Since the first edition of this book in 1981, vaulting has grown from a little known horse activity into an international sport. As the sport has evolved, so has this book. Dedicated and knowledgeable horse trainers, vaulting coaches, judges, camp directors, club managers and parents of vaulters have put hundreds of volunteer hours into creating this how-to book for those wishing to start a vaulting program. A special thanks to those who helped create and revise this book. Jan Weber, Amy McCune, Kate Dalby, Marianne Rose, Jenny Bixby, Stacy Casilio, Kendel Edmunds, Carolyn Conner, Patti Skipton, Kelley Holly, Yossi Martonovich, Noel Martonovich, Megan Grove..
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INTRODUCTION

This book is designed primarily for instructors, lungers, and students new to vaulting. Tips on training new vaulting horses are also included. All information contained herein has been written to help novices enjoy and understand the sport. Knowledge of basic vaulting will be advantageous for those who later want to enter the world of competitive vaulting.

What is Vaulting?

Vaulting is gymnastics in harmony with the moving horse. As a competitive sport it is stylized and disciplined. As a recreational activity and teaching aid it is enormously adaptable in scope and application.

To Parents:

Vaulting allows every child, regardless of age or achievement level, to experience individual success and pleasure. Faster progress is more possible in vaulting than in flat riding as each vaulter receives verbal and physical assistance while working on a horse controlled by an experienced lunge. Age and size for participation in vaulting is unlimited. Some coaches will begin working with children as young as two years old. Others may require the vaulters be older before joining their program.

To Vaulters:

Vaulting is a specialized horse activity that is FUN. It improves confidence, balance, timing, strength, and suppleness, thus making participants better, safer horseback riders. It has been an important part of equestrian training, especially cavalry training, for generations. In fact, riding gymnastics go back to Roman times.

To Instructors:

Vaulting diversifies and enhances any horsemanship program. A growing number of riding instructors and schools are using it to improve their students’ skills.

In this book great care has been taken to emphasize SAFETY in all aspects of conducting a vaulting class. Whether on the ground, barrel, or horse, the final responsibility for achieving this safe program rests with the instructors and their assistants.

It is also important for instructors to always consider each individual student’s abilities, adjust teaching methods to appropriate level of accomplishment, and include as much praise as possible.
How Can Vaulting Fit Into My Current Riding Program?

**Lesson Program:** Many stables choose to develop a complete vaulting lesson program as an adjunct to their riding program. Others use vaulting techniques on a more limited basis, individualizing their vaulting instruction to address specific rider challenges (build confidence, increase understanding and feel of horse movement, create awareness of rider body position/muscle isolation and its effects on the horse, etc.).

**Camp Program:** Vaulting is a fun addition to camp as it provides opportunities for team building among campers, channels their energy into a positive learning experience, and expands their confidence and sense of accomplishment in a short period of time. One of the best benefits for many camps is the financial, with one horse used for numerous vaulters.

**Youth Association or Club:** Vaulting provides an exciting challenge for club members to work together while improving their horsemanship skills and equine knowledge. Whether vaulting is used for clinics, demonstrations or competitions it allows for diversity in rider/vaulter skills and horse breed or use.

**Therapeutic Program:** As vaulting allows for great variety in rider positions and movements, it provides an excellent way for therapeutic students to set and achieve goals while increasing their strength, flexibility and balance. With options for individual or team (squad) efforts, vaulting offers unlimited opportunities for physical and social development.

How Will Joining the AVA Benefit My Program?

**AVA Membership Provides:**

- Access to an extensive group of vaulting instructors and coaches who can provide workshops, clinics, and mentoring services.

- Access to the members-only section of www.americanvaulting.org for in-depth vaulting information, how-to articles, rules, calendars, resources, contacts, forums and much, much more.

- Access to a video library, books, instructional guides and certificate programs.

- Opportunities to participate in special educational programs, competitions, and cross club collaborations.
THE AMERICAN VAULTING ASSOCIATION (AVA)

The American Vaulting Association (AVA) is a non-profit 501(c)3 educational corporation founded in 1969 to promote interest in the equestrian sport of vaulting: gymnastics on and in harmony with an equine partner.

The American Vaulting Association provides many services to the vaulting community and the general public, including:

• Operates the AVA National Office
  AVA National Office
  1443 E. Washington Blvd. #289, Pasadena, CA 91104
  Tel: 323-654-0800 Phone Hours: 8:00am - 12:00pm PST
  Fax: 323-654-4306 email: info@americanvaulting.org
  Website: www.americanvaulting.org

• Establishes and maintains contacts in the international vaulting community, and facilitates AVA member participation in international exchanges and competitions.

