

INTRODUCTION TO SHOW JUMPING COURSE DESIGN

Twenty years ago the attitude toward show jumping course design was fairly rough and ready. "Make it high, make it hard, and sort them out. There is no place in this sport for those who are not up to standard" The Americans and Canadians arrived on the scene with a much softer attitude, one of encouragement and help, with the idea of building a young horse's and new rider's confidence. This made great sense-after all, when running horse shows, the rings with the lower heights, recreational riders and young horses are the ones that make the profit for a show.

So if you are interested in learning how to build courses that encourage young horses to jump and complete their rounds read on.

There are a certain RULES to adhere to. If you follow them it is amazing how well a beginner horse or rider will jump. Showhunter designs are a good basic start. At some showhunter competitions you have a chance to practice your lines and jumps at the beginning of the day, Showjumpers do not have that luxury, therefore designers have to be especially careful. Courses up to 1.10m have to be designed carefully; after that riders and horses are more experienced so some of the "rules" can be broken. However some basics such as related distances, good corners and sensibly placed doubles are always best to follow.

GUIDELINES

1. Jump One

Jump one and possibly two should always run toward the entrance gate. There should be no exceptions at this level. Horses are happy to jump toward home.

Always have plenty of rails in jump one and make it an easy rising oxer (spread) so the jump looks substantial thus encouraging the horse to make a good jump. Having this jump 5cm below the stated height for the class is allowable and a good practice.

WE MUST get them over number one! No fancy filler boards or pickets just rails

2. The First Jump Away from the Gate

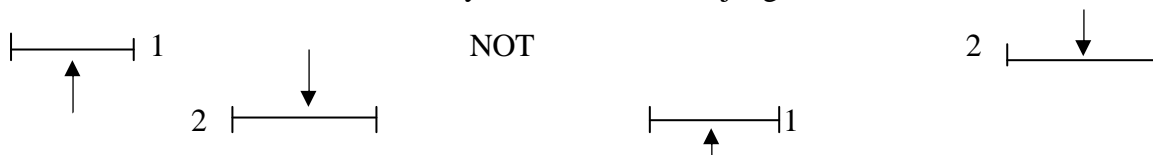
The first jump away from the gate, be it jump 2, 3 or 4 is also a very special jump. It is essential it has no little pickets, fillers or walls, that it is just plain rails. It is hard enough for the young horse to cope with leaving its friends without giving it more questions. This is usually the hardest jump for the horse on the whole course so it is best we make it user friendly.

3. Corners

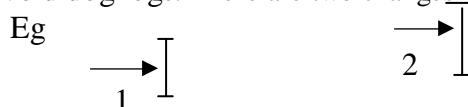
Allow plenty of room on the corners for the young horse to come round. The good rule of thumb is to allow three horse strides for the horse to recover from landing, three strides to negotiate the corner and three strides to set itself up for the next jump. A horse's stride is 12 feet or 3.65 meters. I find if you count 45 of your walking strides round a corner then that will be enough. These come with experience and remember a hacks stride is longer than a ponies stride. It is always better to stride out for a hack if there is mixed classes as the ponies cope better when there is a variation of striding.

4. Reverse Turns

Avoid reverse turns because it is very hard for a rider to judge their line or stride to the next jump. Thus



5. Dog Legs: Avoid dog legs. There are two changes of leads involved in these. Really hard!



6. Doubles

Doubles require careful placement. They should be placed on the best ground, flat and even. They should not be before jump 5. Avoid placing them just in front of the judge's truck or next to any other busy area at the arenas edge.

Placing a double to go directly away from the gate is an added difficulty. It makes the young horse think backwards and then shorten his stride thus making it hard for him to make the stride required.

Placing the filler at the second element of a double when one has not been placed at the first also can cause great strife. If the A element is too empty with just rails and the B element has a lovely bright filler there is a huge risk that young horses will be concentrating so hard on the filler that they will not see the first jump and end up tripping through it.

Two stride doubles are better at the beginning of the season.

