

Teaching a horse to understand the aids for bend and change of bend should be one of your first priorities

One good turn...

Minette Rice Edwards explains how to ride with correct bend, for perfect turns, circles, serpentines and more!



Our trainer

Minette Rice Edwards trains horses and riders up to Grand Prix level dressage and also teaches jumping, at Ham House Stables, near Richmond. She uses her wealth of experience to help riders gain a clearer understanding of how to make optimum use of their bodies and the effect this has on the horse. "The more advanced this process becomes, the less effort is involved, and the greater the freedom of movement for both horse and rider," says Minette.



Our models

Susie rides Carly, a New Forest x Arab mare.

Training tip...

Be consistent with your training and make sure you give your horse the same signals wherever you are – in the school or out hacking, for example.



Lateral bend through the horse's body is one of the most important aspects when it comes to riding. Whether it's something as simple as riding a 20-metre circle, turning down the centre line, riding a serpentine, or a more advanced movement such as shoulder-in or travers, correct bend is essential. Paying attention to this bend when we school our horses increases suppleness and balance, which is vital for good work.

Try the following simple exercises with your horse in the school, just in walk to start with, to get those all-important basics in place. Then, once you've mastered the techniques, you can go on to apply them in trot and canter, too. It doesn't matter whether it is for low- or high-level dressage or for taking an accurate turn or line through a course of jumps, the correct bend will dramatically improve your horse's performance.

Asking for bend

Unless a horse is equally supple on both sides, he will be unable to truly go straight or be in alignment, which is the reason we must work him equally in both directions.

When you ask your horse to bend to the left, he will need to stretch through his right side to enable him to give to the left. Think of his sides and your reins like railway tracks – the tracks go round corners, the outside track is longer and has further to go, and the inside track is shorter and travels less distance, but they always keep the same relationship to each other. Look at Carly (pictured below). Susie has gently placed her nose and chest on the circle. She is pushing her ribs out and



Training tip
Horses necks are more flexible than the rest of their spine. To avoid the horse 'jack knifing' through the outside shoulder, keep even bend through his body.



H&R Back to basics

holding her quarters in to take up the shape of the circle. She should be able to see the corner of her inside eyeball.

- Your inside hand softly squeezes the inside rein to indicate the direction of the turn. You should never try to turn your horse by pulling on the inside rein!

- Your outside rein is your 'magic rein'. It connects

the outside hind leg to the hand, collects the horse and determines the size of the circle.

- Your inside leg is the 'pillar' around which your horse turns. Do not grip, just drop the weight of your leg straight down.

- Your outside leg comes back three to four inches from the knee, not the hip, to hold the horse's hindquarters on the turn or circle. Remember to keep the weight in your heel. Your outside leg also sends your horse forward onto the circle if you're leaving the track.

- Your body should stay in the vertical, with your shoulder and hip aligned with the axis of the turn, without twisting or lifting the seatbones.

- Your hands must stay in the centre of your torso.

Exercise 1 Changing bend

Now you can bend your horse each way, you can focus on changing the bend. Ride this exercise around cones (see diagram right).

1 Begin by riding around the cones on a 20-metre circle, on the left rein. Concentrate on maintaining that nice, soft bend throughout.

2 To make a change of rein, ride a half 10-metre circle from an outer cone to the inner square. Avoid pulling your horse round the turn. Increase bend so that your horse takes up the shape of the half circle.

3 Halt in the centre of the circle, straighten the horse and change leg, seat and hand position for the change of bend. Switch your whip.

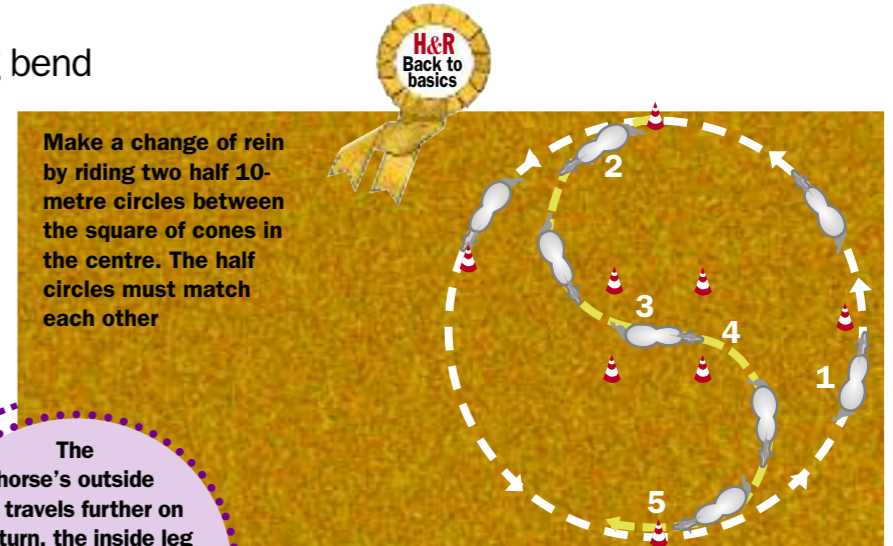
4 Now ride forward onto your right half 10-metre circle with the correct bend.