• Publishes a calendar of local, regional and national competitions.

• Distributes information to clubs and members.

• Helps new members and clubs gather information on vaulting in their region.

• Develops and makes available videos, books, and other educational materials on the sport of vaulting for use by vaulters and the edification of the general public.

• Publishes Equestrian Vaulting, a magazine containing news and articles of interest to vaulters.

• Establishes a rule book for vaulting in the United States, consistent with rules used for international competition.

• Provides ongoing training for vaulters, coaches, and judges, and a training program for judges.

• Provides procedures and standards for testing vaulters for medals at 5 different skill levels.

• Conducts the AVA National Championship competition each year.

• Maintains a website (www.americanvaulting.org) to promote the sport of vaulting.

• Maintains affiliations with United States Equestrian Federation and United States Equestrian Team.
Chapter 1
Beginning a Vaulting Program

1.1 Personnel

A. Instructor/Coach

1. As with any athletic endeavor, the instructor is responsible for the safety of the students in the class and for teaching them the skills required to become proficient in their chosen sport.

2. The qualifications of an applicant for camp or club vaulting instructor, like those for any teaching job, should be carefully reviewed by the Personnel Director or whoever is in charge of hiring teachers.

3. The following qualifications are suggested for a camp or club vaulting instructor:
   a. The instructor should be a responsible, mature person.
   b. The instructor should relate well to others.
      1) If the children are to enjoy an introduction to vaulting during their short time at camp, it is imperative that they have an understanding, effective instructor.
      2) The instructor must be enthusiastic and supportive, as well as firm and disciplined.
   c. The instructor should have some previous vaulting experience such as a junior leader or assistant coach with a 4-H club, United States Pony Club, or vaulting club.
   d. The instructor should have some experience with horses.
      1) A basic knowledge of lunging is helpful to the non-lunging instructor. A basic knowledge is essential to the instructor who must also lunge during the vaulting training.
      2) A knowledge of safe and humane horsemanship practices is required, especially the ability to recognize when a horse is fatigued, sore, or unsuitable for use as a vaulting horse.
   e. The instructor need have only an elementary, common sense knowledge of gymnastics, though a more thorough knowledge is certainly advantageous.
   f. The instructor should have a basic knowledge of First Aid for sporting events. The Red Cross offers excellent courses for this purpose.
B. Lunger

1. It is important for the vaulters’ safety to *always* have a competent and mature lunger work with the horse.

2. The lunger must be able to effectively control the horse on the lunge line.
   
a. The lunger should know how to keep the horse from cutting in, turning back, stopping without cue, going too fast, and so forth.

b. The lunger should be sufficiently skillful with the whip to be able to maintain a 13 meter circle and, at the same time, to signal the vaulters to approach the horse.

3. Since the lunger is usually responsible for a daily check of the equipment, he must know the fit, adjustment, and condition of that equipment intimately. (See Chapter 3, 3.2 Use and Adjustment of the Equipment.)

C. Coach/Lunger

1. It is possible for the job of coach and lunger to be performed by one person. However, it is not recommended that this division of attention be required of one person unless both the coach/lunger and the horse are very experienced, and the class is smaller than eight vaulters.

2. For a class of beginners it is especially advantageous to have two people to supervise the activity.

D. Spotters

1. These assistants are a necessary addition to the teaching staff as they help to maintain the vaulters’ safety.

2. Spotters may be older vaulters who are capable of accepting the responsibility or parents who are capable of running with the horse.

3. It is suggested that spotters be used whenever vaulters are performing a new exercise.

4. For detailed information on the use of spotters, refer to Chapter 4, 4.3 Vaulting on the Horse.

E. The Horse

(See Chapter 3, Selecting and Training the Vaulting Horse.)
1.2 Facilities

A. Level Area

1. A level area with a suitable surface is a must for both horse and vaulters.

2. This area must be large enough for the vaulting circle.
   
   a. The vaulting arena should not be smaller than 20 meters (66 feet) in diameter, thereby providing enough room for both horse and vaulters.
   
   b. Working the horse on a 15 meter lunge circle allows for the best control and safety.

      1) Too large a circle lessens control.
      
      2) Too small a circle is very fatiguing for the horse and can cause him to stumble.
      