Allow 24 feet or 7.3 meters for one stride and 36 feet or 10.3 meters for two strides. Avoid having the distance too long at low heights. Again, check out what the course is being built for and look at the terrain. All of these things can change the dimensions of the stride.

7. The Use of Fillers

These require careful placement and designing. Riders and horses are not perfect and some over zealously designed walls can cause huge problems to the horses. In my experience some designs can cause some very nasty stops especially ones that seem to look like large eyes. We once had a board that had large black faces on a blue background - it caused endless mayhem.

Once you have built a few courses and experimented with different types of fill you will soon get the feel of what works well. Being attuned to what is happening in the ring is a must for a good course designer.

In my experience if rails are used up to jump 5, the horse will begin to get into its rhythm and after that all the scary walls and brushes and pickets can be introduced, seemingly causing little trouble.

8. Change of Rein

It is a good idea to keep the first three jumps on the same rein and change the rein every two or three jumps after that. It is important to check that you have at least 2 changes of rein in a course.

9. Distances

It is best to keep to the 3.65m stride. Strides will be a little longer when the jumps are over 1.20m. It is also very important to keep the distances true and measured. If a horse can get into a rhythm on a comfortable stride length, then they seem happy to jump if they can be kept on this stride. Easy distances for average horses and ponies up to 90cm are:

One stride doubles	7.3 meters for horse.	6.4m for pony
Two strides	10.3m	9.4m
Three strides	14m	13.4m
Four strides	17m	16.5m
Five strides	20m	19.5m

And so on. If both horses and ponies are to jump the same course it is better to build to the hack distance.

10. Trebles

These are best avoided but are added in Pony Club events when riders are working towards the S/J Champs. They are not allowed in Horse Trials.

11. Related Distances.

These are jumps with measured 4, 5 or 6 strides between them. Three stride lines are not recommended.

This is a subject that leads to many a heated debate. Wrongly placed they can be a nightmare for young horses. A related distance directly away from the in gate at jump two or three, with fillers in the second jump of a line can cause young horses and inexperienced combinations all sorts of grief. This is because

the horse may shorten its stride and the distance quickly becomes misrelated, with the horse making a horrible jump if he jumps at all.

Related lines running across the arena, or down to the other horses, or later on in the course work better. Related lines work well in showhunter but remember that they get to practice their lines at the beginning of the day.

12. Uprights and Oxers

Uprights are jumps built in a vertical plane; Oxers are jumps that have both height and spread. Course builders also build triple bars and fans.

Builders usually alternate the jumps between vertical and oxer as they go round. It is not a hard and fast rule but you should have roughly the same number of spreads as verticals.

13. The Number of Jumps

Nine or ten jumps with a double is adequate at this level.

14. Flags

The start and finish flags must be easy for the combination to get through and on to the first jump.

If the judges want to move the flags making the line onto jump one too difficult then move jump one and try and resolve it that way or have someone stand at the flags to indicate to the judge when the riders goes through the flags.

15. Course Heights

The rule book states that every endeavour must be made to make sure the jumps are at the stated height as advertised for the class. A tolerance of 5cm is allowed if the gear can not be quite adjusted to the exact height. Keep to this rule.

Riders know why they have entered classes of a certain height and building higher or lower than what they were expecting defeats the purpose of their entry.

16. Listen To Riders

I have often found they are right. In a hurry to get a course ready for the next class you may have been too busy to check a line especially at the ropes (someone may have moved them) or a helper may have put a jump up too high.

17. Learn From Your Experience

Learn from each course building experience that you have. Try to be attuned to when things do not go well (this happens to all of us) and try to improve on it next time. Be observant of what does work well.

18. Ground Lines

When training young riders over courses, NZPCA recommends that a ground line be put on each jump.

I hope you will find these guidelines helpful. They are not hard and fast but they certainly can give you a basis to set your course building on the right lines.

Showjumping course plans by K Hogan and J Carson, and Jumping Exercises for Pony Club Instructors have course plans and exercises that are easy to follow. The pony club manuals are also full of information that has been tried and proved over many years.

Thanks go to Christine Bullock for helping to write this document.