5 Walk a 20-metre circle to the right, then repeat a few times each way.

Training tip
The horse's outside leg travels further on the turn, the inside leg bears more weight. Use your outside leg to help bring the horse onto the circle.



Give yourself time to prepare for your change of bend



Make a change of rein by riding two half 10-metre circles between the square of cones in the centre. The half circles must match each other

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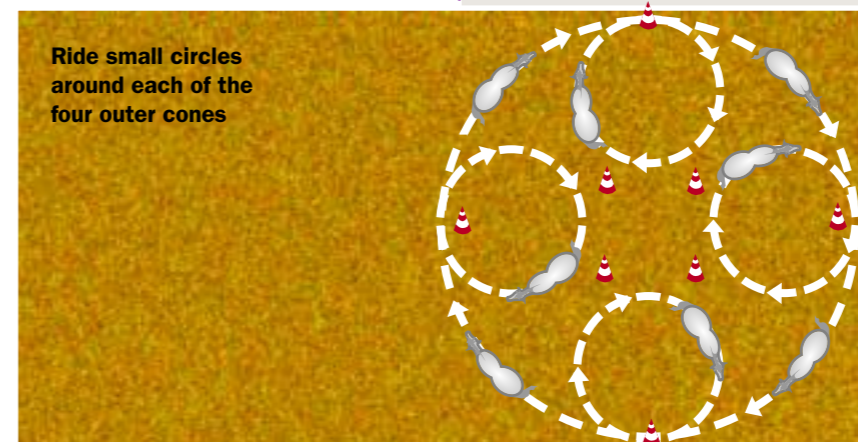
Exercise 2 Small circles



H&R Build your skills

Look up and forward in the direction you are going

- Start by riding a 20-metre circle around the perimeter of the cones.
- As you reach each cone, ride a small circle from it to the centre cones and back, continuing on the big circle until you reach the next cone. Repeat the exercise.
- Start your small circles by gently indicating the turn with your inside rein. Do not pull – always ride forward into the turn.
- Don't let your horse drift off the line of the circle. Ride with both legs and both seat bones into both hands. Never lean or twist. Look up and in the direction you wish to go.
- Keep your inside leg straight down underneath you – avoid drawing it back or you will confuse your signals for the bend.
- Repeat on the opposite rein.



Ride small circles around each of the four outer cones

One good turn...



Exercise 3 Combining the two

Now combine exercises one and two without halting to change the bend (see photos above).

1 Ride a small circle round an outer cone, then change the rein with two half 10-metre circles changing the bend as you walk forward through the four centre cones. Repeat on the other rein. When changing rein from left to right, as you pass through the four cones, bring your new inside (right) leg down and move your new

outside (left) leg back from the knee. Place your body in the direction you want to go without twisting.

2 Be consistent with your leg aids or you'll confuse the horse.

3 Be careful that the horse doesn't stiffen, hollow or quicken through the change of bend. To keep him soft and supple, use correct aids with feel and 'music' in the fingers. Never pull back on the inside rein.



Moving on up

Once you've mastered bending in walk, try riding simple movements in trot and canter. Ride changes of rein and the appropriate size of serpentines, loops and circles, remembering the basic principles all the time. Ride all exercises on both reins for equal suppleness on both sides.

If you're jumping a course of fences, remember to bend your horse correctly through the turns between each jump. You should start to notice a real difference in no time!



In a nutshell

To ride perfect turns and circles...