      3) The area used for vaulting does not need to be fenced. However, if it is fenced, it must be of hazard free material. Maintain the lunging circle a safe distance from any fencing.

B. Footing

1. Proper footing is of paramount importance for the safety of the vaulters and the soundness of the horse.

2. Footing on the vaulting circle should be soft and sufficiently springy to cushion the shock of landing without being slick or deep.

3. The area should be checked to make sure the footing is completely free of rocks, holes, sticks, glass, wire, or other dangerous objects.

4. Commonly used footing for vaulting arenas include sand (not too deep), wood shavings, or rice hulls mixed with dirt. Many of the new designer arena footings for dressage and jumping horses are also good for vaulting.

1.3 The Vaulting Barrel

A. Uses of a Vaulting Barrel

1. It can serve as a surrogate horse for groups starting without a horse.

2. It can save the horse from over use by providing another means for vaulters to practice.
3. It can save time as vaulters continue their lesson on the barrel during the horse’s warm up and rest periods, and during other vaulters’ turns on the horse.

4. It can help vaulters gain confidence since they can master the exercises on a stationary object before trying them on a moving horse.

5. It can be used indoors during bad weather so that the vaulting lessons need not be canceled when the horse cannot be worked.

6. It can be used by vaulters who are composing freestyles and want to experiment with different combinations of exercises.

B. Construction of Barrel

1. A vaulting barrel can be constructed from two 55-gallon oil drums mounted on legs. (See page 7 for more information about construction. Information is also available on the AVA website at www.americanvaulting.org.) Barrels may also be designed from plywood and one by fours.

2. The barrel must be solid enough so that it will not tip over when vaulters pull on the handles.

3. The barrel must be well padded and the handles wrapped with tape. Sharp edges, rough spots, or protruding barrel legs are a danger to the vaulters and must be avoided.

C. Footing around Barrel

1. The footing around the barrel is as important as that in the vaulting circle.

2. Gymnastic mats, foam rubber, old mattresses, carpeting remnants, etc. all provide for good landings.

3. The same types of footing (turf, sand, shavings, etc.) as used in the vaulting circle are also suitable for use around the barrel, especially if it is located in the same general area.

1.4 Attire

A. Shoes

1. Beginners may wear canvas type shoes or light weight running shoes with soft thin soles, water slippers, ballet slippers or gymnastic slippers.

2. Hard shoes such as riding boots or athletic shoes with thick soles are unsuitable because they can cause pressure points on the horse’s back. They also inhibit the vaulter’s ability to point their toes and they lessen the sensitivity of the vaulter’s feet.
3. Never allow barefooted or sockfooted vaulting!

4. When a vaulter can jump down from a stand on the horse comfortably and land properly, he is probably ready to graduate to vaulting shoes. (See list of suppliers in Appendix.)

   a. Vaulting shoes do not give the vaulter much protection or support. However, because they are lightweight and have good traction, they make it easier to perform the exercises.

   b. If ankle support is needed, use tape or an elastic bandage.

B. Clothes

1. Vaulters should wear clothing that allows freedom of movement in all directions and is not so loose as to catch on the surcingle or on another vaulter. Tight fitting stretch pants and tops are ideal. Avoid clothing with strings, buttons or zippers.

2. Gymnastic unitards are most often worn by vaulters because they are functional and comfortable.

3. Other possibilities include shorts, sweat pants which are tight around the ankles, leotards or riding breeches made of a stretch fabric. Tops must be long enough to tuck into pants.

4. No jewelry should be worn while vaulting. Hair should be tied back.

C. Uniforms

1. Only if a team (squad) is formed and wants to compete or give demonstrations are uniforms a necessity.

2. If the team (squad) wants to have matching unitards, they can be ordered from suppliers. The beginning team (squad) may consider dance or exercise wear available at any sporting goods store or most department store chains. The combination of a simple leotard with lycra exercise pants will provide the uniformity desired. More advanced groups should check out gymnastic uniform suppliers.

