students will lead their horse around.

Introduction:

Explain pressure-release and reward training briefly (you have already done this in previous lessons). It might be useful for them to focus on just two aspects such as the three parts of the aid and using a reward that the horse enjoys. If you do a demonstration you can count the three parts of the aid out loud. That is, “please, stop, now” or “one, two, three.”

Gear check:

Check that the students are dressed correctly and that their horses are in a bridle or halter that is fitted correctly. Remember, if a noseband is used you should be able to stack two fingers, one on top of the other, between the nasal bone and the noseband.

Main activities:

One at a time the students will walk their ponies forward and then halt, counting the three phases of the aid aloud. Then they will reward their pony with a scratch. They can all do this several times.

Then, beginning again on the midline the students can walk their pony forward, turn to the right around a cone on the centreline and return to the ride by walking down the long side of the arena and behind the rest of the ride, demonstrating safe distances. Doing a downward transition after the cone and counting the three phases of the aid would also be useful.

E Certificate Riding

Lesson Four: stopping with accuracy

Topic and goals:

Incorporating pressure-release and reward training into under saddle tasks, starting with a downward transition from walk to halt.

Equipment:

You will need several pairs of cones placed around the arena. These should be able to be moved once the lesson progresses. You may also need other cones for marking out a circle and (with more experienced riders) other school figures.

Introduction:

Begin by recapping pressure-release and reward training. Explain that every aid has three parts and how we can count them for example light aid →stronger aid → release of aid could be counted 1,2,3 or And Stop Now. Explain that the release is the most important part of the aid. Explain that to be meaningful reward training must give the horse something that he wants i.e. scratching and stroking not patting and yelling "good boy."

Gear Check:

If a whip is carried the student must have their whip licence. An incorrectly used whip can be harmful, even in the hands of a very small child. Bridles should be fitted correctly, ensure that nosebands are not adjusted too tightly.

Main activities:

Using cones, mark a large rectangle (with rounded corners) in the centre of the arena. It will be approximately 20m x 30m but could be larger if the group is large. Mark a turn through the middle (across the midline) and place two cones at X about 80cms apart. Students will walk around the rectangle (this is an easier school figure for them to ride correctly than a circle) and one at a time, they will ride across the midline and halt at X, counting the three parts of the downward transition out loud. Reward. They will then walk on and return to the ride.

Students can do this exercise at trot as well. They will ride a downward transition to walk at the cones and ride an upward transition back to trot before re-joining the ride.

Extension:

You could use poles side by side (if the students can ride accurate lines) to mark where to ride the downward transition. For more competent riders you could use the centre circle and one at a time ask them to go around the larger arena, ride a downward transition at either A or C and then return to the ride. Older students working at higher certificate levels could do this exercise in 2 point position.

E Certificate Riding

Lesson Five: Turning correctly

Topic and goals:

You will find that many students are unclear about how to turn their horse correctly and safely. The aid for a turn is always a slightly opening rein – never a rein pulled back towards the rider's body. If the horse is untrained or reluctant, the rein can be opened further which will encourage correct turning steps. However, it must be emphasised that the aid only works because it is released as soon as the horse turns. Inexperienced horses may require two turn aids to turn a 90 degree turn with a clear release of pressure between each aid. Ideally the horse's neck will remain relatively straight during the turn with only a small amount of flexion in the direction of travel. It is the job of the outside rein to moderate the bend of the horse's neck during the turn.

Equipment:

You will need numbered cones that can be clearly read by the riders.

Introduction:

It can be useful to start this lesson unmounted doing the turn exercise kneeling on the ground as described in the manual. However, this is not entirely necessary. Give a clear explanation of turning. Emphasise the opening of the rein and the lack of leg aids.

Gear Check:

See Lesson Four

Main activities:

Place the numbered cones around the arena so that they form a school figure. One at a time the children take turns at being the leader following the cones around and counting the numbers out loud. Change the cones and make more challenging figures as the lesson progresses. This can be done at trot as well. Try to include several turns of different dimensions in each of your figures so that the students can practice their turning. Try turning across the midline, turning across the diagonal, changing the rein outside the circle, and changing the rein through the middle of the circle.

E Certificate Riding

Lesson Six: Slowing the horse

Topic and goals:

In the manuals there are three different trot speeds described for riders at E certificate level. See below.