- Inside hand gently places the horse's nose on the circle
- Outside hand maintains the contact and determines the size of the circle
- Inside leg is straight down – the pillar around which your horse bends
- Outside leg moves back three to four inches from the knee, holding the quarters on the turn
- Shoulders and hips follow the axis of the turn
- Hands remain centred in front of your torso.
- Ride forward with both legs and both seat bones to both hands.

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DVD offer – 10% off!

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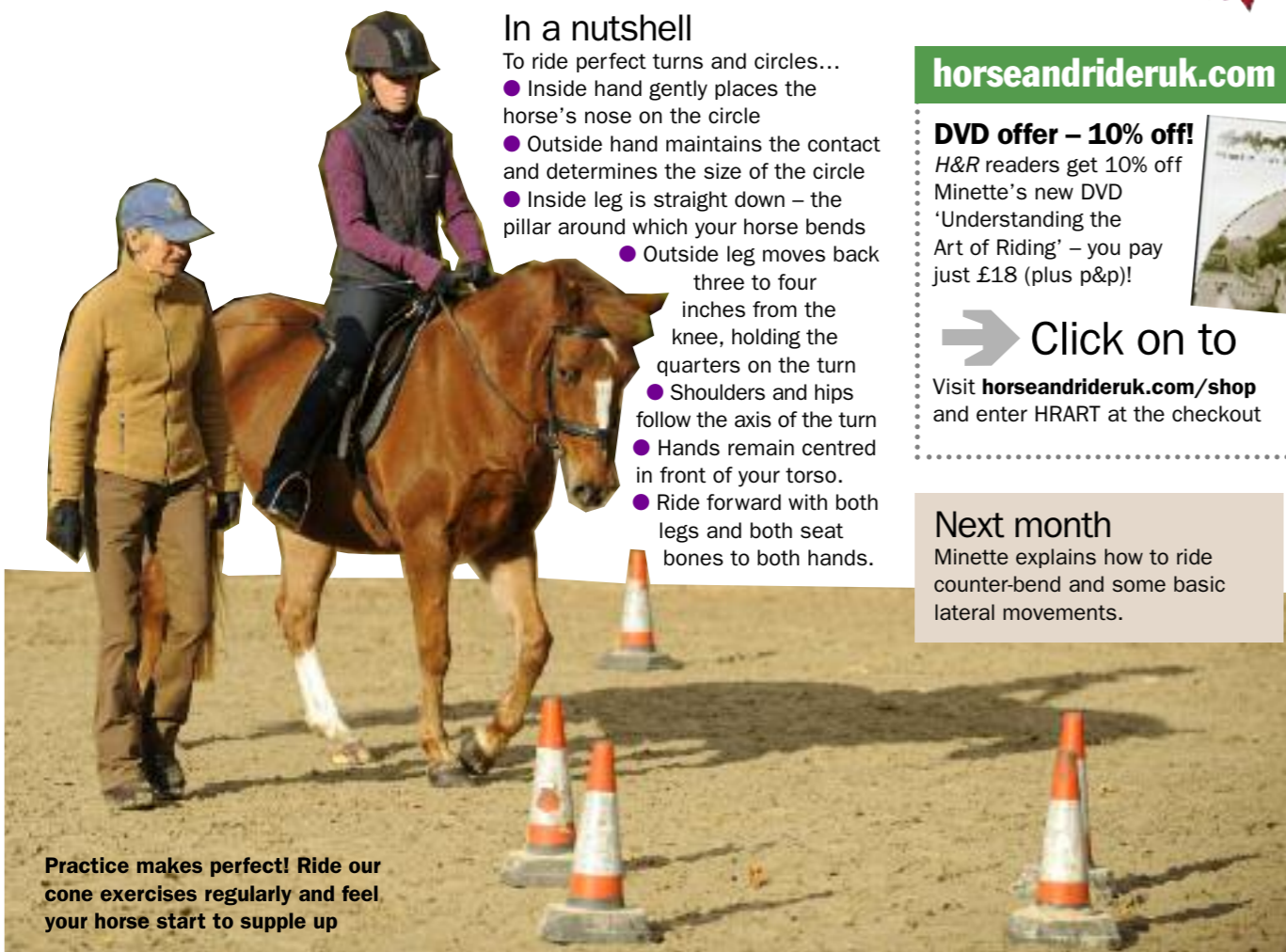


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Next month

Minette explains how to ride counter-bend and some basic lateral movements.



Practice makes perfect! Ride our cone exercises regularly and feel your horse start to supple up