

Canter Work

There are two main challenges in coaching canter work:

- a rider's first canter
- striking off on the correct lead.

Introducing Canter

The rider must have mastered rising trot and be able to adopt the light seat with the aid of a neck strap for a short time. I like the way Jennie Daly explains this by taking up the "one o'clock position" - easy for young riders to understand especially if you have a mock-up of a big clock in the arena (use an old feed supplement lid and using a texter pen write on the 12, 3, 6 and 9 numbers and then indicate the 1 o'clock i.e. the rider moves the upper body from 12 to 1). Riders can practice moving to and back from the 1 o'clock position in halt, walk and trot - this can be made more fun by including "Simon says....."

Quite often the first canter might happen when doing games as the competitive riders dashes for the finish. Corners slows the pony down and unbalance the rider so initially only canter on the straight and don't worry about the correct lead at this stage. And come back to trot before the corner for the same reasons.

If the pony is Lead Line or Just First Ridden the leader must be sufficiently fit to run along side the pony and hold the rider's leg or be ready to do this if the rider becomes unbalanced.

As with any new skill, choose a moment when the group is warmed up, ponies are behaving themselves but the riders are not tired. Only canter one rider at a time.

It is very important to maintain confidence and safety. The use of neck straps is strongly recommended. If you have a slightly more advanced/confident rider (leading file), with the ride in walk ask the leading file to trot on and join the rear of the ride with a few steps of canter on the long side. Make sure the riders know to " hold onto the neck strap, look up, heels down and take the 1o'clock (forward) position".

Never push a nervous or reluctant rider; with time they will want to emulate their friends.

Getting the Correct Canter Lead

Just with any other pace, rhythm is the key to a good canter and a good rhythmic canter is essentially for jumping. The working canter is the default canter and the canter to start any other variation of canter.

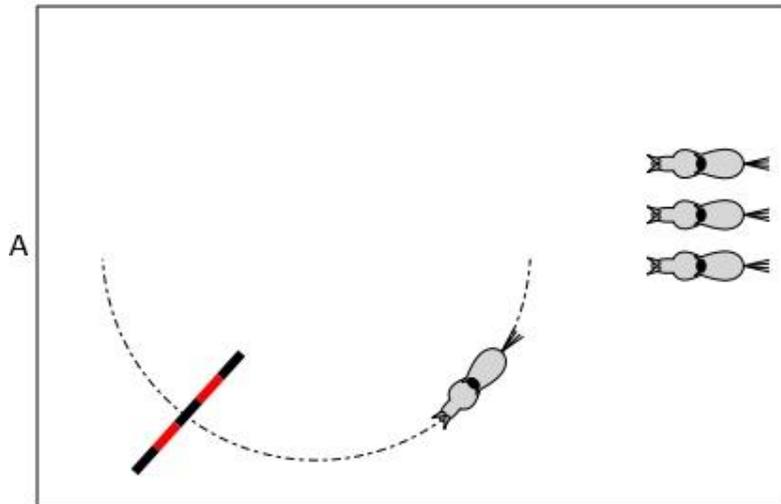
The quality of the pace the rider is in will determine the quality of the next pace so a good quality trot is paramount to get a good canter. Riders at C level should understand the importance of the half halt; younger riders made need this simplified as "a little whoa and then a little go and a little release" - essentially a warning order to you pony that something new is going to happen.

It is always worth recapping on the aids to canter rather than assume that you group will remember from the last rally/lesson. It is also a good time to recap on the footfalls for canter to help lock in the reason for the sequence of aids and correct canter lead. If a number of your riders have OTT TB's remember that the race tracks in WA are anti-clockwise and so some TB's have trouble with a right canter lead.

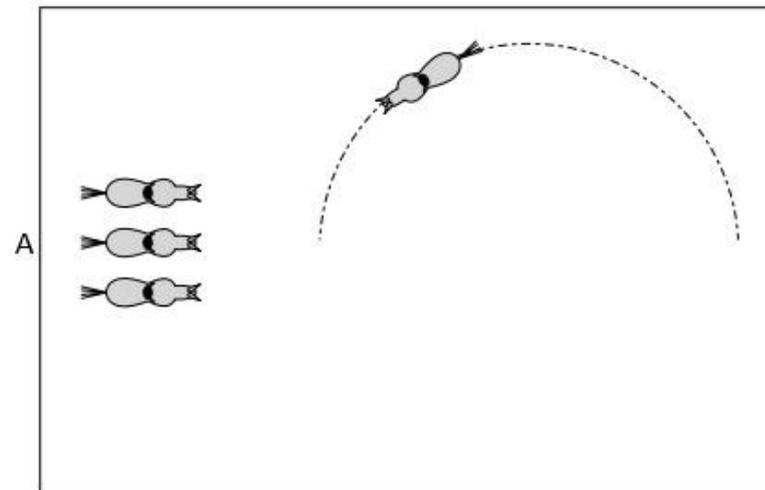
So the aids for canter left are:

- good quality rhythmic trot
- one or more half halts
- ease the left hip a bit forward and put more weight on the left seat bone (don't lean!)
- push your left (inside) leg against the horse's girth and move your right (outside) leg back to slightly behind the girth and give a quick tap with this (outside) leg
- ask the horse to flex slightly to the left (inside) whilst maintaining a feel on the right (outside) and remember to give with the left hand when the horse canters.

As coaches, we can increase the chance of successfully striking off on the correct lead by where we ask the rider to commence cantering. Canter into a corner may help - check the bend is correct as too much bend encourages the horse to fall out through the shoulder. An optional pole may help "bounce" the horse into the correct canter lead. Note this is approached at an angle not straight on.



The diagram at left illustrates that going into the corner on the short end of the school will make it clear the direction of the turn. And as the horse approaches the second corner (assuming he has the correct lead) the draw of the other horses will help maintain momentum. Optional pole is shown in this diagram.



The second diagram illustrates not such a good place to ask for canter as the horse will be drawn to the other horses which will encourage the wrong lead.

Keep the canter short and ensure it is the rider that makes the decision to make a downward transition to trot. The trot should improve after a canter.

References:

Teaching Children to Ride Jane Wallace
Pony Club Manual No.3 Kevin Lawrence

Article by Denise Legge
Diagrams by Bill Legge