



Basic Exercise #6
The Figure of 8

MANUAL

Foreword

This document is the result of many years of research and personal experience world-wide. I sincerely hope that it will be useful for your learning experience and contribute to your personal development. This manual is complemented with a practical demonstration video to optimize the learning process. I wish you a lot of fun and lightbulb moments diving into these materials.

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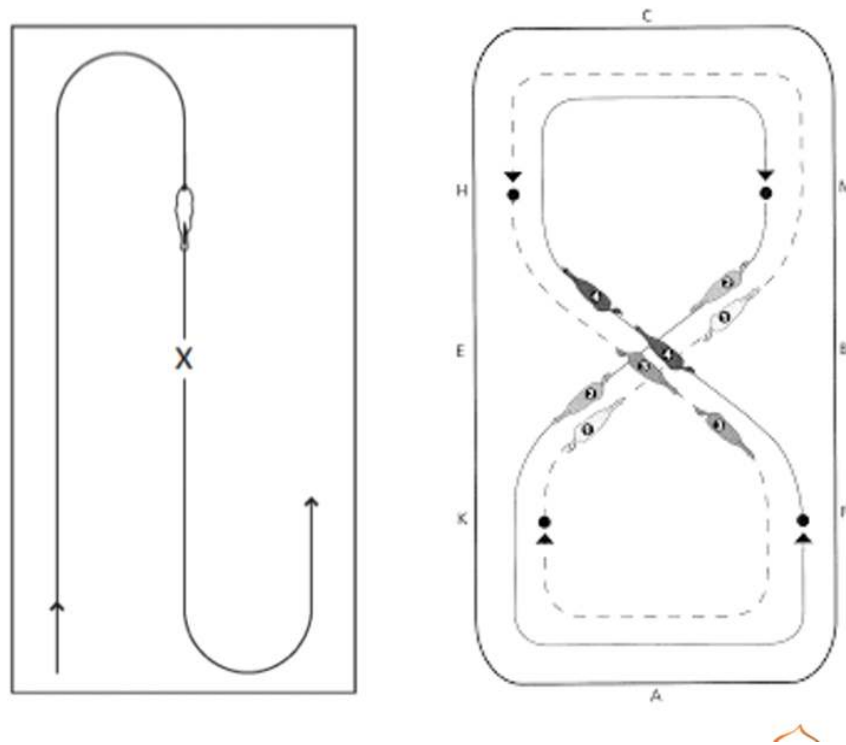
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This document has been compiled with great care to ensure the accuracy of the information. This document is part of Functional Horse Training Online Support Program. The content is therefore incomplete without the accompanying video. Thirza Hendriks cannot be held responsible for incorrect information in this document, or any damage caused by incorrect use of this information. This document does not replace veterinary diagnosis and no definite medical conclusions can be drawn from this document.

INTRODUCTION

The figure of eight is a dynamic full body that exercises that joins together various elements such as resiliency, suppleness and rhythm.

It is a common mistake that trainers work their horses separately to the right and to the left, skipping the point in which the horse needs to change the posture for the new direction of travel. This way, a horse might be develop a certain level of handiness to adapt to both directions, but it will be robbed of the opportunity to improve cadence and resiliency. As such, most postural value lies in the change of rein in a fluent manner rather than separately training a horse to both sides.



The figure of eight allows the horse to fluently change posture and develop smooth muscle tone through optimizing the antagonistic relationship between them. When changing the rein, muscles will have to change their job from being contractors to facilitators. The ability to smoothly change between function is what builds resiliency and healthy muscle tone while reducing the risk of fatigue.

Furthermore, changing the rein also improves and refines the vertical balance in a horse. Often, horses can keep their vertical balance to one side, but lose it when changing the direction. They become unstable and have to adapt their rhythm to not face plant through the turn.

As such, it is key to teach the horse to fluently change the rein without losing vertical balance so they can maintain a fluent rhythm and balanced posture.

ESSENCE

The Figure of 8 can be considered as a whole-body exercise. The benefits include:

- Refining vertical balance
- Refining self-carriage
- Refining lateral suppleness
- Improving resiliency
- Adding dynamic movement

The Figure of 8 can be performed in all gaits. However, performing this exercise in the canter requires either lead changes or the ability of performing counter-canter and should thus be considered as a very advanced as opposed to a basic exercise.

PREPARATION

Before introducing the Figure of 8, you will need to have mastered the following preparatory exercises:

- The Square / Rectangle
- Lateral Flexion of the Jaw
- The B-Loop
- The circle ****sometimes****

Before starting the exercise, please allow a proper warm-up and check whether the above-mentioned elements are present in your horse.

