

# Making the Best Use of Corners

with Karen Pavicic

by Karen Robinson

As a trainer, I have developed an attitude toward riding corners that I try to instill in my students: that they are an important, but often overlooked, aspect of the presentation of a dressage test. Well-ridden corners will inevitably result in a better-presented test. A well-ridden corner is also a deep corner, which effectively makes the ring larger, giving you more time to prepare for each movement. If you have a transition at C and you cut the corner going into the short side, you have very little time to prepare for that transition. Having time to prepare is especially important for less-experienced horses, but even at the grand prix level it's important. There is a transition from walk to passage at the first letter coming out of the corner, and if you don't make good use of that corner you aren't going to get a good transition to passage.

The best way to improve the use of the corners is to develop a habit of going into them. I always refer to a corner as a quarter of a ten-metre circle, which I think simplifies them for riders. I sometimes see riders who have been training in a ring where the footing isn't leveled often enough, and a track forms around the end that is more like a half 20-metre circle than two corners with a straight line across the short side. That grooved track makes it almost impossible for a rider to ride correct corners. Poor footing is another contributing factor to poorly-ridden corners. Riders will not want to push a horse into a corner with deep or slippery footing. If you have the opportunity to practice corners in a well-maintained ring with good footing, even for a couple of weeks, you will see a marked improvement in all aspects of your training.

Creating the habits that lead to riding good corners comes from systematic and symmetrical practice, and frequent changes of rein. When I am training a young horse I will often ride a sequence

like the following: I ride a short side with two definite corners, then I go across the diagonal and ride a corner as I go into the first half-corner at the end of the diagonal. I will then ride a 20-metre circle on the short side, at A or C. When I finish the circle I then go into the corner coming out of the short side. There should be a clear difference between the corners and the circle.

You can't expect it to be perfect right away; the goal should be to consistently work toward making better use of the corners. Even riders who school in a very large space can learn to ride corners by placing four cones in a frame and riding around them in a square or rectangle. I remind my students to maintain activity in the gait so that the horse doesn't lose impulsion in the corner.

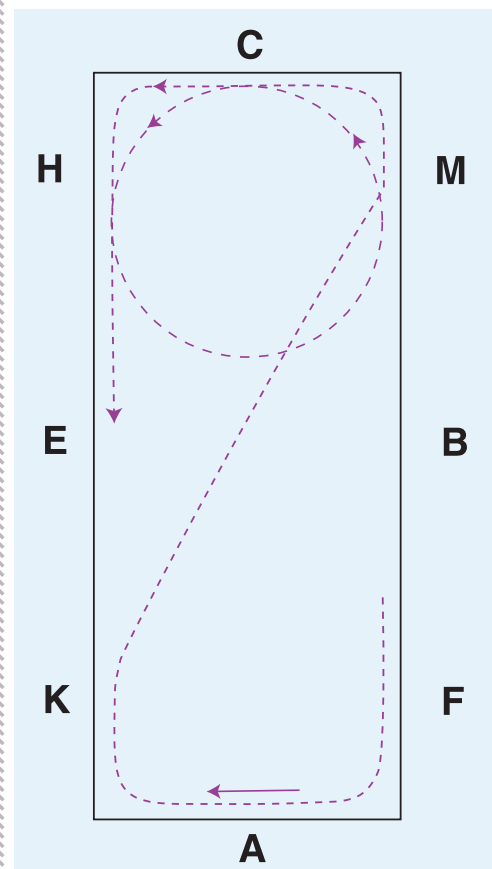
When the rider is in trot, I usually have them sit, rather than rise. Sitting is a better position for helping the horse to remain balanced, supple and forward through the corner. It is occasionally the case that riders go to the opposite extreme and ride too deeply into their corners. It's good to push the envelope a little sometimes with increasing suppleness and bend, but you shouldn't take it to the point where the horse is uncomfortable or struggling in the turn. The purpose of the corner is to increase balance and suppleness in order to better prepare for what follows the corner. Riding too deeply doesn't help the horse any more than cutting the corner.

The way to know if you have ridden a corner well is to assess how your horse feels immediately after. You should feel that the horse comes out of the turn straight, with his shoulders up and enough impulsion to perform whatever movement comes after the corner. ”

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Riding a proper corner is only possible if the footing is properly maintained. A grooved track or poor footing makes it difficult to execute a quarter of a 10-metre circle, such as this one.



A good exercise which illustrates a clear difference between the corners and the circle. Ride a short side with two definite corners, then go across the diagonal and ride into the first half-corner at the end of the diagonal. Ride a 20-metre circle on the short side, then go into the corner coming out of the short side.