

Help on Rollback Turns

Jumper and equitation trainer Greg Prince offers advice with his wagon wheel exercise.

By Annie Eldridge

July 2007

Rollback turns are difficult because they involve so many skills. Riders need to look ahead and plan a turn after the first jump, then ride back to a second jump that's often met on an angle. There's a lot to do at once, yet you need to ride precisely and calmly.

Jumper and equitation trainer Greg Prince from Woodridge Farm in Sherborn, Mass., has an exercise that will help you learn to follow your eye and develop the swift reactions you need while jumping and turning. He calls it the "wagon wheel."

The wagon wheel exercise will do wonders for your jump and turn skills. "You can't afford to be late with your eye during the wagon wheel series – the next jump comes up too fast," Prince explains. "There isn't enough room to let your horse veer off his line, either. You'll learn to ride precise turns and plan your ride to the next jump because, that's the only way you can make the exercise work."

Set four cross-rails, each one-quarter around a large circle in your arena. Start with a circle that's the width of your arena—then tighten up the distance over time. If you want, you can practice the wagon wheel exercise with poles on the ground before you set the actual jumps.

Pick up an organized, steady trot and trot the series. Don't worry about how many strides your horse takes between the jumps. As you go over each jump, just keep continue to turn your head and look around the circle to the next jump. Use an opening rein to suggest what direction you want to turn, and keep your horse right in the middle of that circle, so he jumps the center of each "x." If he speeds up, slow down; if he gets sluggish, add leg pressure. You have to react to whatever your horse does instantly because you don't have much time until the next jump. Once you've practiced the circle several times in trot, try the exercise in canter.

"You'll find the exercise is easy at first, but tends to fall apart as you keep going around the circle," Prince explains. "The key is, keep going. The whole point of the exercise is to commit to your plan and make it work, whatever happens."