

LESSON PLAN

FIGURE 8

OBJECTIVE: THE CHALLENGE IS IN THE CHANGE OF BEND. THE EXERCISE IS GOOD FOR ENGAGING THE HORSES CORE WHEN DONE CORRECTLY

PREREQUISITES:

- Can walk and trot independently around the arena
- Stop, go turn is established in walk and trot.
- Some bend has been introduced on the 10m loop, 20m circles, short sides
- Turns across the arena and diagonals and changes of direction.

EXPLANATION:

What:

2 x 20m circles joined by a change of direction through the middle. Ridden like you draw a figure 8.

Why:

Horse - The change of bend is the challenge in this exercise for the horse. Frequent changes of bend done correctly are good not only for suppleness but also for engaging the horses core. Because they have to keep changing their bend it is harder for them to collapse through the hip and the shoulder and it encourages them to stay in self carriage better. The figure of 8 also works them more evenly both ways than the serpentine.

Rider - Shortening the length of time to get the change of bend challenges the riders communication and efficiency of aids. Remember though if the horse is not responding well and your not getting your quality strip back to the easier exercises (ie 10m loop, 20m - circle diagonal - 20m circle) or walk and get the quality of the bend and change of bend. That is the purpose of this exercise. To ride the exercise for the exercise sake without getting the change of bend will only reinforce the one sidedness of the horses ability to bend and crookedness.

Challenges the riders feel for true bend and getting true bend through the changes (hint, once self carriage and topline is established the crest will flick to the direction of bend if the horse is changing bend properly and not just faking it).

How:

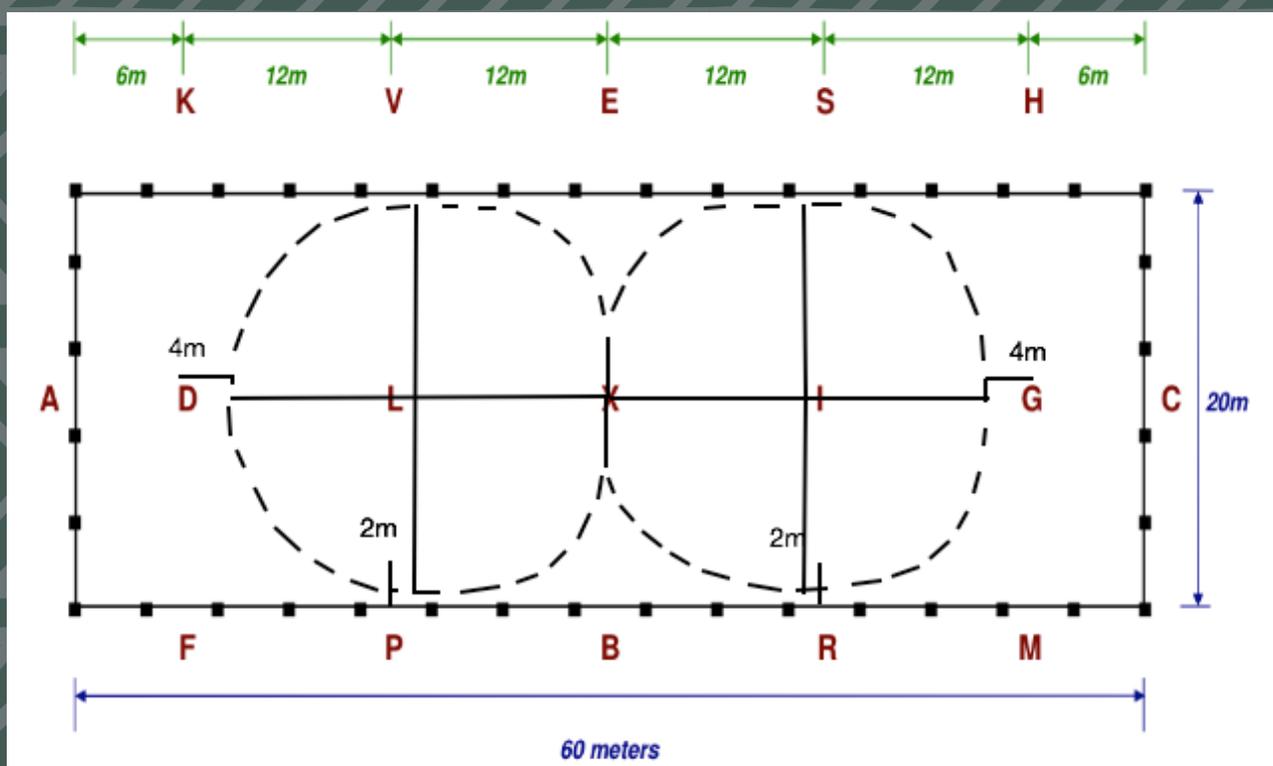
Refer to the diagram below for how to break down the geometry of the shape. Try walking this movement out on the ground first and set out some cones to help you get your eye in for the shape.

I'm going to explain this from riding on the left rein from C. E turn left X circle left 20m. This is in a 20 x 60m arena. Riding the curved line touch the track, leave the track 2m inside of R. Continue to follow the same curved line to cross the centerline 4m inside of the HM line. When we change direction over X we make it a bit easier by holding the period of straight on the EB line a bit longer so when we hit the 3/4 of the circle 2m the other side of S stay on the track a little longer and take the curve a little deeper to try and straighten up around the 3/4 line. Eventually you want to change bend within 3 - 4 strides over X.

