

RDA Carriage Driving: Using cones and other equipment

What RDA Driving groups do in their sessions is dependent on the facilities available, the capability of the drivers, the experience and knowledge of the coaches, the types of vehicle used and, most importantly, the training and experience of the horse used (the word 'horse' is used here to denote horse, pony, donkey or mule).

All the work RDA Driving Groups do is valuable, these notes are to give information and help to those who may want to expand their existing activities. This is certainly not an edict from above to say that you *must* do it, simply an opening of a door to something different and enjoyable.

Let's start with Cones: Why use Cones for training?

- ◆ It gives enjoyment
- ◆ Helps to train people to look where they are going rather than the back of the horse's head!
- ◆ It can help give a good sense of spatial awareness.
- ◆ Using cones helps the driver find out what the horse is able to do and what is, and is not, comfortable.
- ◆ It gives a sense of achievement and helps with progressive training which is visible, recordable, rewardable and memorable.
- ◆ Helpers and driver co-operate more readily.
- ◆ It can help people to recognise colours, shapes, letters, numbers and sequences.
- ◆ It can give drivers independence—they can be asked to design courses or course-related activities.

- ◆ It can lead toward competitive driving within and outside RDA.
- ◆ Configurations of cones can be versatile: simulated roads, markers to indicate change of pace and direction, marathon-type obstacles, handy pony courses, dressage markers and even cone courses.

Other equipment to use with cones: available from garden centres, supermarkets, online, toyshops, sports equipment suppliers

Coloured balls: Plastic 'boules' sets for children are available. These are coloured balls filled with water—so they don't blow away—usually primary colours and about the right size to fit into the depression on top of each cone. These can be used to identify individual or pairs of cones.

E.g. Some people find working with colour easier than using numbers; a sequence of pairs of cones can be built up using pairs of different coloured balls and driven from memory—red, blue, yellow. Then progression can be made to using colour with numbers, letters or sounds.

Numbers and letters: sets of large neoprene tiles with pop-out numbers or letters are available; all very squashy and safe, though they may blow around if it is windy. They can be used as numbers for cones or for collection games.

Bean bags, plastic skittles, flags, different shapes fixed to the top of cones. Soft toys, squashy foam-filled play balls, neoprene foam pipe lagging too. To collect, identify and mark.

Bending poles are available but be careful when using those secured by spikes at the base, the spike must be driven completely into the ground. If working on an artificial surface always ask the owner of the said surface before use, spikes can damage the membrane under the surface.

Training domes and markers from sports suppliers are portable, coloured and safe to use although they may not be easily visible for the driver of a low-seated vehicle.

Shavings or marking spray is useful but check that any land-owner does not object.

Safety

When using equipment

Let the imagination run free when using this equipment but do keep it safe. Appraise everything from all angles.

E.g. Those small inflatable footballs and hard plastic cones available from some supermarkets are a hazard but the squashy, foam-filled version of these balls is more acceptable. Basically, if it snaps, crackles or pops, don't use it.

- ◆ If using cones, any horse **must** be used to working with them, particularly if the vehicle touches or runs over a cone. RDA CDCs must also be familiar with this equipment and aware of how a horse may react.
- ◆ Cones used should be specifically designed for use with driven horses and preferably of the squashy variety; road traffic cones are not recommended. Squashable driving cones are available from some of the carriage driving retail websites; some offer a discount for RDA Groups.
- ◆ Leave plenty of room for the turnout when driven; a layout planned on foot may be too tight and difficult when driven.
- ◆ Don't clutter the area used with equipment; too many poles, markers, cones and helpers crowded in a limited area can be confusing to all concerned and become dangerous. Ensure there is enough space to operate and that markers are easily identifiable.
- ◆ Explain the planned activity to all concerned. Risk assess and highlight any safety issue; avoid confusion!
- ◆ Avoid wear and tear on the horse's joints and muscles by keeping turns and circles large and open rather than tight.