3. Uniforms for teams (squad) have also been made very nicely from fabrics with four-way stretch and the efforts of willing parents.
2.1 On the Ground

1. The instructor should never assume that the students know how to behave around horses.

2. It is far better to repeat explanations or directions than to chance an accident.

3. On the first day the instructor should stress basic safe horsemanship practices.

   a. Explain to the students how a horse sees so that they will understand why they must follow certain procedures while vaulting and working around the horse.

   b. Explain how to approach a horse and the importance of speaking to him when first approaching or at any time he might not be aware of your presence.

   c. Teach vaulters how to lead and tie a horse correctly. Emphasize that the horse must NEVER be tied by the bridle or the lunge line. Demonstrate how to lead and tie a horse correctly. In subsequent lessons vaulters can be taught how to lead and tie the horse with supervision and they can be given opportunities to practice those skills.

   d. Teach vaulters how to pat, praise, and reward a horse. When the work is finished, let vaulters feed the horse tidbits, such as carrots or apples with the permission of the horse owner. Explain that it is always better to place treats in a bucket or tub than to hand feed.

   e. Vaulters should be taught to groom and tack up the horse. Demonstrate how to groom and tack up the horse safely. In subsequent lessons, with supervision, vaulters should be encouraged to participate in these activities with emphasis on the safety of the vaulter and comfort of the horse.

   f. Insist that the vaulters NEVER “fool around” or “rough house” near a horse.

   g. Carefully discuss where a person should not be in relationship to the horse. Do not stand or run directly in front or in back of the horse.

   h. Also discuss what the vaulters should not do to the horse:

      1) Do not fuss with his nose, mouth, eyes, or ears.

      2) Do not touch sensitive spots around the stomach or prod him in the flanks.

      3) Do not land heavily on his back.
4) Do not dig in with elbows, knees, or heels.

5) Do not attempt to make him go by clucking, kicking, or hitting.
   Controlling the horse is the lunger’s responsibility.

2.2 On the Vaulting Circle

1. If vaulters are attentive, organized, and efficient in their movement around the vaulting circle and in the taking of turns, the practice will be safer and much more will be accomplished with the time and horse energy available.

2. The following procedures should be used on the vaulting circle:
   a. At the beginning of class, before the vaulters go to the vaulting circle, the instructor should establish an order of go. It should be followed throughout the vaulting lesson.
   b. Each vaulter, at his turn, should go into the vaulting circle to the lunger just after the horse has passed, NEVER IN FRONT OF THE HORSE.
   c. This vaulter should stand directly behind the lunger until it is his turn to go out to the horse.
   d. As the vaulter on the horse is preparing to dismount, the lunger signals by raising the whip so that the vaulter behind him can pass under the whip, run along (but not touch) the lunge line to the horse, and, facing forward, come into stride with the horse’s forelegs.
   e. As soon as the previous vaulter has dismounted, the next one should be prepared to mount. An empty horse is a waste of the horse’s energy and practice time.
   f. While this change is occurring, the next vaulter in line should move from the edge of the vaulting circle to stand behind the lunger as in b above.
   g. After dismounting, the vaulter should return to the line-up by following the vaulting circle in the same direction of the horse. The vaulter must remain a safe distance from the back of the horse.
   h. A vaulter should NEVER CROSS THE VAULTING CIRCLE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES AFTER DISMOUNTING.
   i. The above procedures can be learned and practiced before using a real horse by having the vaulters pretend to be the horse. Start with a ‘horse’ holding the end of the lunge line and have the vaulters approach first at the walk, then trot, then canter. When a vaulter has approached correctly and is in step with the ‘horse’, that vaulter takes the end of the line and replaces the ‘horse’ who runs
back to the line up. This method gives the vaulters an appreciation for the energy and focus the horse needs because at first many vaulters will be inconsistent, tire easily and cut in just like an untrained horse!

2.3 Additional Horsemanship Knowledge and Skills

1. The AVA offers an extensive Horsemanship Program with five levels of proficiency which is designed to be incorporated into your regular practices as 10 to 15 minute mini-lessons. Levels one and two cover general horsemanship knowledge and essential skills that everyone can use.

2. The following is a list of additional horsemanship topics that can be incorporated into your lessons as appropriate:

   a. Horse Parts/Anatomy
   b. Breeds, Colors and Markings
   c. Conformation and Lameness
   d. Shoeing/Farrier Care
   e. Health Care and Veterinary Knowledge
   f. Conditioning and Fitness
   g. Nutrition
   h. Stable Management
   i. Turnout and Tack
   j. Travel Safety
   k. Vaulting Sport Knowledge.