Ride a straight line from quarter line to quarter line getting the change of bend and new direction established. Touch the track, leave the track 2m inside of P. Maintaining the arc of a 20m circle cross the centerline 4m inside of the FK line, returning to the track 2m past V. Finish the circle at X riding the corner to track right at B. Understanding the geometry of why these are the points of your figure of 8 and 20m circle will make it a lot easier to ride accurately.

Aids:

- Always start your movements with a positional correction and set the direction with your body. Eyes, shoulders, hips "look" to X.
- Ride your corner at E and straighten up from the quarterline to X before setting up your first 20m circle. Outside leg says turn/leave the track. Inside leg and outside rein says stay out through the corner so your horse doesn't drop the shoulder and fall in on the turn. Inside rein and leg asks your horse to look in the direction of travel. The corner and therefore bend through the horses body is the angle of a quarter 10m circle.
- Outside rein and leg straightens onto the EB line.
- New outside leg and inside rein sets direction, new inside leg and outside rein says stay out. New inside rein and leg says look in direction of travel. Outside rein and leg keeps them from over bending and as always legs ride forward to hands.



- Ride the arc of the 20m circle to the points described on the figure, taking note of the horse falling in, falling out, losing tempo or rushing. Ensure the horse has changed bend to the new circle and isn't just pretending to bend. I.e. Weight distribution is into the outside shoulder, balance is in the inside hind, horse is flexed through the ribcage to the direction of travel without falling in

Exercise:

In walk practise riding the accuracy of the figure of 8. Once you're confident with the shape and navigating the movement concentrate on maintaining the consistency of the rhythm and tempo throughout the movement establishing bend and getting of change of bend through the middle.

Quality - How many asks do you need before the horse responds to the aids "turn, stay and look"? Try and time this so that you are getting the accuracy of your shape. Does your horse want to slow down, speed up or fall in or out? Can you be prepared and ride the conversation smoothly to create the right arc of the line and maintain the quality of rhythm and tempo through the circles and the change of bend.

I.e: Your conversation with your aids as described above might go like this "turn, stay out, walk on, look where you're going, straighten up, walk on, shift your balance, change your bend, walk on, turn, stay out, look where you're going." So you are kind of bouncing them between your aids to ride the straightness of the curved line.

Pick up the trot. Ride your tempo changes until you have a nice balanced, forward working trot with your horse seeking your hands.

Warm your horse up with some 10m loops getting the shift in balance, change of bend and suppleness. At the degree of bend required your horse should also be looking for some transitions between long and low and working frame. Ask for these to get their topline warmed up.

Ride your 20m circle - diagonal - 20m circle to get your shape warmed up and the change of bend happening over a longer straight. You could also use a short diagonal for the extra challenge to prep for the figure 8.

Ride a couple of trot - canter - trot transitions to get the forehand active and lifting or some trot poles depending on you and your horses stage of development.

Ride your figure 8 in trot. The first couple of times through is purely steering around the shape and coordinating the turns. Once you have established the working pace throughout the figure look for the quality of bend and change of bend across the centerline. If you start to lose responsiveness to the aid and accuracy come back to the walk and tune in again. If you are finding you are not getting the change of bend you can ride the first circle in trot and the second circle in walk focusing on the change of bend. You could also try doing the change through walk and the rest of the circle in trot. Have a play and see what works for you and your horse with the change of bend being your quality first and foremost and then rhythm and tempo and true bend through the circle and change.

Progression

You can really spice this exercise up if you find the change of bend too easy. Lay out some trot poles across the centerline or even a jump. Ride in canter and use the change as a walk through, trot through and flying change, ride one circle as a 20m and the other as a 15m or 10m always focusing on the change of bend as the quality.

Common mistakes

Rider error - Leaving it too late to set the horse up for the change of bend

- Riding the change of bend across the centerline diagonally instead of parallel to the short sides.

- Accuracy is also really easy to miss on this one if you don't understand the breakdown of the geometry

- Leaving the track too late to turn onto the EB line and wheel wobbling.

Horse (but really also rider) - The biggest most common error with this exercise is in the change of bend. We really need to ensure the horse changes their weight distribution and then gets the lateral bend around the leg through the whole body and doesn't just fake it.

When your horse has true lateral bend established and isn't just collapsing through the hip and the shoulder you will see the whole crest roll in the new direction of travel.

Ride review

How far out from the letter do you need to start asking your horse to prepare for it to be ready to leave the track to turn onto the EB line?

Does your horse find it easier to turn one way more than the other?

Does your horse find it easier to bend one way more than the other?

Does your horse evade by falling in, falling out, slowing down or speeding up?

Did you remember to correct your position before riding the turns and changes of bend?

Were you able to ride the accuracy of the shape without the circles being too big or too small? Did you get the period of straight across the centerline?

How many times did you feel you could repeat the exercises before you felt your horse become mentally or physically tired of the exercise and want to finish?

Did you time your warm up sufficiently ie. how many times did you have to come back to the walk or an easier exercise for the horse to execute easily? Or did you warm up your horse too much and they were too tired by the time you got to the exercise?