When coaching drivers

- ◆ Keep any cone formats open and inviting, it may be tempting to put out a tight formation of closely-spaced pairs of cones and try to drive fast but this

can be demoralising, counterproductive and dangerous. Start with a simple layout and progress in small increments to build training on well-constructed foundations where the horse, driver and coach are comfortable working with equipment.

- ◆ Some RDA CD Coaches may be unfamiliar with working using cones and other equipment. Do learn to do this confidently and safely before working with an RDA Driver.
- ◆ When driving a course of cones, measurements between cones and pairs of cones depend on the capability and experience of the Driver, those who may be going into driving trials type competition should be able to work at competition width, beginners are safer and more confident and successful if given more space.

The Paces used for RDA CD are walk and trot.

Canter is not used because:

- It can make the horse too excitable for an RDA driver, or even CDC, to manage. This could be in the short and/or long term; RDA driving horses are precious and can become useless for RDA if too wound-up and sharp.
- It may be too fast or strong a pace for the RDA Driver to cope with and may be frightening. Not everyone can react quickly or enjoys speed; Drivers may not be sufficiently balanced, supple, fit or strong to cope with fast turns or a bumpy ride.
- Canter can be an uncomfortable pace for those driving vehicles which have shafts fixed directly to the front of the chassis rather than the type which are hinged; the former may lurch about at this pace. This also causes more wear and tear on the vehicle and harness. RDA equipment, too, is precious, expensive and must be safe; we cannot afford breakages.
- Not all driving horses can tolerate working in canter or find it easy; some start bucking or kicking, some run away, some lose confidence.

Driving turns and circles

Size of turn: RDA CD suggests that a 20metre diameter circle is a suitable guideline for any circles or turns(which are parts of a circle). This is a size which allows a horse to turn easily and without unnecessary wear and tear to the joints. Some smaller turnouts and more manoeuvrable vehicles may turn tighter but no less than a part of a 15 metre diameter circle. It is suggested that vehicles with rear-steer technology work on turns no smaller than an arc of 20 metres diameter.

How the horse turns

When a horse working under saddle or in harness turns he must remain balanced which is achieved by carrying his body upright rather than leaning over to the side or crossing his legs sideways into the turn. This is so that the horse can be ready for any following action whereas swinging sideways requires 'recovery time' before the horse can literally 'get back on track'. To stay upright, the horse must curve the body slightly round the arc of the turn and the hind feet must follow in the same track as the front feet much as do the wheels of a railway carriage.

Remaining upright and curving in the direction of the turn allow the horse to use his hindquarters (engine) efficiently to push and carry his body forward. Scrabbling sideways around turns or turning too tightly blocks the efficient use of the horse's engine and the legs tend to cross over and push sideways which puts undue pressure on the joints.

RDA horses tend to work in slower paces which means that larger arc turns are easier and the energy from behind flows through smoothly and efficiently. The horse achieves the correct curve or bend by stretching the outside of the body. Therefore, when driving a circle or turn, the driver must, if possible, give enough with the rein on the outside of the turn and ask in a give-and-take action on the rein on the inside of the turn. To turn easily, the horse must be pushing energetically from behind; energy is controlled power not speed.

Driver GIVES enough with outside rein to allow horse to stretch in direction of turn.

Too much giving away of the outside rein means the horse swings sideways

Outside of circle or turn

The outside rein supports & controls the amount of turn

Inside of circle or turn

The inside rein indicates the direction of the turn

Driver ASKS with gentle give and take on the inside rein.

Too much pull on this rein blocks the action of the hindquarters and sometimes simply pulls the neck sideways.