PRACTICAL EXECUTION

For all positions, the basic aids include:

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- Inner intention
- Body posture
- Secondary rein
- Secondary whip

The figure of 8 is first introduced in an hourglass shape including a diagonal line. When performing it by using half circles, the angle gets narrower, and it will require more strength from your horse. The rounder version is thus a more advanced version.

Before doing this exercise, you need to be able to swap your tack when your horse changes rein. The best way to do this fluently is by swapping your whip hand and rein hand over and across. Practice this until it's fluent before attempting it in movement.

You can check whether the change in bend was successful by checking the horse's tail. When going to the left, the tail of your horse should be slightly to the left. When you have changed to the right, the base of the tail of your horse should now hang slightly to the right as well.

If your horse's tail keeps hanging to one side, you know that there are some restrictions going on inside of its body.

GROUNDWORK – ONE REIN (CAVESSON)

1. Walk backwards and start on the short side.
2. Take the diagonal to the other side of the arena.
3. Switch your tack while on the diagonal.
4. Ask your horse to change the bend through the ribcage. Make sure to do this while still on the diagonal and not in the corner. When changing the bend your horse is more likely to lose vertical balance, we want to restore the vertical balance before taking the corner rather than asking it in the corner where it must deal with all the elements within the corner.
5. Restore the elements, such as vertical and horizontal balance, along the way.
6. Take the corner and enter the short side on the other side of the arena.

Make sure to take plenty of breaks and to not tire your horse too much. As this exercise includes many elements it can be quite mentally and physically draining. Enjoy the process and be patient.

WORK IN HAND & LONG-REIGNING – TWO REINS (CAVESSON OR BRIDLE)

1. The process is the same as described under the groundwork section, apart from the element of having two reins rather than one.

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The figure of 8 is a nice introduction to start leading the horse from the outside and away from you. In most exercises the horse is lead from the inside shoulder, however in the figure of 8 in the work in hand position, half of the movement is lead from the inside and the other from the outside. Therefore, it is a great exercise to add the self-carriage aspect to your horse's performance. It will require more dynamic shoulder control and shoulder freedom to move the shoulders towards and away from you evenly. It is thus, a great exercise to bring refinement to the work in hand position.

- When you start entering the diagonal, the purpose of your reins start to change. What once was your inside rein is now your outside rein and vice versa. So, somewhere in the middle of the diagonal you start to ask the horse to bend away from you. With what is now the inside rein you ask the lateral flexion, and the outside rein pushes the outside front leg. When it seems too difficult in the beginning, make sure you are not too far behind your horse's shoulder, try to stay a little bit in front. The closer you are to the horse's cavesson with your outside rein, the easier it is to steer the shoulders.

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- This position requires more self-carriage and refinement of both you and the horse. You will be both on the inside and the outside of the shoulder of your horse as you ask it towards you and away from you. This will give the horse more responsibility of the bend.



RIDING – TWO REINS & SEAT (CAVESSON OR BRIDLE)

When ridden the aids of the seat are added to those of intention, body posture and reins.

1. Remain in a neutral soft seat to stay vertical over your seat bones and guide your pelvis in the direction of travel you want the horse to go. Reduce your range of motion to match that of the horse.

2. Use the reins the same way according to the descriptions in work in hand. To give the proper action on the reins, turn your shoulders where you want the horse's to be without twisting in your waist.

VARIATIONS

Apart from the basic figure of 8 there are two variations possible.

1. Rounding off the figure. In this case you take half a circle to one side, change the rein, and then take half a circle to the other side.
2. The S-change, in which we change via the centre line of the arena.

The principles are the same throughout these variations. We want a nice flow of forward movement, proper tracking of the limbs, proper vertical balance, proper alignment and soft lateral bending and horizontal balance.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Once you have mastered most basic exercises separately, the next step is to integrate them in a fluent sequence. From there, you can continue with various other exercises to build strength, coordination, endurance or suppleness depending on you horse's biomechanics and discipline selected.

You can choose more advanced or additional exercises presented within the program to create your own optimal training schedule.

A woman with blonde hair in a ponytail, wearing a black turtleneck, dark riding pants, and dark shoes, is leading a dark-colored horse with a white blaze on its face. They are walking on a gravel surface in an outdoor arena. The background shows a wooden fence, trees, and a utility pole.

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GOOD LUCK!