

HILL WALKING FOR YOUR HORSE PART 1

WALKING ALONG A HILL

Easy everyday exercises to improve and maintain your horses balance, and strength engaging the cybernetic muscles.



For prehabilitation and rehabilitation, hill walking is an essential way to help maintain and develop your horses strength and balance, by aiding in strengthening the pelvic ligaments.

Starting in hand and using the natural camber of a hill, walk your horse along a gentle slope in both directions. The slope does not need to be steep, but long enough to walk approximately 20m in a straight line. Start with 5 minutes and build up by 2-5 minutes every 2nd to 3rd session so long as the horse is balanced, straight and rhythmical.

Start easy, on a gentle slope with a small gradient. Walk your horse in a straight line along the side of the hill, lengthways.

This requires the horse to lengthen the muscles and ligaments on one side of the body, while shortening the other side, asking for more flexion through the joint lines.

Try to keep the horse straight as you walk along the side of the hill (this is harder than it sounds). You may need to start quite slowly to assist your horse in keeping rhythm and balance, and increase speed and slope gradient as the horse becomes more comfortable with the exercise. Ensure that the hind legs (hocks) are not twisting as this means there is instability in the movement.

When you have covered about 20m, or have reached the end of the hill, make a nice smooth, large turn and go back in the other direction.

Do not ask your horse to turn too tightly, they will likely find this difficult to start. Instead, try making a nice large loop, giving your horse as much opportunity as possible to maintain balance and rhythm in the turn.

As the horse gets fitter and can complete this exercise without losing straightness, rhythm and balance, you can then make the exercise more challenging by increasing the gradient of the slope, increasing the time, or adding weight (such as a saddle or rider).

This exercise is especially beneficial for horses who spend most of their time training in an arena. Arena training is great, but needs to be varied with other exercises, in order to develop confidence, balance and co-ordination. Ideally, you can incorporate 10-15mins hill walking into daily warm-up/cool-down routine.



The hill does not need to be steep. A gentle slope allows the horse to have more stable foot placement, encouraging the horse to walk out more confidently. Keep an eye for loss of rhythm and balance and if this occurs, make the exercise easier by using less slope, or reduce the number of times you perform the exercise.



WHY HILL WALKING

Walking your horse along the side of a hill requires the horse to engage one side of its body, while lengthening and stretching the other side.

This simple exercise encourages the horse to flex the hind limb joints while engaging the pelvic stabilizing ligaments and muscles.

BALANCE

Walking your horse along a hill, in both directions, has many benefits when it comes to Balance and co-ordination of your horse.

It can correct side dominance, lack of co-ordination in the hind limbs and also hind quarter stiffness.