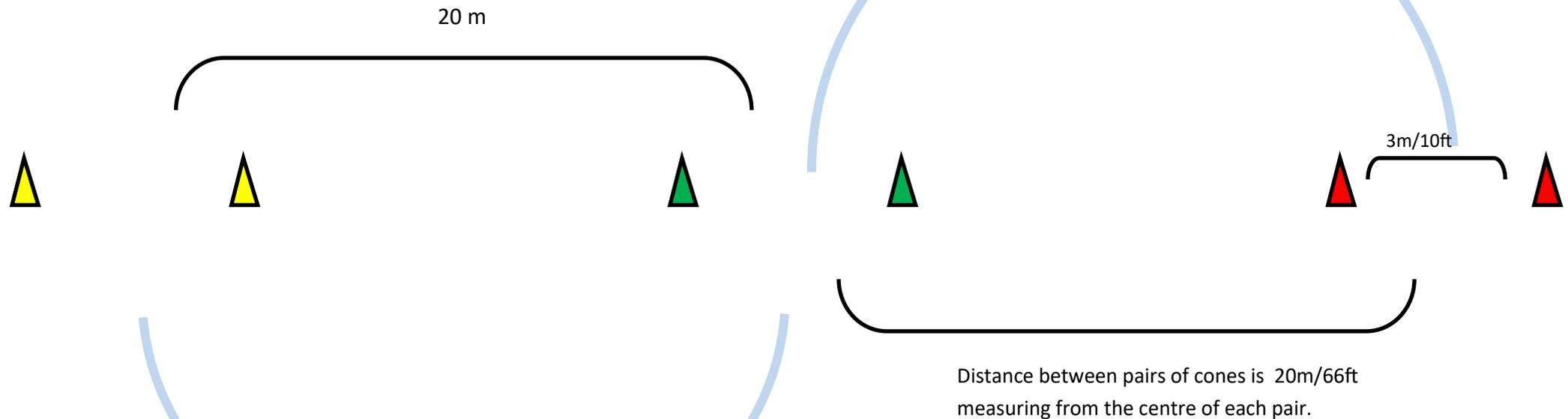
Standard 20m diameter circle as shown in all diagrams of circles and turns.

Keep all turns open and smooth

Then you don't have to struggle & the horse doesn't tire so easily

THE FUNDAMENTALS of CONE DRIVING COURSES : BASIC CONE LAYOUT

Three pairs of cones - can be an effective way of starting out. They can fit into a standard 20m by 40m riding arena, as illustrated, giving a variety of possible sequences without cluttering the area. Different colours identify each pair e.g. using coloured plastic balls, in this example.



Driving shapes

Blue lines denote the track taken by the turnout, two open, smooth half circles. The sequences can vary giving shapes such as:

