

# Flora Harris

*on improving adjustability*

Two clock-face style circles, plus canter poles and oxers on specific distances help to hone a horse's balance and athleticism

## AIM

MY trainer and partner Jeremy Scott introduced me to the two-circle pole exercise and I've used it on a variety of horses with impressive results.

It is intended to be ridden in canter, but if the horse struggles, start off in walk or trot.

The beauty of the exercise is that it can be tackled in a variety of ways and it ticks so many boxes, improving the horse's balance, athleticism and adjustability. It is great for dressage, it helps to develop a showjumping canter and it teaches the horse to be able to adjust for the cross-country, where you need plenty of gears. It also challenges the rider to pay attention to detail and their position.

## THE EXERCISE

This exercise requires a large school — ideally around 60x30m — although the dimensions can be adapted. Build two offset circles with a 24m distance (on a straight line) between the pole at 3 o'clock on the top circle and the pole at 9 o'clock on the bottom circle. Each circle should have the poles sited

## TIPS AND PITFALLS

- Keep the horse straight. If necessary, put in tramlines on the 24m distance. If he is crooked, the exercise won't have the desired effect.
- The rider should aim to use their upper body before their reins and always look at the middle of each pole, which will help with straightness.
- If the horse becomes strong or out of balance, make a transition.
- Be patient — this is tricky to perfect and will take time to master. Do no more than three or four circles before resting the horse in walk.



Flora Harris and Bayano competing at Blenheim last year

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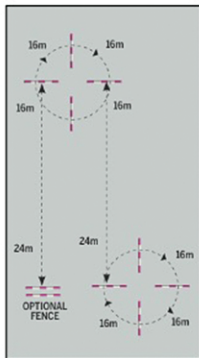
as though they are on a clock face — at 12, 3, 6 and 9 o'clock — with 16m on a curving line between each pole. Also, place one pole where the oxer will be built as the horse progresses. Initially keep all poles on the ground, but an oxer up to 1.20m can be constructed as the horse gains experience.

**2** Enter the circle at any point, in a straight, balanced canter. Put four strides between each pole on the circle and then, when the horse is ready, three or five strides. Some find shortening and engaging the hindleg a hard ask, while others

find that they lose balance when asked to lengthen.

**3** As the horse becomes more established, ride from one circle to the other, exiting the top one at 3 o'clock and entering the lower one at 9 o'clock.

**4** Once the horse is confident, aim to open him up on the 24m distance between the circles, putting in, say, five to seven strides. Also, open him up to the oxer and then collect again for another canter circle. It's a great feeling when it works. **H&H**



**NEXT WEEK**

Billy Twomey on preparing for jump-offs