



Creative dressage schooling



Enjoy the training process with
55 meaningful exercises

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Circles

I am constantly reminded how difficult it is to ride a correct circle. Many riders don't even realize that the figure they are riding is *anything* but round! Some ride deeply into the arena corners when riding a 20-meter circle (as if they are riding around the whole ring rather than a specific figure); others make their circles too small or too large. Some bulge out or fall in on the "open" side of the circle (the side that isn't along the wall or fence), or neglect to hit the track where they should at the *circle points* (see p. 20).

Riding a circle correctly requires maintaining a consistent degree of lateral bend in the horse. To achieve this, the rider must not only give the aids correctly, she must also focus on riding a *painfully* accurate path of travel. For example, on a 20-meter circle that begins at A or C, the horse will touch the track at three points: the starting point of A or C, and the two circle points, located on each long side, 10 meters from each corner. In a 20-meter by 40-meter arena, the circle will also touch X.

To do this the rider establishes the circle in the middle of one of the short sides of the arena. As soon as the horse reaches A or C, the rider begins steering him toward the first circle point on the track. Upon reaching the circle point, the rider steers toward X, from X she steers toward the next circle point on the opposite track, and from that circle point she completes the circle by returning to A or C.





Correct Circles

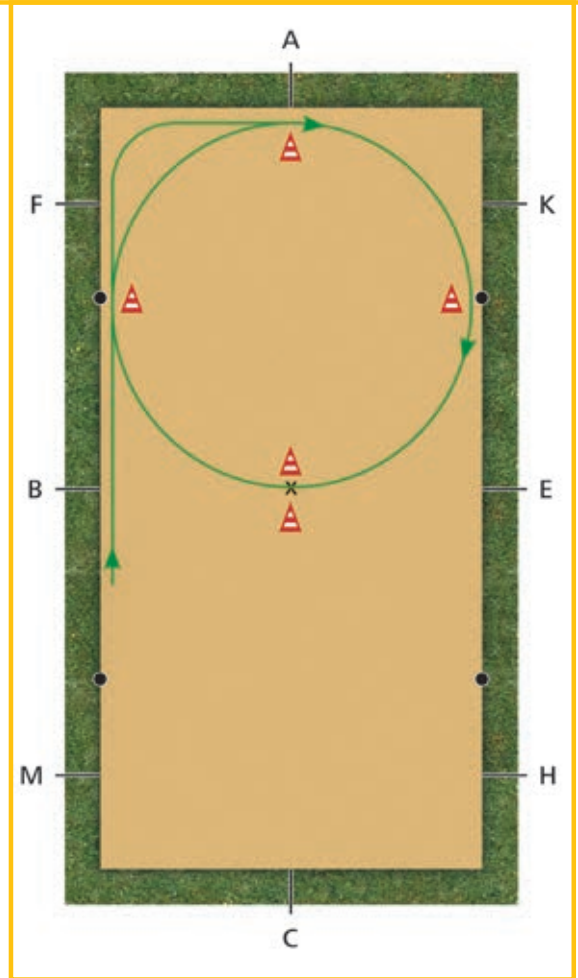
Where You Go

You need five cones or “markers” for this exercise. Place a cone at each point of a 20-meter circle: one just off the track at C or A (so you have room to ride between the cone and the arena fence or wall, one at each circle point (again, slightly inside the track), and then one on either side of X (in a small arena) so the path of your 20-meter circle goes between them.

Ride along the long side of the arena at the trot, tracking right. When you reach A on the short side, flex your horse to the right and steer him toward the next circle point. You will be guiding him slightly off the track in a curved line. As soon as your horse arrives at the circle point, steer him toward X. At X, pass between the two cones and then steer toward the next circle point. Even when you have reached the “safety net” of the track after traveling along the open side of the circle, remember that the remaining quarter of the circle must still be ridden as a *curved line* until A is reached again. At A the 20-meter circle is completed, and you can proceed around the arena on the track.