Whole circles (green/yellow/green),

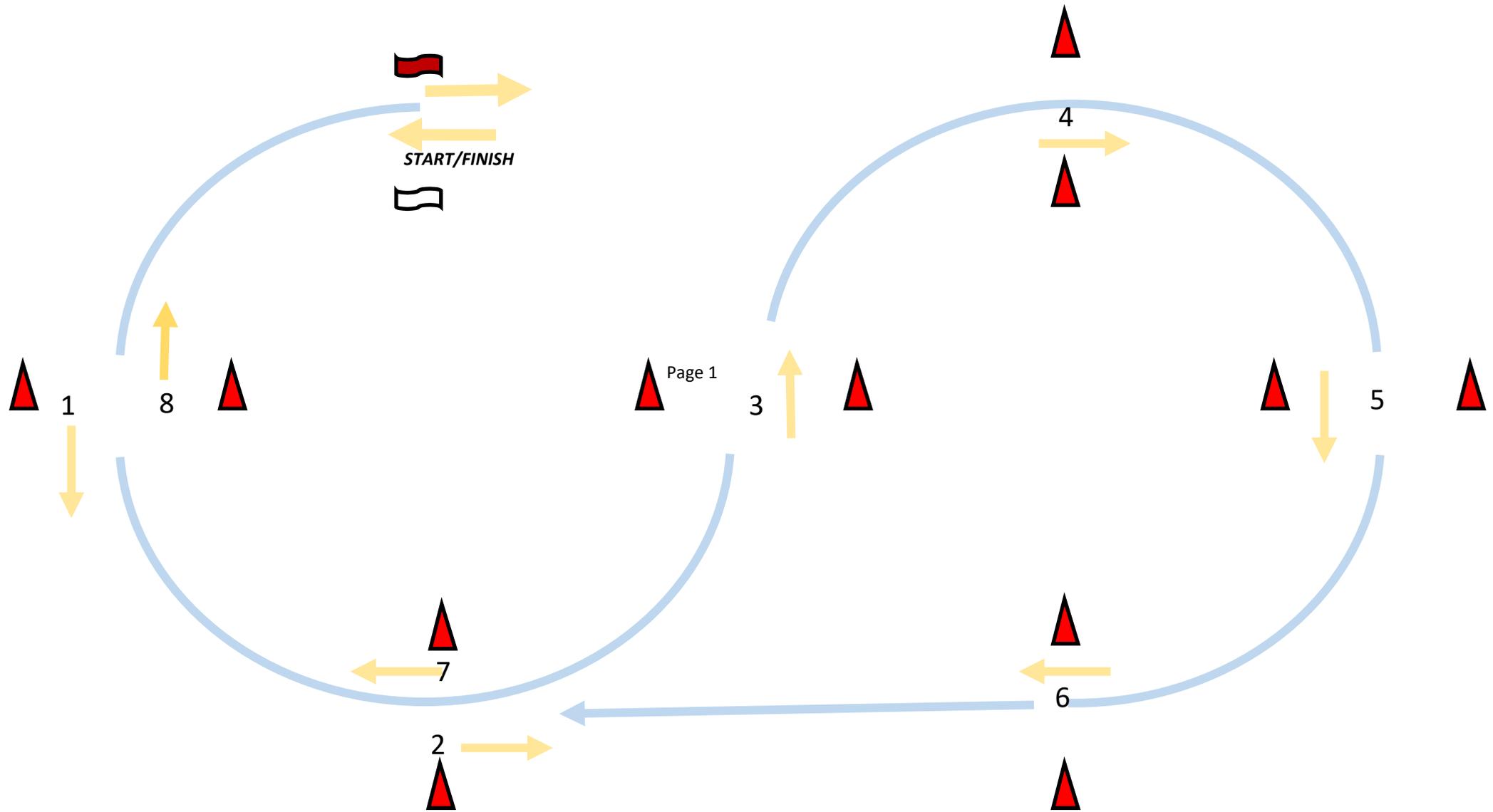
Ovals (red/yellow/red)

Serpentine (yellow/green/red) *as illustrated in blue*

Figure of eight (yellow/green/red/green/yellow)

Distance between cones 3m/10feet or more for basic work and beginners. This is safer and less daunting for the beginner.

Give plenty of space between each pair of cones for thinking and manoeuvring time.



BASIC CONE LAYOUTS: Three pairs of cones - give a backbone to a simple cone course which still has open, rather than tight, turns because it is based on a minimum size of 20m circles. Use more space if available but don't make it any smaller. The yellow arrows indicate the direction to take between the cones, the blue lines indicate the driver's route.

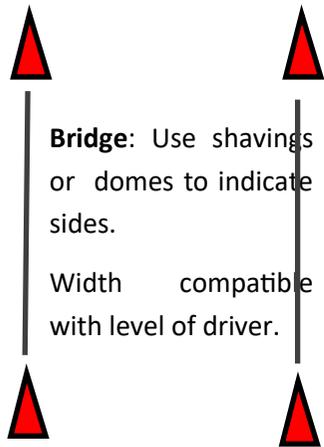
This layout could work equally well as a basis for a treasure hunt or collection game.

Pairs of Cones identified by numbers, colours, helpers, different shapes, letters.