'Now you can practise slowing. Imagine that working trot is about as fast as you can run. Try and ride your horse just a bit slower than that – as fast as you can jog. If your horse tries to speed up, just use your slowing aids to remind him to stay at the slightly slower tempo. Make sure you are not holding him in the new tempo with your reins. With your helper, practise changing between a speed that is fast as you can run and your jogging speed.

Once you can ride at jogging speed, try and ride the slowest trot you can imagine. We'll call that speed baby jog. So, now you have three trot speeds:

- *as fast as you can run (working trot)*
- *as fast as you can jog (slower than working trot)*
- *baby jog (which is the slowest trot you can imagine).*

With your helper, practise swapping from the faster trot to the slower trot and then to your slowest trot. You should be able to choose any speed trot that you like! Check all the time that your horse is staying in the new rhythm with just a few reminders from the reins'.

Equipment:

You will need enough cones to mark school figures for the students to follow.

Gear check:

See Lesson Four

Main activities:

On a circle the students will ride working trot. You will use a metronome to set the tempo – for every beat the rider will either rise or sit (or one of the horse's legs will take a step). For horses this will be about 75BPM, for smaller ponies about 80BPM. For a mixed group, try starting at the slower tempo. Now, reduce the tempo to about 70BPM. It is important that the riders learn to slow in the same way that they learned to ride downward transitions – that is, using the three phases of the aid and releasing it when the slowing has been achieved. The horses should be able to maintain the slower tempo. It can be really useful to ask the students to take their hands towards the horse's ears and give a loop in the reins to check that their horse is indeed staying in the slower rhythm without the reins.

Once the students can achieve the slower trot you can use the metronome to do a really slow jog – this will be about 68 BPM.

You can call the different trots anything you like – working trot, slow trot and jog. Or working trot, slow trot and really slow trot. It's up to you.

Then you can swap between the various tempos.

Extension:

Change between various trot speeds on a variety of school figures. Riders can do this in two-point position. For higher certificate level riders (not E and D level riders) this lesson is a useful way to prepare for riding without stirrups. You should ensure that riders can trot slowly in self-carriage before they attempt trot without stirrups.

D Certificate ground work

Lesson Seven: Position one and two

Topic and goals:

To say safe during ground work there are two different positions that can be used. Position one (handler facing the horse's near side hip) is used for step back and for handling the horse for the farrier and vet. Position two (handler facing forward) is used for leading. These positions will be returned to throughout the student's pony club career.

Equipment:

Young students could do this lesson without their horse. You could make a horse out of chairs, or use a barrel (the ones used to train vaulting would be ideal) – the possibilities are limited only by your imagination! Older students can use their own horse.

Introduction:

Position 1:

- The student should stand on the horse's near side. Facing **backward**, looking toward the horse's left hip.
- The student should stand beside the horse, never directly in front, in case he gets a fright or strikes with his front legs.
- The reins should be held in the left hand, at most 15cm from his chin.
- This position is used when training set back and park. It is also used when holding the horse for the farrier and vet – although of course the handler would change sides so that they are on the same side as the vet.
- During all groundwork, maintain an upright body position and focus.

Position 2:

- The student should face **forward** (the same direction as the horse), standing on his near-side, next to his cheek.
- The student's feet should be about 1m (3ft) or less from the horse's hooves.
- The reins should be held softly in the student's right hand, at most 15cm from the horse's chin, with the excess rein in the left hand.

Gear check:

Ensure that bridles are adjusted correctly including fit of noseband. Remember you should be able to stack two fingers on top of each other between the noseband and the front of the horse's nasal bone (i.e between the noseband and where the horse's blaze would be). Students should be dressed safely and should be wearing helmets, gloves and boots with hair tied back.

Main activities:

After the introduction and a demonstration the students will practise position one and two separately. They can then practise swapping from position one to two and back again. If the students are using a pretend horse you can make this a game. Emphasise maintaining control at all times and safe rope handling. Also include messages about maintaining safe distances on the ground should be included in the lesson.

D Certificate ground work

Lesson Eight: The stop response

Topic and goals:

At D certificate level the stop response in ground work has three components – stop, step back and slow. In combination, these three behaviours are vital for handler safety and also for producing horses that are calm and reliable during handling.

