

## The Lazy Jumper

**How do I get my seasoned jumper to pay more attention to the jumps?**

*By Cindy Hale*

**Q.** My seasoned jumper is a “been there, done that” kind of horse. But lately he’s been dropping rails, almost always on verticals. At horse shows, the first round or two he jumps clean. After that, I can’t seem to get him to pay attention to the jumps. He’s barely making an effort. Any suggestions?

**A.** A veteran campaigner like your horse is the perfect horse to learn on. However, many of these wise fellows get a little lackluster in their performance once the novelty of a new set of jumps wears off. They begin to jump flat, without an arc or bascule to their flight path. That sends the jump rails tumbling to the ground, especially with verticals. As you’ve probably learned, if you “gig” your horse with spurs to make him jump with more enthusiasm, all you get is more speed, not more effort. But there is help!

Here is a simple exercise to use at home and at horse shows to encourage your horse to sharpen up: Set a modest vertical jump about 2’6” to start. Then place one ground pole 10 feet in front of the vertical and one the same distance away on the landing side. Now pick up a working canter and approach the jump on a steady, even pace. Make sure you maintain a consistent rhythm. Don’t try to manufacture the perfect take-off spot to the ground pole. Instead, allow your horse to canter over the first ground pole in stride, jump the vertical, and then rock back on his hocks to re-balance so he can then canter over the second ground pole. You can repeat the exercise in both directions.

The goal is to force your horse to think about his jumping effort. In negotiating the ground poles, your horse has to create a rounder arc through the air, which in turn leads to a clean jump.

You can add some drama, especially at horse shows, by draping a rub rag or saddle pad over a vertical in the warm-up ring. When you’re ready to go into the show-ring, your horse’s attention will be focused on each jump, which will lead to a better round. Of course, keep in mind that older horses like yours may begin to jump flatter due to arthritic changes in their joints, so you should consult your veterinarian if the problem continues.

**Expert:** Cindy Hale is a champion hunter and equitation rider. She teaches hunt-seat riding at Cornerstone Equestrian Center in California.