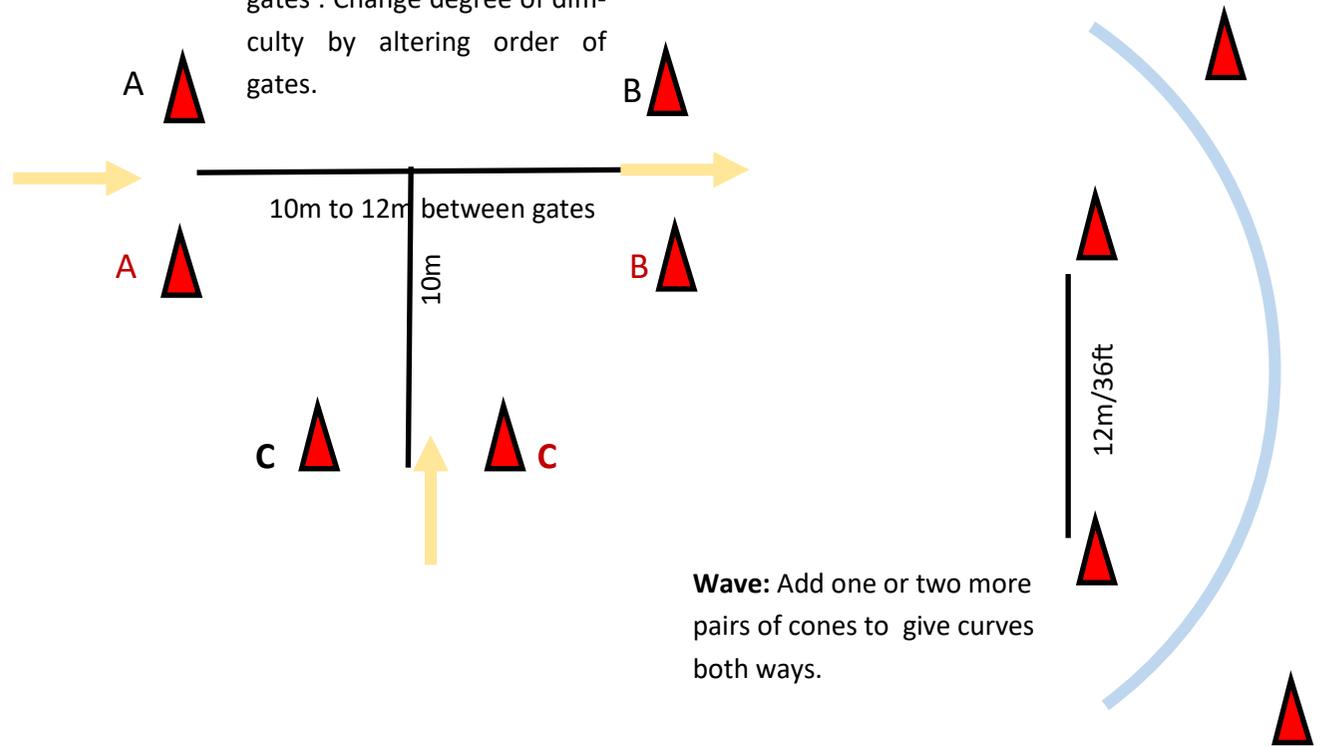
Course can be changed easily but still has open turns and the familiar pairs of cones.

Cone course

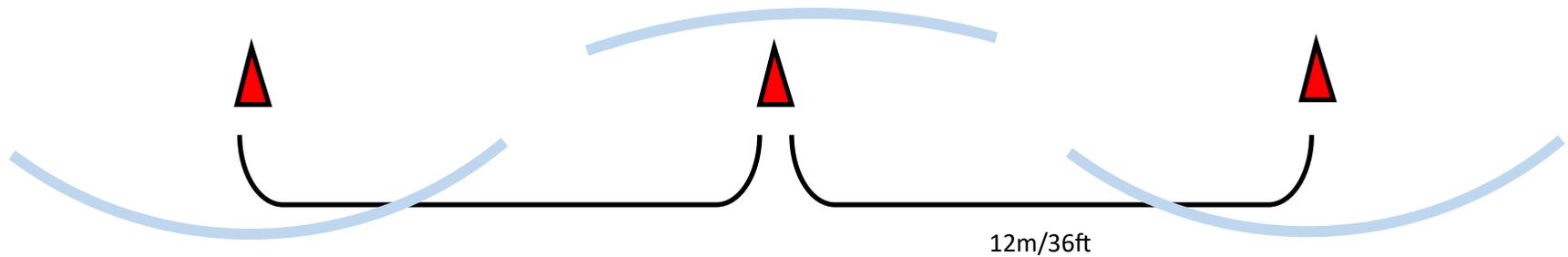
Other elements that can be used in a cone course in a more open area. Each element in this course could be used individually for a 'handy pony' activity.