Below is a short excerpt from the D Certificate manual:

> *'Without moving your legs, apply pressure on the lead rope or reins towards the middle of his body. How much pressure did you have to use before he took a step backward? If it took quite a bit of pressure – we need to work on the stop response! The horse is very sensitive and he is much happier when his training is clear and he can be controlled using light signals. We want to be able to move him backward with about as much weight in our hands as a chocolate bar.*
>
> *If your horse is really heavy, make sure you start your pressure very lightly. Then, in the time it takes you to count to three, gradually increase the pressure. As soon as he takes one small step backward with one front leg, release the pressure totally and scratch or stroke him. It is really important to remember that the pressures you use should never be painful – they should just be slightly annoying for the horse.'*

Equipment:

For riders who are inexperienced with ground work it may be useful to mark a spot for each on the arena, ensuring that there are safe distances between each horse and rider combination. You will also need cones or poles to mark a 'slow zone' where the students can practise slowing their horses.

Introduction:

It is important that students understand that the stop response has three components and that these are all related. The aid for stop (pressure on the reins) should be discussed as well as a brief discussion on correct use of pressure-release. That is, you must focus on rewarding the correct responses with a release of pressure.

Gear check:

See Lesson Seven

Main activity:

Students should stand by their cone and assume position one. Practise step back. When this can be achieved by all students they can form a ride on a circle that you have marked with cones. In position two

the students should move around the circle (on the left rein so the handler is on the inside) and halt when told to. You can use the same command as for a riding lesson, “Whole ride prepare to halt. And halt.” This will allow them to organise their reins and prepare themselves to halt. If the horse is heavy in the downward transition, return to the first exercise and repeat step back. This will improve the stop response.

Next the ride can practise slowing on your command. You could use a metronome to set the tempo – depending on the size of the horses in the group the tempo could range from 45 – 55BPM and a slow walk from 40-55BPM.

The ride can then walk around the entire arena and slow when they walk between parallel poles. You can place several pairs of poles around the arena.

D Certificate ground work

Lesson Nine: the ground work dressage test or obstacle course

Topic and goals:

In the D Certificate manual there is a simple ground work dressage test that you can work through with your students. If they become proficient at this you could use basic obstacle courses to test their ground work skills. Walking between poles, over bridges, through gates, around barrels, in and out of bending poles, under archways, over poles, over low natural obstacles, up and down banks, over ditches, along stepping stones… basically if it is safe for both horse and rider your students can use it as a test of their ground work skills. You could have ground work obstacle courses and make them into a competition with prizes for the calmest horse, the most accurate combination etc.

Equipment:

Any equipment that is safe and appropriate for the task can be used. For a simple ground work dressage test a standard dressage arena can be used.

Introduction:

Ground work is not only useful because it makes the horse more obedient to handle on the ground, it is also a valuable form of training because it deepens the responses that are used under saddle and is a very good way of teaching students about the ways in which the horse learns. You can either use the ground work dressage test from the D Certificate manual, make your own up using the movements that you have worked on in your previous lessons (stop, step back, slow, go forward, turn), or make up a ground work obstacle test. Discuss with students the qualities that you will be looking for and marking them on – calmness, accuracy and light aids.

Gear check:

See Lesson Seven.

Main activity:

Work through the ground work dressage test or obstacle course. Most students will not consider the possibility that anything to do with dressage can be fun – so, while prioritising safety, make it as much fun as possible.

D Certificate Riding

Lesson 10: Stopping in two steps

Topic and goals:

Training becomes most effective when the horse has really clear, reliable habits. One of the habits that it is useful to establish first is a walk/halt transition that occurs in a single stride of walk. Even young students can easily learn to identify a stride at walk because they can simply count two steps of the front legs, i.e. one step each of the left and right forelegs. Counting the steps of the front legs may be the first time the students identify where the horse's legs are and is a useful way to begin developing their feel for the biomechanics of the horse.

Equipment:

You will need enough cones to mark out simple school figures.

Introduction:

The following is an excerpt from the D certificate manual and is about riding a downward transition to halt from walk.