Why You Do It

Being able to ride an exact circle line is of crucial importance. Placing cones or markers around the points of the circle make the correct line easier for the rider to visually identify and ride accurately. Riding through each “gate” formed by the cones and the fence line teaches the rider to recognize the aids necessary to keep the horse on a consistently round circle. The cones make it harder for the rider to “cheat” by flattening out the open side of the circle.



Here's How

- 1 As you trot through the first corner onto the short side of the arena and approach A (the start of your 20-meter circle), bring your inside hip forward and drive with your inside leg at the girth to establish lateral bend and encourage the horse to step under his body with his inside hind leg.
- 2 Apply a “guarding” outside leg to help keep the horse's outside hind leg active. When combined with the outside rein, your outside leg also prevents the horse from drifting out. The outside rein needs

to allow for a slight inside flexion of a degree relative to the arc of the circle.

- 3 Use half-halts at regular intervals to keep your horse “packaged” and balanced as you guide your horse onto the path of the circle, using the seat and leg aids described above and a slight opening inside rein.
- 4 As soon as your horse responds with the appropriate lateral bend, soften the inside rein while keeping your horse thinking “forward.”
- 5 When you reach the next circle point, ride the continuing turn in the same manner—your goal is to achieve a *round* circle!
- 6 After passing through the “gate” at X and heading back toward the track, you will need to ride with increased outside aids to prevent your horse from falling out, and as a result, reaching the track *before* the circle point.
- 7 Ride the final quarter of the circle (back to A) just as you did the first three.
- 8 Repeat for several circles, then change directions.

Having Problems?

- *Your horse constantly drifts outward on the circle.* You may be asking him for too much lateral bend in his neck toward the inside. Keep him straighter so that you only see his inside eye and the edge of his inside nostril. For the time being, use very clear seat and leg aids. A horse that is strung out and unbalanced may also drift outward. Use half-halts to organize, activate, and “package” him.
- *Your horse constantly falls in on the circle.* This usually means your horse is not fully accepting your inside leg and is avoiding bending laterally. Work with your horse so that he easily “gives” in his

neck when you ask him to flex inward. Drive your horse forward while repeatedly—but briefly—applying your inside rein aid to attain flexion, and then immediately “giving” the rein when he responds. If the horse is too strong in the trot, try riding the circle in walk. Once you can easily flex your horse to the inside, he will better accept your inside leg and allow himself to bend laterally—which means you will better negotiate the path of the circle.

Riding a Square

Where You Go

Exercise 5 should be attempted only once you have practiced Exercises 1 through 4. Keep in mind the progression of the previous exercises as you ride a square within a 20-meter circle: Begin a corner at A, then ride a straight line to the circle point on the rail, where you ride another corner onto another straight line to X. At X, ride another corner, heading to the circle point on the opposite track, where your final corner sends you back to A. This exercise can be ridden in all gaits.

Why You Do It

This exercise helps correct the horse that “falls through” his outside shoulder (on the *outside* of the square). This means the horse’s weight falls to that shoulder—a problem that is usually caused either by the rider’s inadequate use of the outside rein or the horse’s inadequate response to it. Because this exercise calls for riding straight lines *without* inside flexion, it clarifies the value of the outside rein for both horse and rider. The horse that tends to carry more weight on his outside foreleg will begin to bear weight more evenly on his legs after *Riding a Square*.

Here's How

- 1 After riding down the track and coming onto the short side traveling in either direction, turn at A while keeping the next circle point (on the rail) in view. Make this turn by pushing your inside hip (the one closest to the center of the square) forward, drive with your inside leg at the girth, and keep your outside leg in the guarding position, just behind the girth. Your outside rein should allow your in-
- 2 side rein to ask the horse to flex and turn.
- 2 As soon as your horse leaves the track at A to travel to the first circle point, ride him in a straight line: Both seat bones equally weighted, both legs at the girth driving the horse forward, and the horse’s neck straight between both reins. A strong half-halt on the outside rein may be necessary to achieve the desired straightness.
- 3 Ride a half-halt as you go into the “corner” of the square at the circle point and then continue, riding to X and making the turn onto the next straight line as described above.
- 4 Practice this exercise in both directions.