Triangle: Set up as three gates. Change degree of difficulty by altering order of gates.



Wave: Add one or two more pairs of cones to give curves both ways.



Serpentine: The distance between cones may be varied, longer or shorter. The turnout makes shallow loops round alternate cones.

Simple Grid

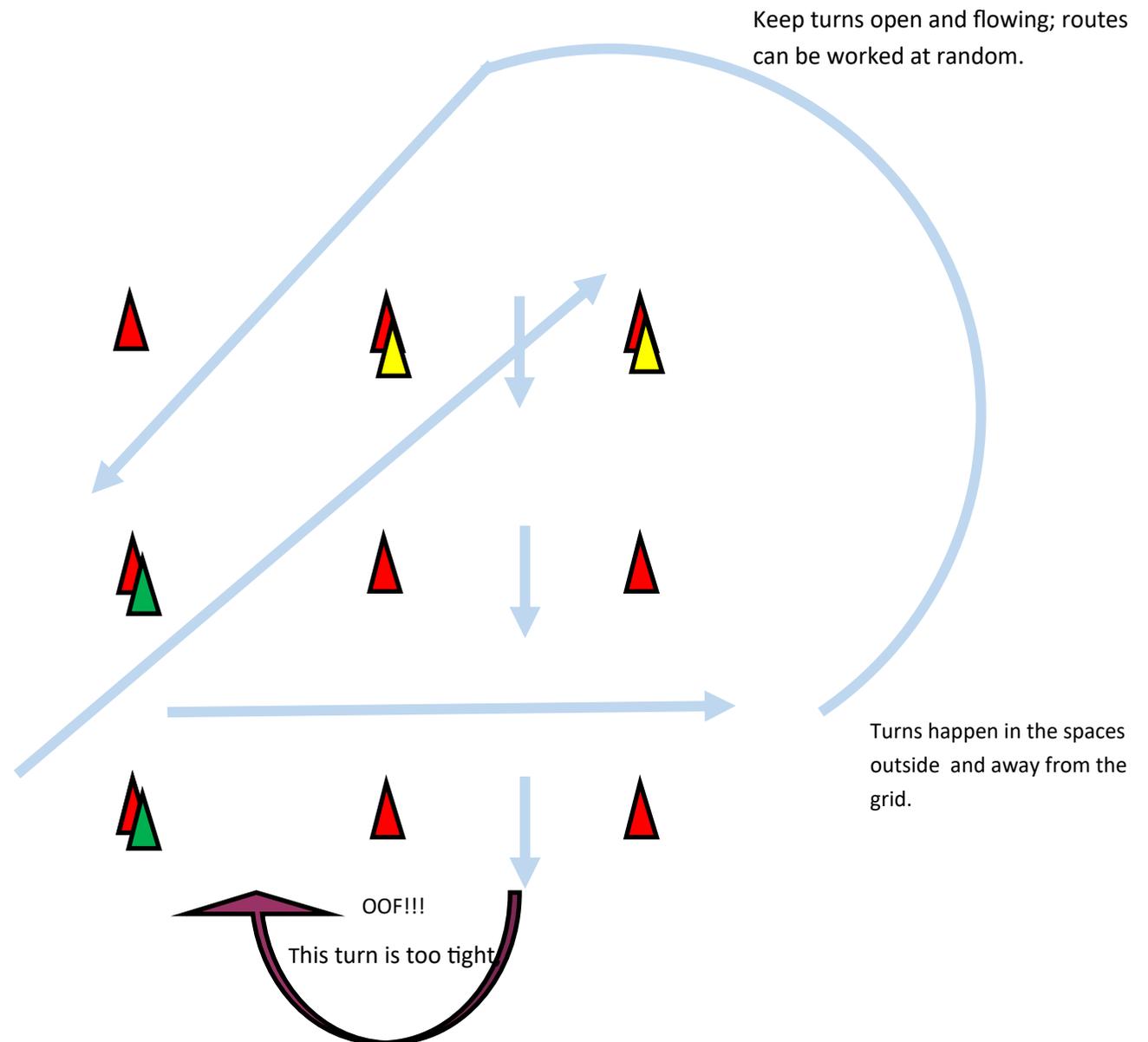
A **Grid** is made up of a square of evenly spaced markers or cones, the most simple being four cones marking the corners of the square. The route through this can be top to bottom, side to side or diagonally .

