

“Jen Marsden Hamilton is a teaching icon.”

GEORGE H. MORRIS

# STRIDE CONTROL



Exercises to Improve  
Rideability, Adjustability,  
and Performance



JEN MARSDEN HAMILTON

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# PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

## chapter

# 3

### **Strategy and Stride**

When on course in competition, there is no time to think, there is only time to assess the situation and make adjustments to follow your strategy. Thinking is done at home. Once a skill is a habit, you don't have to focus on it (see *Creating Good Habits*, p. 14).

You walk the jumping course to build a strategy. It is your responsibility as a rider to ride the track and set up the stride/pace on the short side of the arena for what's required in the line of jumps ahead.

God made the horse under the Imperial System, and God said the horse shall have a 12-foot stride (at least in North America!) Courses and related lines are based on the 12-foot stride. A 60-foot line of jumps will ride as four 12-foot strides, leaving one 12-foot increment as the space required for landing and takeoff (6 feet each).

### **Setting Pace**

In order to get around lower-level courses, you need three different canters: regular canter (middle), open canter (forward or longer stride), and closed canter (steady or shorter stride). It is the rider's

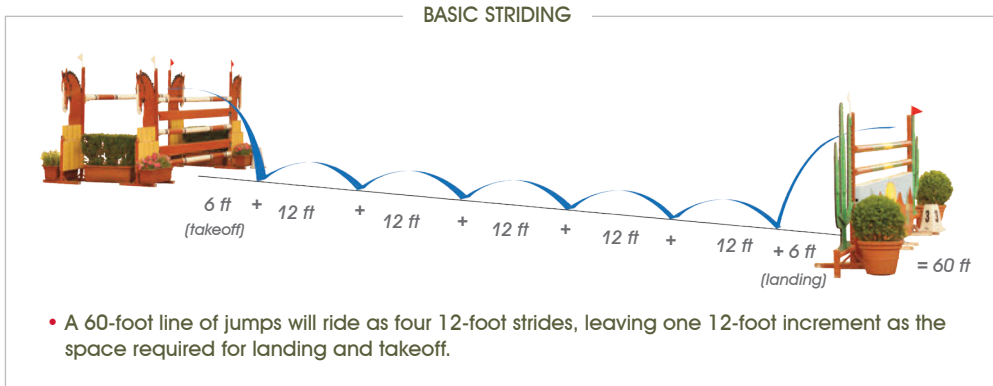


*If you aren't having fun,  
your horse sure isn't!*

responsibility to set and maintain stride length and pace. All lines do not ride the same, and riders and horses need to learn and like jumping off different stride lengths and different distances/takeoff points.

Factors to be considered when setting stride (pace):

- Actual measurement between jumps—is the distance long, short, or lovely?
- Types of jumps—vertical to oxer, oxer to vertical, vertical to vertical?
- Where the line is on course—is it first or last?
- How close the jump is to a turn—the jump takes away pace when combined with a short turn.
- Whether the jump is toward or away from the in-gate.
- What kinds of distractions are present.



tors rattray  
Tors Rattray



Tors Rattray and Versace NZPH.  
*“Jen’s coaching, knowledge, and passion for this crazy sport of jumping colored sticks has provided me with a foundation that will last a lifetime,” says Tors.*

”

Tors Rattray

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For this exercise you need two ground poles, 60 feet apart on the long side of the arena.

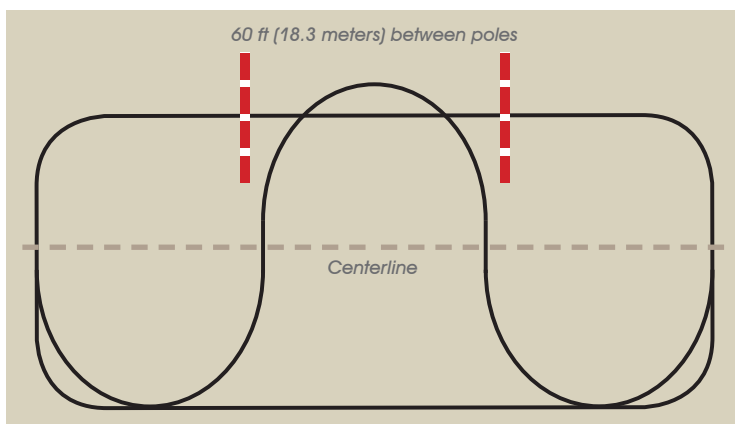
Use a tape measure and measure from both ends of the poles to ensure they are parallel and the right distance apart. It also pays to mark the position of the poles with cones or a pair of jump wings. This way you will notice if the horse knocks a pole and alters the distance.

Stride control between the poles is longitudinal work (back to front). In contrast, serpentines and turn-on-the-forehand (for example) are lateral work (side to side). This exercise does both.