> *'Repeat the same process and this time count how many front leg steps your horse takes to stop. How many steps did your horse take? If you said two steps – that's great! If you said ten steps – we have some work to do! Ideally we would like the horse to stop in two steps of his front legs. If you have trouble achieving this, you might have to increase the pressure a little bit more quickly. It's ok to increase your pressure a little bit as long as you always start with a really light pressure. When your horse stops release the pressure and give him a scratch or a stroke on the neck.'*

Gear check:

Riders must be dressed appropriately according to Pony Club standards. Ensure that the horse's tack is fitted correctly and that, if nosebands are worn, they are also fitted correctly with two fingers stacked on top of each other between the noseband and the nasal bone of the horse. If the rider wishes to carry a whip they must have their whip licence. Spurs are not appropriate at D certificate level.

Main activity:

On a circle at walk help the riders count their horse's front leg steps. In order to be consistent, count the swing phase of the outside foreleg as one, the swing phase of the inside foreleg as two. When the riders can easily count one, two, one, two in time to their horse's walk you can add the downward transition. It is easy to combine counting a stride and counting the three parts of the aid. The light aid (one) will be

applied as the outside foreleg is in the swing phase, the stronger aid (two) will be applied as the inside foreleg is in the swing phase, the release of the aid (three) will occur when the horse becomes immobile. The transition from the trot to the walk should also occur in a stride. If the students are rising then the transition should occur in the time it takes them to rise and then sit. Especially with younger students it makes more sense to perform the downward transition from rising trot as they are unlikely to be balanced enough to ride it effectively from sitting trot.

D Certificate Riding

Lesson 11: Working on straightness – the line game

Topic and goals:

In the equitation science training scale *straightness* has two components. The first is maintaining line and the second is straightness through the horse's body. We cannot expect that the horses will become straight through their bodies until they can achieve the first component – maintaining line. This seemingly simple exercise is a useful technique to help achieve the first component of straightness and you will find that very few horses are able to do it well at first.

Equipment:

A simple dressage arena is ideal for this activity but if one is not available it can be done in any safe enclosed area.

Introduction:

Straightness is a really important quality for any horse. Not only does it help maintain the long term soundness of the horse, it is also a necessary requirement for further training. The horse will not be able to achieve his athletic potential if he is not straight.

Gear check:

See Lesson 10.

Main activity:

Riders will pick a point and ride on a straight line towards it. They will not maintain their horse on the line but will 'dare' the horse to fall off line and, when he does, correct him by opening the opposite rein and applying pressure. The horse will learn quite quickly to stay on the rider's line. This exercise can be done at walk and trot. If the group is large and the arena small, you may have to do this exercise two (or even one) at a time.

Extension:

This exercise can be done in canter but due to the problems of changing lead it should be done on the centre line and the same rein maintained. Higher level (C* upwards) rider can do this exercise at canter over narrow poles, making sure that their horse does not drift from their line over the pole.

D Certificate Riding

Lesson 12: Wiggly lines

Topic and goals:

The wiggly line is one of the best turn exercises that you can teach your students. During this exercise they will ride down the quarter line and perform three or four shallow turns (about the quarter line). They will be trying to determine if their horse can maintain a steady rhythm during the turns (many horses will quicken or slow one way), if the aid required for each turn is the same and if the horse stays relatively straight through his body.

Equipment:

Enough cones to mark the start and finish of the quarter lines.

Introduction:

The aid for turn begins with the rider looking in the direction that they wish to turn. This serves two purposes as it acts as a classically conditioned signal for turn for the horse and also ensures that the rider is looking where they are going. The rider then opens the turning rein towards where they are turning; if the horse doesn't turn the rein can be opened further and a little more pressure applied. As soon as the horse turns the turning rein is returned to its normal position. The rider maintains enough outside rein to prevent the horse from bending his neck. Riders will find that they often need more outside rein in one turn than the other. It is important to reiterate that riders do not need to use leg aids for turn. When two aids are applied at once (such as a rein and leg aid) one will overshadow the other. That is, one will be acted upon and the other will be habituated to. Habituating the horse to one single leg pressure often leads to habituation to both legs and therefore the go forward aid become ineffective.

Gear check:

See Lesson 10

Main activity:

In open order the riders can perform a wiggly line at walk and then trot on the quarter lines. You can use a metronome to help them maintain a steady rhythm. They may find they need to use their slowing aids if the horse quickens during turns one way. In this instance it is best to slow before and then after each turn – not during the turn as it is important to avoid using two aids simultaneously. If the horse slows during the turns one way, then the rider should quicken him before and after the turn until he can maintain his rhythm throughout the exercise.

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