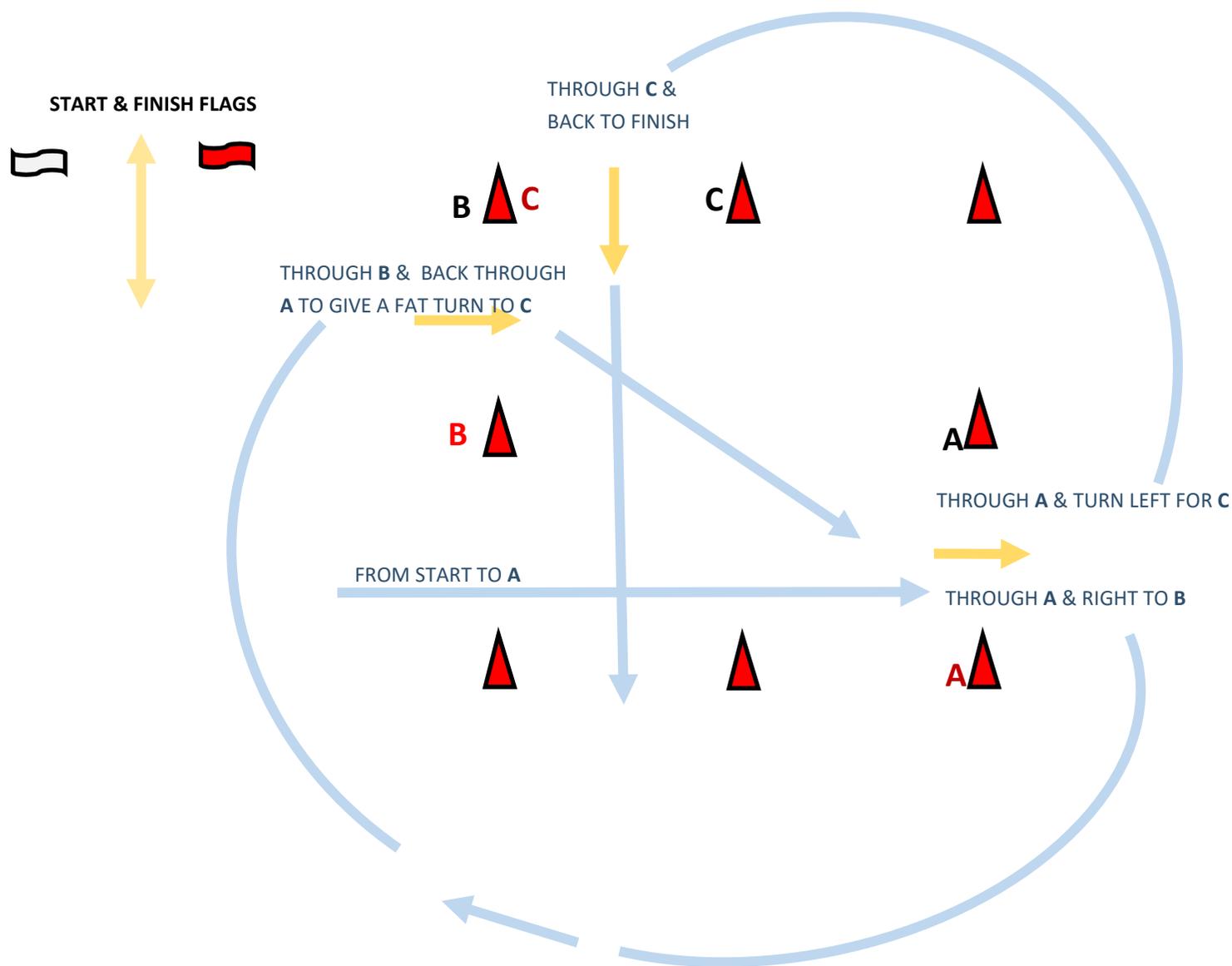
Illustrated is a **nine-cone grid** which can be driven in the same way but with more possibilities. This will just fit into the centre of a minimum size standard riding arena of 20 by 40 metres. Spacing between cones has to be at least 7 metres/20 feet to allow room to make open turns and give a clear, rather than confusing, view of the layout.

