



TREC EXERCISES TO TRY AT HOME

By Zoë Smith

IH members might remember Kelly Marks and Pie's winning TREC debut at the 2007 SEIB Pro-Am TREC Championship in Windsor (if not, be sure to check out the video on the IH YouTube page!)

Whether you want to follow in Kelly's footsteps and compete, or just try something new with your horse, incorporating some TREC exercises into your riding is a great way to test the skill, accuracy, and ability of both you and your horse.

? WHAT IS TREC?

TREC is an equestrian discipline that originated in France and stands for the French 'Techniques de Randonnée Équestre de Compétition' – Trail Riding Techniques in Competition.

The idea was to test the skill and training of both horse and rider, relating to the needs of a trail rider and horse. For example, map-reading and orienteering skills, the ability to maintain a steady pace over distance and varied terrain, and the ease with which the pair can navigate natural 'obstacles' that might be required whilst out trekking (e.g. opening a gate, crossing a river, or jumping a fallen tree).

If, like me, you believe that there's no such thing as being 'just a Happy Hacker', TREC is all the proof you need that those who 'only hack' actually have a wide and varied skillset that rivals that of many dressage riders and showjumpers!

i A standard TREC competition is made up of three parts:

1 The 'POR' ('Parcours d'Orientation et de Régularité')

Essentially this is an orienteering test on horseback and is ridden as a pair or team. On arrival, competitors are given a map with a route marked on it. You have around 15 minutes to copy this onto your own blank maps, then you set out to follow the route on your horses. Depending on the level, routes can range from 10-40km (6-25 miles), which must be completed within a certain time.

Along the way, there are a mix of manned checkpoints and unmanned clip markers (which you have punch onto your route card) to ensure you don't go off route. At higher levels, there is also an off-map portion, where you need to follow a series of compass bearings. You lose points

Continued overleaf >>



“...those who ‘only hack’ actually have a wide and varied skillset.”

You can compete in TREC events as a pair or as a team of up to four people

TREC EXERCISES TO TRY AT HOME

<< Continued from previous page

for going off-route, completing the course too fast or slowly, or missing a checkpoint, and the total points go towards your overall score.

2 The 'MA' ('Maîtrise des Allures')

This is a Control of Paces test where each individual rider has to ride through a corridor (typically marked out by cones or poles) up to 150m long and from 2m to 2.20m wide.

The challenge is that you have to start at the slowest possible canter, then return at the fastest possible walk. Your score depends on your time and points are lost for breaking the gait or riding outside of the corridor.

Another challenge is that this test can take part over different terrain, including grass or unlevel ground (although it will be level enough to safely canter on!) in an open space, not only on an arena surface. The 'corridor' might be on a straight line, curve, or go around a corner.

3 The 'PTV' ('Parcours en Terrain Varié')

This is the fun bit! Each individual rider has to complete an obstacle course of up to 16 obstacles. Traditionally, obstacles are outdoors on varied terrain and can be spread out over a distance of up to 5km (3 miles), with a minimum time to complete the course (although it isn't a race).

There are over 30 different possible obstacles, which include things like mounting from the left or right, in-hand tasks such as walking over a bridge or loading into a trailer, ridden exercises at a walk such as opening a gate or manoeuvring through an S-bend, and ridden patterns and jumps designed to be completed at a canter.

Each obstacle is worth 10 points and they are judged according to different criteria. For example, some obstacles are judged on accuracy and technique, and others are based on gait, so you might get full marks (10 points) for completing it successfully at a canter. Points are deducted for 'faults' such as knocking a cone or changing gait. You can skip obstacles if you want (although obviously you will receive '0' for that obstacle!) so there's no pressure if you don't want to jump or there is a particular challenge that worries you or your horse. Typically in a team event with four riders, the top three scores count towards the overall score.

IH Training Section

Tackling the 'low branches' during the PTV stage



TREC COMPETITIONS

TREC competitions and training days in the UK are organised by TREC GB and include 1-day and 2-day events in summer and indoor 'PTV and MA only' events during the winter months. There are four different levels that vary in difficulty.

See for more information visit www.trecgb.com



Competitors have just 15 minutes to copy down the map route before setting out

SCORING TREC OBSTACLES

i All obstacles are marked out of 10 on Effectiveness (7 points) and Style (3 points).

EFFECTIVENESS: This is based on the number of faults:

- 7 = no faults
- 4 = 1 fault
- 1 = 2 faults
- 0 = 3 faults or more

I've listed common faults for each obstacle shown on the following pages.

STYLE: For gaited obstacles you get:

- +3 points for a canter
- 0 points for trot
- -2 points for a walk

i For non-gaited obstacles +3 is awarded at the judge's discretion, typically for a calm horse, well balanced rider, and obedience to the aids.

i There is also a penalty of -3 for brutality or dangerous riding, at the judge's discretion (this could be the overuse of the whip or anything that puts horse, rider, or others at risk).

