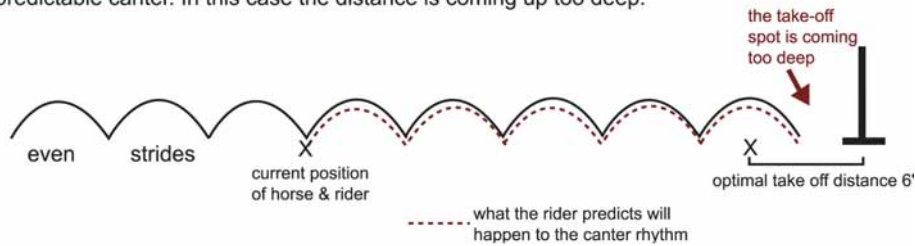




Even Rhythm - the rider can predict the take-off location out of a predictable canter. In this case the distance is coming up too deep.



song. You will notice that your horse's natural rhythm is surprisingly inconsistent. For example, most horses tend to slow down through turns and speed up along straight-aways. Try sensing these variations in his rhythm and keep him on track with your rhythm. It's a great feeling when you can sustain your horse's rhythm to a good tune!

Feeling the sweet spot

More important than knowing where the take-off spot is "feeling" where the take-off spot is. This phenomenon happens in almost every accuracy sport. One knows when they have hit a ball with the sweet spot of a tennis racquet, golf club or baseball bat. This same feeling happens when a rider comes to a fence and finds that magic take off spot where everything happens perfectly the sweet spot. Finding a take-off distance is actually a feeling that happens when the rider senses where the horse will arrive in front of the jump given the canter rhythm she is on. It is not something that is mechanical or tangible that can actually be "seen". Finding the sweet spot is really a function of feel and rhythm.

Try this - walk up to a log on the ground or a sidewalk curb from the street and take notice of what you do to comfortably step over the object. We first decide our line of approach to the object, then we control our walking stride so that each step is even, controlled and balanced. At some point before the log or step, we recognize that we are going to arrive at it either too

closely, too far or just right. After recognizing the sweet spot, we make the necessary adjustment in our walking steps to meet the obstacle comfortably. We naturally sense take-off spots virtually every time we walk somewhere. The feeling one gets when they "feel" the distance on a horse is no different.

Exercise - Feeling the distance

[Diagram] It is important to do this exercise with an instructor as it involves jumping. Note: all measurements assume your horse has an average canter stride length of 12'. Place a cross rail along one side of your ring with a trot pole 7' in front of it. Then set up a small jump four comfortable strides away (58' to 60'). After an appropriate warm-up (start gradually by trotting the cross-rail a few times on its own), let your horse canter through the line to the next jump. If the exercise is set up correctly and your horse is relaxed, you should arrive as the second jump at a perfect distance. Pay attention to how the horse feels when you arrive at the second jump. Notice how he does not need to speed up or slow down towards it and how smooth the jump feels from the moment of take-off to the moment of landing. Also pay attention to how the horse does not need to adjust his stride length or balance before the jump. If you can feel all of this, you will have felt the sweet spot. Memorize this feeling. It will be your goal to reproduce it every time you jump from now on.

Improving your eye

Okay, so now that you have developed a sense for finding a rhythm and getting your horse to the perfect take-off distance, you will most likely be frustrated by the fact that you don't see them consistently. Sometimes you sense them from three strides away, other times five strides away and a lot of times you don't see them at all. Seeing distances consistently is as elusive as finding the perfect golf swing every time.

Exercise - Three times in-a-row

You may be able to see your distances once in a while but can you complete a course of eight jumps or more without missing once? In other words, can your eye work under pressure? Again, place a single ground rail in the same fashion as the single rail exercise above. Instead of finding the perfect natural distance once, you are going to have to find it three times in-a-row. It is important to be extremely critical of yourself and the distances you find each time - this exercise requires discipline. It is best to have a knowledgeable ground person monitoring you during this exercise and they should be very critical as well. If you arrive at the rail two inches too deep, consider it a miss. If you arrive two inches too long, also consider it a miss. You are only happy if you get your horse to the perfect distance. Now, when you have found your first perfect distance keep your canter rhythm and make your second approach to the rail.

"FINDING A DISTANCE IS A FUNCTION OF RHYTHM NOT A FUNCTION OF TIME - DON'T BUY TIME TO YOUR JUMPS BY SLOWING DOWN!"