Grids can be made up of larger numbers of cones, the next size being 12 for an oblong, although more cones can be confusing and stretch resources. Work with what works best.

Driving a grid is about seeing and driving a straight line as well as planning ahead to drive curves linking those lines. Marking cones as shown can help the driver to see the line and the Coach to explain it.

To drive the turnout down the various routes through the grid requires quick reactions and good preparation for the turns and routes chosen. It helps the driver to look up and think ahead working from eye to horse without over-thinking the use of the hand and rein. The driver does less and achieves more.





There is more than one way this obstacle could be driven and moving or adding more gates changes it completely. Planning different routes and testing how well they drive helps all concerned understand driving technique and horse movement in greater depth.

Simple Grid becomes a basic driving trials—type obstacle. Remove the central cone to allow easier movement through the square.

In competitions, the gates marked must be driven in the correct direction and correct alphabetical order. Once the driver has gone through a gate in the correct order and direction, the gate may be driven in any direction.

Gates are indicated by A,B,C with the red letter to the right as the driver approaches the gate.

The yellow lines indicate the direction in which the turnout must go through the gate. The blue lines the driver's route when negotiating the gates.

Start & Finish: The route from/to the start gate is assumed to be as smooth and open as this driver's route through the obstacle.

BUT to return through the finish, there is the option as shown - down to the bottom and then an open turn back, smoothly, to the flags. OR, if the driver can align the turnout accurately, it can be driven through the C gate and then the B gate at an angle which would also allow a still open, but shallow, turn back through the finish. Quick and satisfying! Could be done in an active walk.

Planning Activities

A good exercise for Drivers, Coaches and Helpers since it means everyone can learn by trial and error what works best. The previous example shows a driving trials-type obstacle with three gates, which, like the three pairs of cones shown earlier, is enough for beginners and the horses to manage. Asking all concerned to work at planning and then test driving something like this can be valuable, enjoyable and rewarding.

- ◆ It brings people together.
- ◆ It helps everyone to recognise their strengths and weaknesses
- ◆ It drives home the message about sizes of circles and turns.
- ◆ It can help people to recognise the horse's strengths and weaknesses; is the horse stiffer or smoother turning one way or the other, does he prefer to go left, did they grind to a halt when they tried to turn too tight?
- ◆ It also makes people think about the manoeuvrability of different types of vehicle. Does one need to use a different approach with the 4-wheeler to the 2-wheeler?

BUT....

- ◆ Does everyone like working with cones or do they prefer a drive up to the woods or on the lanes?
- ◆ What effect has the logistics of buying and putting out this equipment have on the finances and the labour force, is there really time to do it?

Plan your own course through the GRID