Photo courtesy of Lucy Clarke

Photo © Les Cavaliers du Louet

GIVE IT A GO!

Even if you don't fancy competing, setting up some TREC obstacles at home can be a fun way to challenge yourself. Perhaps tackle them with friends and take turns judging each other, or film yourself and watch it back to check out your mistakes. These four TREC obstacles are all ones that you can set up at home in an arena or field, using only cones and poles.

i A FEW TIPS:

• **All TREC obstacles have a start and end 'gate', normally marked by cones or poles with red and white flags.**

You are judged from the moment you enter through this 'gate'. Practice this at home, by always setting up a clear start and end point, and making sure that you continue riding (or maintain gait) until you pass the end! Remember – you aren't judged until you pass through the start gate, so take the time to get ready, prepare your horse, or establish a steady and rhythmic gait before you do!

• **While all of these exercises can be completed in an arena, remember that in a TREC competition, they could be placed outdoors on grass or other surfaces, or in an open space.** So once you are confident in an arena, try them in different places. This is really important as horses can take a while to generalise learning – this means that just because you have practiced an exercise at home, doesn't mean your horse will find it easy when doing the same exercise in a new environment, on a different surface, or set up with a different type or colour of poles. The more variations you practice the better!

• **When completing gait exercises (ones where you get full marks for completing it at a canter), it's best to stick to the gait you are most confident in.** You get full marks (10 points) for completing it successfully at a canter and 7 points for completing it at a trot. However, if you attempt it at a canter, but break to trot, you will receive a 7 for trotting, but you will also get a fault which is -3, so you will end up with a 4!

• **There is a chance to walk the PTV course at a TREC competition, just as you would at a jumping event.** Walk the obstacles on foot first (without your horse) and use this time wisely to plan your route and think about how you will tackle each obstacle. Know your horse – if you think your horse might spook at something plan your entrance (before you enter the start gate) so that he has time to have a good look at it first. When deciding whether to attempt a gait exercise at a trot or canter, look at the ground conditions too, and consider which canter lead you need to be on and where you can transition to canter.

• **Stay safe! A body protector is required for the PTV stage at all competitions** and I highly recommend you wear one at home too. Of course, I don't have to tell you to wear a helmet and gloves when riding and doing in-hand exercises too!

4 TREC EXERCISES

1 Bending Weaving through a 'slalom' of cones or posts without breaking gait. This exercise is designed to show the 'obedience and suppleness of the horse'.

i HOW TO SET IT UP Place six poles or cones in a straight line, with a distance of 5 meters between each one. Place your start and end gate markers 4 metres apart, forming an imaginary 'corridor' with 2 metres of space each side of the bending poles (if you want to be even more accurate, you could mark this out with poles or chalk).

i HOW TO RIDE IT For top marks, ride the slalom at a canter. You can ride this at a walk or trot to begin with, and you can also increase the distance between the cones to 6 or 7 meters to make it easier while you're learning.

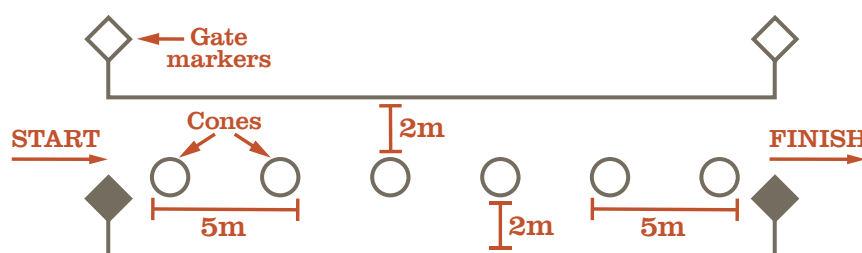
✓ SCORING You get 10 for completing it at a canter with no faults. Faults include touching any of the cones or poles, breaking gait, and going outside of the 'corridor'. Missing any pole in the sequence will result in a zero score.

TIPS

Try to stay as straight as possible and as close to the cones/poles as possible. Resist the urge to 'pull' your horse left and right with your reins, or make big movements – this will only put him off balance. Instead think of guiding your horse from the withers with both reins, stay straight and balanced in the saddle and use your legs and weight aids



Practise this exercise in walk and trot first before progressing to canter



TREC EXERCISES TO TRY AT HOME

IH Training Section

The POR phase puts the team's map reading and compass skills to the test



Photo © Les Cavaliers du Louet

<< Continued from previous page

2 Neck Reining

Riding a figure of 8 pattern with only one hand on the reins. This exercise is designed to show the rider's ability to ride one-handed and the horse's obedience to the aids.

HOW TO SET IT UP Set up two cones, poles, or barrels a minimum of 15 metres apart, and place the start and end gates a minimum of 10 metres from the centreline.

