

## An Exercise of Circles

Improve your horse's straightness and contact with this exercise from Gerhard Politz.

**Exercise:** Walk or trot your horse on a 20-meter circle in the direction that he feels hollow—where he tries to avoid contact. At the centerline, ride a change of rein and do a 10-meter volte.

### Benefits

- Straightens your horse.
- Encourages your horse to stretch his body into the rein on his hollow side and, eventually, helps you get more equal contact on both reins.

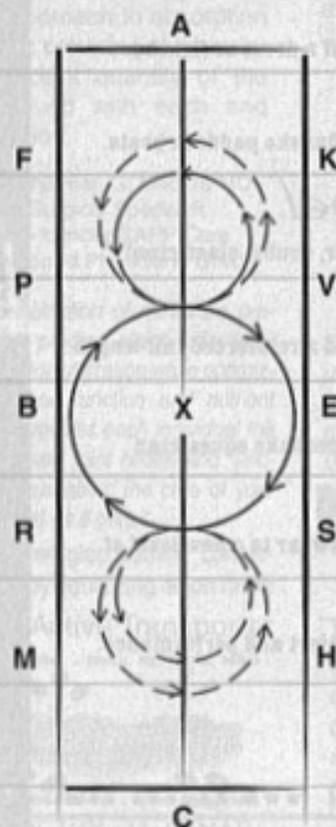
### How to Do It

1. You first need to determine which is your horse's stiff side and which is his hollow side. On his hollow side, he will have a tendency to bring his haunches in and fall through his outside shoulder. Falling through the outside shoulder becomes more obvious when riding circles or lateral movements such as shoulder-in. As a

result, the contact on the outside rein becomes stronger because your horse tries to avoid contact on his hollow side.

2. Begin riding a 20-meter circle on your horse's hollow side in an energetic walk, working trot or an impulsive collected trot, according to

Ride the 20-meter circle between B and E. Change rein on the centerline and ride a 10-meter circle between P and V. Optional 10- and 15-meter circles are in dotted lines.



your horse's capabilities and stage of training. Let's assume your horse is hollow to the right. Ride a 20-meter circle to the right. You will feel that the contact on your inside, right rein is lighter than on the outside, left rein. The measure of difference in the contact is related to the severity of stiff-versus-hollow side.

3. When you reach the centerline, ride a 10-meter volte to the left, to the outside of the 20-meter circle. Use your inside, left rein to bend your horse quite obviously in the neck. When your horse releases the inside muscles of his neck, his neck becomes somewhat concave. When that happens, immediately lighten the contact on your inside rein and allow your horse to stretch into the outside rein. Your inside leg is at the girth and your outside leg is behind the girth to ensure the bend and to prevent your horse's haunches from falling out. If you ride the circle in the middle of the arena, you can repeat the outside volte on the opposite side of the 20-meter circle, thus linking two voltes to the bigger circle.

4. Repeat this exercise several times, and you will feel that your horse is increasingly ready to take contact on the outside rein in the volte. It is important, however, that you keep giving the inside rein on the volte whenever possible. Remember that this is the rein on which your horse wants to be heavy when you ride the 20-meter circle.

### Tips for Success

- Begin at the walk to introduce and familiarize yourself with the exercise. Pay attention to the quality of the walk and the degree of "forward." Do not allow your horse to walk "like a snail on vacation."
- Make sure you don't wrench your horse with your hands around the circle and volte.

### Variations

Variations of this exercise improve the straightness and strength of your horse's hollow side, confirming him in that rein, and make him lighter on the opposite, heavier rein. Your horse will become suppler and more flexible, his collection will be enhanced and his shoulders will become free. Because of the loosening and suppling

effects, these variations also help address problems arising from a “passagey” or “hovering” trot. In addition, your riding skills will improve considerably if you strive for meticulously correct execution of the movements.

- To increase the gymnastic value of this exercise, incorporate lateral work. For example, begin with shoulder-in right on the 20-meter circle. On the centerline, change rein to a 15-meter circle riding haunches-in left. Make sure you often release the inside, left rein on the smaller circle just as you did previously in the volte so your horse takes a better contact on the outside rein. Then at the centerline change rein again to the 20-meter circle to shoulder-in right. Over time, the degree of difficulty can be enhanced by downsizing the 15-meter circle to a 10-meter volte.
- Vary riding shoulder-in right and renvers on the 20-meter circle. Eventually go from renvers to a 15-meter circle or smaller outside circle in haunches-in.

Before you include lateral work on circles, it is advisable that you acquire good knowledge of riding lateral

work on straight lines. It is very easy to misjudge and overdo the bend and angle of lateral movements when riding them on circles. This would throw the horse onto his shoulders and be totally contrary to the purpose of lateral work. Also, make sure you don't overdo the angles in lateral work and don't wrench your horse around with your hands since serious drawbacks will occur such as the horse losing regularity of the gait, impulsion and possibility of collection.—with

Reina Abelshauser 

*A Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI)-level competitor and trainer, Gerhard Politz emigrated to the United States from Germany in 1987. He is a Reitlehrer FN, a British Horse Society Instructor and a U.S. Dressage Federation (USDF) gold medalist. In Germany, he studied with masters such as Egon von Neindorff and Willi Schultheis as well as Gen. Kurt Albrecht, former head of the Spanish Riding School. In 1992, Politz joined the editorial board of the USDF Instructor's Manual. He works out of the Flintridge Riding Club in Pasadena, California.*