



Nayel Nassar's Favorite Exercises

Holly Grayton

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What are the best exercises for a young rider training at home?

I think it's always good for young riders to simulate a horse show experience. Horses feel different in the ring, and nobody is there to tell you what to do. Nothing teaches better than experience, especially in this sport. So the more often they can put together a string of fences on their own, the more confident they'll be in the ring. If things are going well, it's always nice to jump a bit bigger at home so that the show isn't as intimidating for a young rider.

What are your favorite methods to prepare a young horse at home for the competition experience?
Courses and more courses. You really want to develop young horses' rideability and get them to be as confident as possible. The best way to do those things is by putting them in as many kinds of situations as possible. The more they jump, the more they learn. But it's still important to keep a good balance between fences, flatwork and trail riding. Jumping them too much can cause them to lose interest in the sport, and eventually can shorten their careers.

What is different about your approach to keeping your top level and more experienced Grand Prix horses ready?

I'm a huge advocate of the "keep them happy and they will return the favor" mentality. Older horses already know what they're doing and already have a lot under their belt. It becomes more about preserving them rather than actually teaching them, so I rarely jump them at home at all. The less they see fences, the more careful they'll be when they actually do see them, and the more they'll enjoy jumping them. If I feel a GP horse is starting to get careless or sick of the sport, I find that a few weeks off is a better solution than more practice. If I do jump them, it's usually more for my benefit than theirs, as sometimes there are things I want to get more comfortable doing (short turns before and after fences, doing leave-outs/adds etc.)

In the week leading directly up to a show, what would be a typical exercise regimen for your horses?

Flatwork and trail-riding. Everything in jumping starts on the flat, so it's important to keep the horses fit and responsive between shows. As I mentioned before, there is usually very little jumping involved, unless there is something very specific I think the horse needs (water jump/doubles/triples etc).

Can you describe some of your favorite particular exercises?

- 1) 8-10 small verticals in a row, all on a bounce stride (so about 3m between each). Start small, then raise every 2nd pole. Then randomly raise them (without going too big of course). It's great to get mobility and reaction from the front end while trying to keep the horse as calm as possible so that he takes his time with every effort.



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- 2) 2 small oxers with 1 or 2 strides in between, then keep widening the oxers by mainly moving the BACK pole of the 1st oxe and the FRONT pole of the 2nd one, so that the distance gets shorter and shorter. This one is more difficult to execute because the exercise should still be do-able for the horse, and you have to come in as slow as possible so that a) the short stride is possible and b) so the horse really has to push himself up and across. It's great to teach the horses to jump across oxers, especially in combinations. It's important to keep the fence small enough so as to not scare the horse.

What is your warm up routine at competitions?

It differs from horse to horse. I don't jump the horses too much in the warm up ring unless I think they are too fresh to do their job well in the ring. So the warm up usually consists of 3-5 verticals, 4-6 oxers then a final vertical I catch once or twice.

Why do you do it in this specific order?

We start on verticals to get the horse jumping upwards. Once that trajectory feels good, we move to oxers where the horses are asked to jump across too. I go wider and wider (plus higher) to make sure the horse continues to cover the oxers as they are jumping higher. Then I finish on the vertical to make sure the horse is reactive to the vertical and knows to make the right trajectory, especially after jumping the last few oxers (i.e. jump more up and less across). I also like to put them on a slightly imperfect distance on the last jump or two. If they're sharp and focused, they'll keep it up and make the correct effort. If not, you catch them off-guard with a rub right before going into the ring, which is always a plus.