



Accordion Gymnastic

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With the summer show season well underway, many horses and riders have busy competition schedules ahead. Focus and attention at this time of year tends to shift away from training and towards competing. With often limited time in between competitions, the horses need to be freshened up for the next event, but also riders will look for a few touch up exercises to help with rideability and responsiveness.

Good gymnastic and rideability exercises do not require big jumps, which is nice for the horses in between the physically taxing competitions. The following is a good exercise designed to work on subtle lengthening and shortening of stride between jumps.

Begin by setting a small (0.85m) vertical on a quarter line in the arena. Measure 48' and place a pole on the ground. From this pole, set three more poles on the ground spaced 10'6" apart. From the last pole, measure 48' and set another small vertical.

Start by cantering into the line over the vertical and make four quiet strides to the set of canter poles, and once through the bounces of poles make four quiet strides to the final small vertical.

The distance between the vertical and the canter poles is short, but the canter poles themselves are set slightly forward – especially after the quiet distance to them. The proper execution of the exercise should have the horse entering the line from a quiet gymnastic canter, and gradually but subtly lengthening the stride to the canter poles, such that each stride is progressively longer than the last. Once through the poles, the stride should be gradually shortened back up to the quiet canter that began the exercise.

Riders should ensure the canter stride isn't too big coming in to the exercise. Also, riders should be careful not to lengthen the stride too strongly upon landing from the vertical. It is important that the last stride before the canter poles is the longest stride of the four strides, but does not force the horse to get too close to the first canter pole.

An extension of the exercise is to raise the canter poles into cups to make four verticals set as bounces.

As always, riders should always wear a helmet whenever mounted on a horse, and only ever jump with professional supervision and guidance to keep horse and rider safe while training.