### ★ Strategy

1. Canter the two poles with five strides between them—this is your regular (middle) canter.
2. Ride a serpentine of three loops—canter the first loop, trot the second loop, and canter the third loop, making all your transitions on the centerline.
3. Halt on the center line and turn on the forehand to change the rein.
4. Canter around the arena and canter the two ground poles in five strides again.
5. Ride a serpentine of three loops again, this time trotting the first loop, cantering the second loop, and trotting the third loop.
6. Walk on the centerline.

60-FOOT LINE OF GROUND POLES



- Set two ground poles 60 feet apart on the long side of the arena.



## ★ Purpose

The purpose of Exercise 1 is to teach:

- The rider to take responsibility for setting up, on the short side of the arena, the stride length required in the line, which is determined by the distance between the ground poles (longitudinal work).
- The rider to organize and turn, and straighten and turn, as she rides the serpentine (lateral work).
- Both rider and horse discipline and accuracy in the transitions (longitudinal work).
- The rider coordination of aids and the horse to yield or move off the pressure of one leg aid in the turn-on-the-forehand (lateral work).
- The rider to think and organize. Canter down the long side may seem like an empty task; it isn't. The transition to trot on the centerline, and the start of the serpentine, is a good test for this.
- To finish the ride neatly with a downward transition to walk on the centerline on completion of the serpentine.



*Set the pace, keep the pace,  
and let the jump come to you.*



end of exercise 1



*Away from one jump  
is to the next!*

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### **Further Education: The Importance of the Short Side**

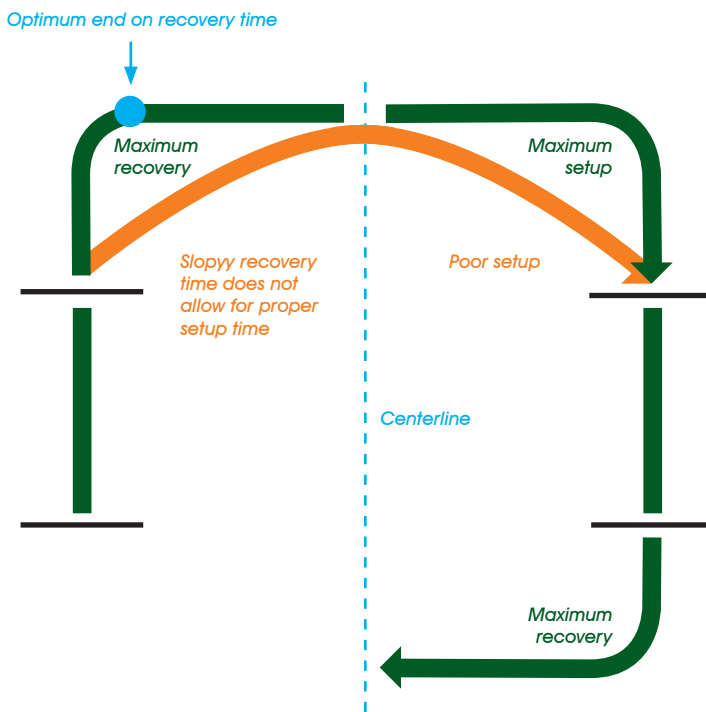
The short sides of the arena are an important part of any course. This is where the organization is done. It is on the short side that the rider prepares the horse for what's coming. The horse doesn't know the course and distances. The rider does, and this mental knowledge has to be turned into physical action.

There are two parts of the short side: the setup and recovery.

- **The Setup Time**—The distance from the centerline to the first pole or jump of a line is the minimum setup time. This is where pace is established for what is required to get down the line.
- **The Recovery Time**—The recovery time is where you have to fix any loss of position, connection, balance, shape, lead, pace, and track. The distance from your last jump to the centerline of your turn—on a lovely perpendicular-to-parallel path (because we never cut corners)—is your recovery time. It's your maximum recovery time.

