

David O'Connor Clinic, Maple Ridge, Nov. 27 & 28/07

David O'Connor won Individual Olympic Gold at the Sydney Olympics in Eventing. He and his wife Karen O'Connor are long time members of the USET. David O'Connor is a USPC alumni, past coach of the Canadian Olympic Event team and Pan Am Gold Medal winning team, and is the current coach of the US Olympic Event team.

Stadium Jumping

It is not enough for a **rider** to be talented. Riders also need:

- **drive**
- **work ethic**
- **tools**

It is not enough for a **horse** to be a good jumper or talented. You need:

- ***to teach a horse to shorten and lengthen***
- otherwise you will rise to a level where your talent isn't enough; your horse won't be able to jump out of a situation and will either injure himself or you

When jumping, what is important is:

- **direction**
- **rhythm and balance**
- **speed**

EXERCISE

Canter on a circle: in ½ seat; sit down; lengthen; collect; in ½ seat (use knee, calf and feet and see if you can canter in place/create a rotation in the horse's back); lengthen in ½ seat; collect in ½ seat using lower leg; change across the diagonal using a flying change; lengthen with seat close to saddle (still in ½ seat; hip has to move forward); collect (use stirrup then knee then calf) – canter in place; sit down

(group 2: some horses have real circular motion with their back; you need to learn to move with that)

EXERCISE

Canter on a circle, poles on the ground one stride apart.

Canter over rail on the ground. Stay in centre. Stay on the circle (not corners/straight lines). Do the same in reverse.

A pole is a 3.5" fence. Distances are important.

Look at your fence all the way to the fence (don't teach riders to look at a focal point beyond a fence). Instead, emphasize 'getting your brain onto the next thing.' Look at what you're doing/where you're going next.

You want to see a distance so that you can react – **but never shorten a stride to look for a distance.**

Progression: change speed (same exercise) - go faster or slower.

Lack of CONTROL of *speed, rhythm or balance* is when people get hurt.
Take responsibility for the control of speed, rhythm and balance.

Recognize when the horse takes a step in the right direction. Have patience. **The next time doesn't have to be perfect, but it has to be different.** Don't keep making the same mistake over and over – **change something.**

Be detached and objective. But don't be so detached and unemotional that you don't notice or don't care.

EXERCISE

Two 1-2' brush boxes (jump fillers) in a straight line (30' apart; 32' if outdoors).

Canter straight through in two strides; canter through in three strides the next time.

- if horse doesn't shorten, halt and rein back at end of line.
- If horse doesn't shorten, you wouldn't put up with that on the flat, so don't put up with that over fences.
- How your horse lands will help him with the next fence; control the landing

Notice the things that are underneath you: school on small stuff so that when you're doing the big/fast stuff, you can:

- a) **notice, and**
- b) **automatically react to it.**

Straightness: if you are 'fairly' straight, or 'kind of' straight, that's not good enough.

- **you're either straight or you're not straight** – you're either too far left or too far right.
- Make a decision!
 - o *A wrong decision is better than no decision.* A wrong decision is fixable; it's when you have no decision that we can't fix what's wrong.
- make riders take responsibility for making decisions, even if they're beginners
- the best students are the ones that come to a lesson wanting to fix something; they've already made the decision. He's helping them, not telling them what to do.

This is a game, and the key to the game is beating the game.

EXERCISE

Vertical to oxer, 70' apart.

- rider must be aware of striding: that's leadership, making decisions
- "Are you straight?"
- Jump through in 5 strides, then 6, then 7.
 - o If it's not working, ask the rider how to change it. There's not enough time for a complicated answer. **SLOWER.**

Think:

- What do I do?

- Control:
 - Make a specific decision
 - Come up with a simple answer
- How do I do it?
 - Collect:
 - Rider needs to be able to produce a *specific* canter (make a decision) and be able to reproduce that any time on any horse in any given situation
 - The exercise is not what's important; it's what you learn from that
 - ***Make the decision*** (about what you're going to do two strides after the fence) **three strides before the fence**
- ***use a five stride decision making process***

Gene Lewis (US Jumper trainer; recently deceased) has stated that **90% of all problems** people get into **when jumping** are **caused by** two things:

- 1. Being too fast**
- 2. Being too slow**

Position: **to keep your leg still, you must move your seat back.**

What keeps you on your horse? Strength in the knee!

Going from 5 to 6 to 7 to 8 strides: don't slow your horse down in between fences; start your short canter further back (on the first corner before the fence). You might need to count out loud to help you with your strides. Ride the same rhythm on the corner that you do down your line.

At Training level, in dressage, this is the first time you have to shorten or lengthen. Correspondingly, it's also the first time a course designer will ask you to shorten or lengthen on the cross country course.

Don't cut corners!

Pull horse up on a straight line to prevent falling in. Stop with the wall, but actually you must stop before the wall (stop before your horse's head goes through the wall). In cross country, there are no walls – we cannot depend on that crutch.

EXERCISE

Vertical to oxer to oxer (three stride distance between each)

Is your brain active about corrections?

Is your brain noticing changes?

Check in – ask the rider.

Riders must keep things simple: don't get lost in the details of an exercise. Remember: exercises are just tools to help you move on. If you get lost in the details of something, you'll end up running into a tree (literally).

When you're trying to fix something: **Don't make it more complicated**; *make it more simple*. If you make simple things complicated, you'll end up making complicated things impossible.

Most riders need to be softer in the air with their hands.

