



SHOWJUMPING: THREE STAGES OF LEADING EXPLAINED

Showjumping is now well-established as a core discipline in RDA, and to ensure groups deliver it safely to riders, horses and volunteers, the process of leading/jumping over a jump (raised pole) is no longer seen as a safe practice.

If the pole is resting flat on the ground, the horse may still be led in walk or trot, with the leader passing between the wings. As soon as the pole is raised off the ground it is no longer a pole work exercise, it is actually jumping. Therefore the following leading methods must be used:

Leading at Stage 1 (Leader has control of the horse)

This method of leading is used when the rider has minimum control of the horse and is often used with a rider who requires two side walkers and a leader. The leader has control of the horse and follows the commands of the rider and Coach, with minimum input from the side walkers. The leader is placed between the shoulder and head of the horse, with enough contact on the lead rope to keep control at all times. This leading procedure is used for riders performing Showjumping Level 1. This method of leading should be practised by the leader whilst warming up before the session starts and should include walking or trotting over poles.

Leading at Stage 2 (Control of the horse is shared between Leader and Rider)

At this stage of leading, the rider is now at a level where they should be working to control the horse in walk or trot and practicing working independently. The leader is positioned at the horse's shoulder but with a lighter contact than used at Stage 1, allowing the rider to direct the horse. There may be a need for one side walker but usually at this level the rider works with just a leader. This leading procedure is used for both Showjumping Level 1 and 2 and should be practiced in the warm up session before the lesson starts in walk and trot. For riders that are working over raised poles, the horse must be worked at the third stage of leading as described below, over the height of jump intended to be used during that session. It is of paramount importance this is achieved during the warm up to ensure the suitability of horse and to check the leader is competent to lead while the rider performs a jump.

Leading at Stage 3 (Rider has control of the horse)

The leader at this stage is positioned beside the rider's leg and allows the rider to control the horse. The leader's role is to ensure the rider is applying the correct aids with input from the Coach, before the rider comes off the lead rein. The leader is just there in case an incorrect aid is given to the horse and also acts as a confidence-giver to a rider that is ready for the transition of moving from being led to riding independently.

This stage of leading is required for Showjumping Level 2. The horse should be warmed up before the session starts at the third stage of leading, in walk and trot over the height of jump intended to be used during that session. It is of paramount importance this is achieved during the warm up to ensure the suitability of horse and to check the leader is competent to lead while the rider performs a jump.

It is the responsibility of the Coach to observe the warm up session so that the horses used for the session are suitable.

The Coach should observe the following:

The combination of horse and leader: Assess the leader's handling techniques before the session starts, which should include transitions from walk and trot, turning, straight line approaches to the jumps and after landing. Leading the horse at the third stage of leading requires the leader **not** to jump over the raised pole, but to pass along-side the wing, hopefully in line with the rider's body; remaining alert and only interfering with the way the horse is going when required - for example, if the horse gathers speed before or after the jump or if the rider becomes unbalanced. This requires a very experienced and competent leader.

The use of 9ft or 10ft poles make the process of leading easier, and a length of lead rope appropriate to the individual needs should always be used.

The horse's gaits need to be assessed – a horse that works at an even trot when jumping would be ideal. The leader needs the horse to work with impulsion, to ensure the quality of the trot has enough energy to make the movement of the jump comfortable and balanced while taking off, in the air and when landing. A horse with a forward pace may not be suitable for leading, but may be suitable for work off the lead rein. A horse that works too slowly or shows signs of stiffness may over exaggerate the jump movement and may unbalance the rider when in the air.

The equipment used in the lesson must be shown to the horse in the warm up session. For example, if you intend to jump the horse over a plank, ensure the leader warms up the horse at the third stage of leading over the plank. Also, if specialist tack is fitted, the horse needs to be warmed up with it on.