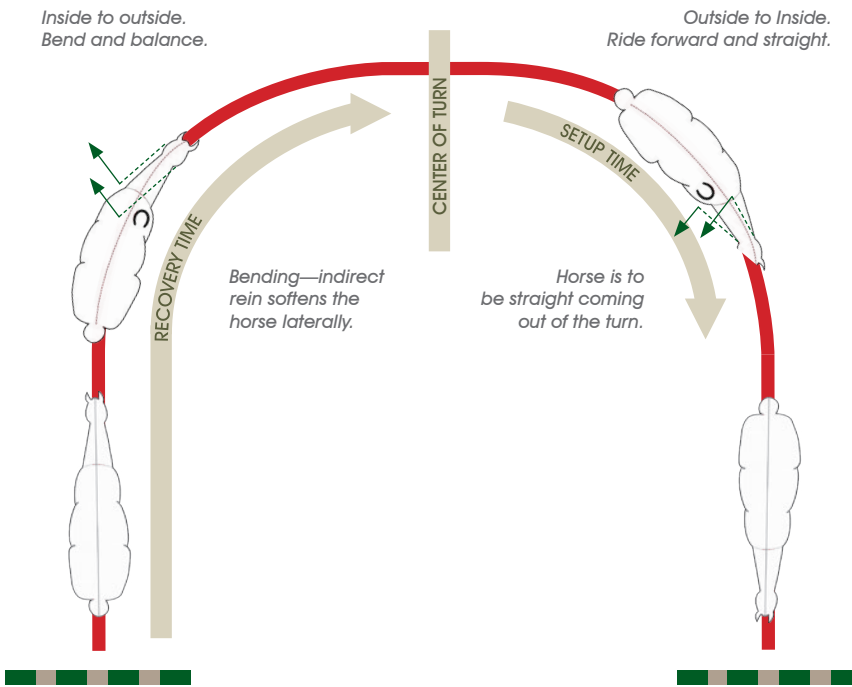
When the setup and recovery are put together, recovery time leads to setup time. Ideally, you want to reduce the recovery time to give yourself more setup time. This is done by riding straight away from the last jump of the line on a straight track, perpendicular to the turn. Hopefully, position, balance, pace, and lead are maintained or corrected at the turn, and thus the recovery is completed early. This gives more of the short side to the setup for the next line on course.

RECOVERY AND SETUP



- When riding from a line on one long side to a line on the other, you want to minimize recovery time in order to maximize setup time (green line). Sloppy recovery (cutting corners) does not allow for optimal setup (orange line).

THE BETTER THE TURN, THE BETTER THE LINE



- Ride straight away from jumps. Be very particular about keeping your track to and away from jumps.

*lady olivia waddy*

# Lady Olivia Waddy



Lady Olivia Waddy and Bosun, competing at Tauherenikau International ODE, National Advanced Points Winner for the year. *“Jen has taught me a sack-full of very sound jumping skills. As a coach myself, if I could emulate half of her coaching skills and knowledge, I would be very happy.”*

”

Lady Olivia Waddy



## *Don't become the queen of the perfect mistake!*

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### **Riding the Setup Time**

On the short side of the arena, the balance and pace are established (longitudinal connection). Through the turn, the horse will tend to bulge or drift to the outside.

Ride from outside to inside: Use an inside open rein and an outside bearing rein with direct pressure, and an outside leg to guide the horse around the turn. The outside leg and outside bearing rein block any potential drift and maintain balance. Pace is maintained with the inside leg. The open rein won't disturb the established pace. Your hands are moved to the inside of the arc being ridden. As the turn is being completed, your hands return to the neutral position and the horse is straightened and balanced with an outside direct rein. You do not want the horse bent through this turn because it will shorten the stride and the horse will get crooked. Ride the line.

### **Riding the Recovery Time**

As the horse lands off the last ground pole in this exercise (or jump of the line), use direct reins to rebalance. Look straight to go straight—follow your eyes to see the turn and give yourself direction.

Ride from inside to outside: Riders tend to let horses cut corners and fall in going into turns. Use your inside leg to push to the outside rein and leg. Direct pressure on the outside rein will help control balance and pace as the rein opens to guide the horse straight. The inside indirect rein and inside leg are used to bend and shape the horse for the turn. The outside rein will control pace, balance, and amount of bend, and will hold the



*You are never too old  
to learn and improve!  
And many of you have  
proven this to be true.*

track. The hands move to the outside of the arc being ridden and then return to their neutral position and even contact.

The habit of riding the recovery time smoothly and accurately enables a smooth and definite setup time for the next jump. The better the turn, the better the line.

### Correct Practice

Correct training and good habits come from paying attention to the details, and internalizing the skills required to get the correct response.

A correct position that allows you to deliver clear and precise aids is the most important thing in riding. Make it a habit. Every transition, circle, serpentine, and turn should be done to the best of your ability. Every time you ride down a line, read the situation and maintain or adjust the pace, balance, and straightness as required. Educate yourself and your horse.

Consistency leads to good habits and improves discipline and communication, which raises the level of performance and makes you a winner!

## KEY POINTS ✓

- *You have eyes for balance, direction, distance and conviction. Your eyes create the final conviction that you want to jump the jump. Use them and you might see that elusive distance.*
- *A successful course ride is a combination of rider-horse communication. Through*

*stride control exercises, the rider learns how to produce and feel the horse's stride, and the horse learns to listen and respect the rider.*

- *Effective use of the short side of the arena changes a frantic ride into an educated ride.*