Horses that cover a lot of ground in the air are hard to ride in combinations, especially the latter fences.

Work off a distance in the corner

- discipline yourself
- when you see a distance and you're still on the corner, don't then let the horse fall in
- be more patient with your eye
- usually the first spot you see in the middle of the short end should be bypassed; wait to see your spot when you're at the top of your straight line
- when riding off a short turn (three strides) adjust your stride when you're parallel to the fence
 - o you can either **change the speed** OR
 - o you can **change the line** the horse is riding
 - don't steal the turn from the horse
 - teach yourself the technique

The canter that you have to have through the exercise is the canter you need through the corner.

When you jump around a 4 Star event course, you want to make it easy for your horse. If it's too hard, he'll want to quit.

EXERCISE

Course: vertical (3 strides) to oxer (3 strides) to oxer; around corner and across diagonal (two fences, using fence one as fence 5) in 4 to 5 strides (no bending, jumping fence 5 on slight diagonal), around corner and up line vertical to oxer in 6 strides.

David O'Connor stated that when he's teaching, he won't correct a rider beforehand (unless it's a safety concern) because a rider will learn more from his/her mistakes. It's not going to be perfect all the time – **but it does need to be safe**.

David also stated that hunter/jumper riders are very good with shortening and lengthening. These are basics. Event riders are not as good comparatively. This is unacceptable, especially since our dressage is better (comparatively).

There must be an emphasis on the basics. The rules must be engrained.

If a horse is chipping, the rider must focus on riding not just to the fence, but rather beyond the fence – focus on the last fence in the line.

To improve the quality of jump, you must first improve the quality of the canter.

Don't fight your tack.

Sometimes an All Purpose saddle is a No Purpose saddle – you might need different tack to get the position you need.

David O'Connor, Maple Ridge, Nov. 28/07 (Day Two) Cross Country

EXERCISE

Riders are on a circle, switching between galloping position and 'preparation' -position. He had their stirrups shortened about 4-6 holes so they were in more of a race track position.

- Use a cross/bridge, not a pull/release on cross country.
- Use rubber reins (not leather or canvas) as they hold but will still release on drops.
- Experiment with different gloves if you have problems with maintaining contact.
 - **Galloping position is very forward**
 - **Preparation position more upright**; create the 'speedboat' idea (horse up in front)

EXERCISE 2 (did not do)

Hill work – such as Man From Snowy River. Must canter in, lean back. Horse will slow down and balance automatically.

David O'Connor stated that because the horse has his quarters well underneath him when travelling downhill, you can build a house at the top of the hill (9' after the brink) and the horse will jump it; likewise, at the bottom of the hill you can build a condominium 6' after the base and the horse will jump it.

If you jump uphill with impulsion, the shape of the fence and the location of the fence on the top of the hill will control the speed.

EXERCISE 3

Small cross country fence, circling around at the canter.

400-450 m/m pace; at about **30 m. out, change to preparation position. When teaching, put a marker there**; when riding, make a mental note of where to change positions.

- make it a system

- maintain speed, balance, rhythm
- don't make the positional change too early or too late

It's easier to jump off a turn than it is to jump off a straight line approach. When you are riding off a turn, you can make two adjustments:

- You can **change the turn**, OR
- You can **change the stride length**.

When you are **coming in off a straight line, there is only one thing to change: the stride length.**

In 2007, there were two event riders killed in the USA at the same type of fence: a table with a straight line approach. In both cases, the riders missed the balance point; *they made no positional adjustments before fence.*

If you can jump a wooden fence, you can jump most cross country fences – they just might be a little more upright or a little more sloping, depending on the fence. The rest is just about building your horse's confidence on ditches, banks and through water.

EXERCISE 4: banks

Progression:

- up over a single bank
- down over a single bank
- up over a double bank
- up over a double bank to a vertical (stadium standards and single rail, 2')
- ride 2'9" vertical down double bank
- up double bank to bounce set 9' from top bank
- bounce, then down double drop
- up double bank, to bounce to one stride
- one stride to bounce, then down double drop

When the horse goes down a bank, he has to look down; the concern is that he may pull the rider forward.

Don't exaggerate your leaning back on the downhill drops unless the fences are really big.

David O'Connor stated that he is a huge believer in banks. It's all about technique.

In cross country, you often don't have time to think. *Keep it simple.* Reduce your instructions. **React instantaneously.**

Banks need a lip on them when jumping down; if that's missing/worn away, horses will jump in front but miss it behind. They'll drag a leg, or land hard on all fours.

If the horse is sticky down the bank, make him gallop away from the bank. Reinforce the forward.

Remember that when doing an exercise (like this bank) ten times, *the horse may do it five different ways; and they may **all** be correct.*

Use a whip on the shoulder the same way you would a cluck; using a whip behind the leg is reserved for when you really want the horse to GO FORWARD.

What makes a cross country horse?

1. **Confidence** (introduction to water, banks and ditches)
2. **Footwork exercises**

*Cross country shouldn't be frantic, eyes-like-plates: you must make the horse **understand** it, not just do it.*

Always try *to make the job easy for your horse.*

EXERCISE 5: water

- a) into water, out between standards
- b) in between standards, out through water
- c) into water, out over 2' stadium vertical
- d) jump in over 2'6" stadium vertical, out through water
- e) jump a one stride into water
- f) bounce into water

Don't make the horse run through the deep water; stay in the shallow.

EXERCISE 6: short course

One stride to bounce to double bank down; over to first clump of trees over stone wall; bounce into water.