HOW TO RIDE IT For top marks, ride the pattern at a canter, keeping only one hand on the reins the entire time. Some competitions stipulate which cone should be ridden first and in which direction, but the pattern must include a change of rein and opposite start and end gates.

SCORING You get 10 for completing it at a canter with no faults. Faults include touching any of the cones or poles, or breaking gait. Having two hands on the reins at any time, or changing hands will result in a zero score.

“Take the time to walk this pattern before riding it and think about exactly where you are going to ride.”



Having two hands on the reins at any time, or changing hands will result in a zero score

TIPS

Take the time to walk this pattern before riding it and think about exactly where you are going to ride – give yourself plenty of space to make a circle around each barrel, look in the direction you are going, and use your seat and weight aids to help guide your horse along with your neck rein. Ride this pattern at a walk or trot to begin with, as your horse gets used to neck reining. When attempting the pattern at a canter, it may help to start on your horse's more difficult rein – that way he will often be more willing to change to his preferred lead leg. As you get more confident, practise riding it in both directions.

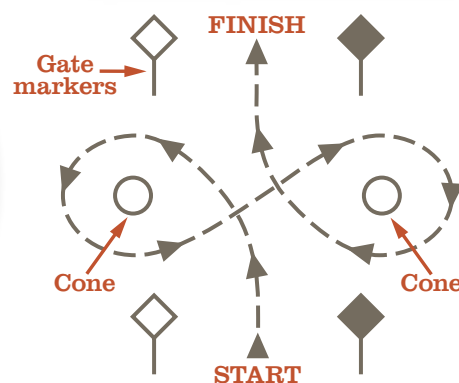


Photo © Les Cavaliers du Louet

TREC EXERCISES TO TRY AT HOME

TIP

While you have the corridor set up, you can also use it to practise backing up in a straight line, both ridden and in-hand



This exercise is designed to show the obedience and accuracy of the horse

TIPS

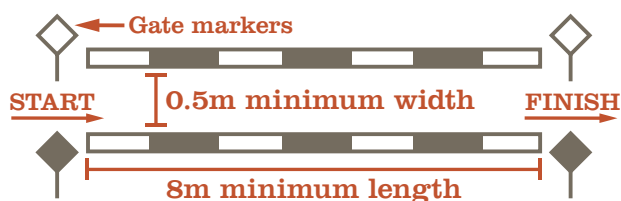
Make sure your horse is straight and moving actively forwards before you enter the corridor, then look straight ahead where you are headed (not down at the poles!). In-hand, make sure to secure your stirrups and pass the reins over the horse's head. You must pass through the corridor in front of your horse – have a quick glance over your shoulder to check he has entered the corridor, then look straight ahead. Practice trotting with your horse in-hand so you know the best speed for your horse – with some horses you might need to run quite fast to avoid them falling back to a walk, with others you might need to keep the pace steady to avoid them getting overexcited

3 Corridor Riding or leading a horse through a narrow corridor. This exercise is designed to show the obedience and accuracy of the horse, and test the rider's groundwork skills.

HOW TO SET IT UP Set up two lines of poles at least 8 metres long, and 0.5 metres wide.

HOW TO RIDE IT This obstacle can be ridden or in-hand. Practise riding through the corridor at a walk and trot, before attempting it at a canter, or widen the corridor to make it easier at first.

SCORING For the ridden exercise, you get 10 for completing it at a canter with no faults. Ridden faults include touching the poles, a stop or refusal, or breaking gait. In-hand, you get 10 for completing it at a trot. In-hand faults are the same, plus the horse passing the rider's shoulder and stirrup irons not secured. For both, leaving the corridor results in a zero score.



“Slow down the walk and take your time – attempting to do this too fast is more likely to result in a fault.”

4 S-Bend Manoeuvring around an S-shaped corridor from poles (ideally raised), either ridden or in-hand. This exercise is designed to show both the horse and rider's control, balance, and accuracy.

HOW TO SET IT UP Set up six to eight poles in an S-shape. The dimensions in the picture can be altered to suit your equipment, but the narrower the width, the trickier it will be to complete.

HOW TO RIDE IT This obstacle can be ridden or in-hand, and must be completed at a walk. Ride or walk through the S-bend without touching any of the poles.

SCORING You get 7 for completing the S-bend with no faults and 3 points for style, which are awarded for a calm, obedient horse and subtle aids. Faults include touching the poles, stopping, refusing or backing up, and breaking into trot. In-hand faults also include the rider stepping backwards while in the obstacle.

TIPS

Make full use of the space available – go forwards as far as possible before turning to give your horse space to turn his hind legs. Try to use subtle rein aids to help your horse keep his balance – opening the inside rein too wide can encourage your horse to drop his shoulder and risk hitting the poles. Slow down the walk and take your time – attempting to do this too fast is more likely to result in a fault. However, you still need to maintain enough energy that your horse doesn't stop!



The narrower the width, the trickier it will be to complete