If you are planning to vault in any competition, it is vital that you review the prize list for that event very carefully. It will give you information about what is expected of you and your vaulters. If you are entering an AVA recognized competition, please take some time to review the current AVA Rules for Vaulting. The requirements for compulsories may change and the expectations for freestyles may change. There may be new rules about competition procedures.
CHAPTER 3
SELECTING AND TRAINING THE VAULTING HORSE

3.1 Selection and Evaluation of a Horse for Vaulting

A. Selection of a Suitable Horse – Initial Evaluation

1. It takes a lot of work to train a vaulting horse, so make sure your efforts are not wasted on an unsuitable horse.

2. Good vaulting horses can be found in nearly every breed and among grade (mixed breed) horses. The horse must be a gelding or mare and at least six years of age to attend a recognized vaulting competition.

3. The most important points to evaluate when selecting a vaulting horse are temperament, conformation, gaits, and training, in that order.

   a. Temperament

      1) Irreproachable character and good temperament in the presence of children are essential characteristics. A horse who enjoys interacting with people or has a good-natured “baby sitter” outlook is a treasure.

      2) He must be willing to learn to accept one, two, or three vaulters all doing “strange” things at once.

      3) He must be able to be trained to remain steady and unflappable in all situations.

      4) He must be able to be trained to be responsive and obedient to the lunger’s commands and willing to work so as not to repeatedly break gait.

      5) There are a number of horses that do not have the balance, consistency or stamina to sustain work at the canter even if they are willing, but who may work quite satisfactorily at the trot.

   b. Conformation

      1) Conformation is so secondary to temperament in the search for a suitable horse that a potential vaulting horse should not be rejected for faults of conformation unless they are so extreme as to interfere with the safety of the vaulters or to cause the horse to become unsound or uncomfortable.
2) A good vaulting prospect should be thoroughly examined by a veterinarian for soundness and evaluated for conformation to establish if there are any problems, which would make the horse unsuitable for vaulting.

3) Suitable size for the size and level of the vaulters: in general, vaulting horses range from 15.2 to 17 hands. However, shorter stout horses in the 15 to 16 hand range are preferable for beginners because boosting and spotting is easier yet they can carry a heavier vaulter. Except for use with very small children, horses under 14.2 hands are normally not used although stout breeds such as the Norwegian Fjord can carry small adults easily and are often no more than 14 hands.

4) A vaulting horse should also have: a strong back, broad, long, and well attached at the loins; a broad, flat croup; good vision in both eyes. This is ideal but not essential.

c. Gaits

1) The horse must lunge on an even 15-meter circle at a slow and consistant pace. Note that this is the size circle used in competitions. Although a 13-meter circle gives the lunger more control, smaller circles are harder on a horse at the canter due the extra forces on his joints and muscles.

2) The horse must have a slow, evenly paced walk, trot or canter that is always under control. Most camps do not vault at the canter and some only vault at the walk.

3) Natural gaits which are comfortable for the vaulter are preferable.

d. Training

1) The goal of training a vaulting horse is to train the horse to move calmly and rythmically on the circle at the required gait.

2) Any previous training the horse may have had should be carefully considered.

3) Horses that are already trained for riding and are experienced around children are preferable.

4) Those horses that have been lunged or driven in long lines will be most easily trained to go on the vaulting circle.

Note: Your goal to develop a successful equestrian vaulting program can only be achieved with a suitable, healthy, happy, and willing horse. Be particular; choose the right horse for you and your vaulters. It is nice to have a suitable horse, though it is not essential to begin a vaulting group. Many beginning vaulting programs utilize groundwork and barrel practice, if a suitable horse is unavailable.
B. The Suitable Horse – Advanced Evaluation

1. Try him first at the halt with an experienced vaulter or a good rider. (Refer to Chapter 2, Safe Horsemanship.)

2. Give the vaulter a leg up from both sides.

3. With a surcingle, have the vaulter safely perform every sort of exercise that occurs to you. Have the vaulter kneel, stand, mill, lay, pat, poke, and prod all parts of the horse's body. The vaulter should be encouraged to swing both arms and legs, but at all times must be careful not to hit the horse, or to make any sudden moves which would scare the horse. Throughout all, the vaulter must be secure on the horse.

4. If the horse accepts all this activity on his back, you can begin a vaulting program quite satisfactorily with work at the walk with spotters.

5. Next, have the horse led at the walk and repeat the exercises performed at the halt. Do the compulsory exercises (excluding the mount) and include all kinds of dismounts from every position.

6. If the horse still accepts the vaulting work and already knows how to lunge, proceed cautiously to test him at trot, first being led and then lunged. Finally test him at canter.
   a. Be advised. What the horse accepts readily at halt and walk, he may object to at trot or canter.
   b. Be certain that the vaulter who is testing the horse is good enough to dismount quickly from any position if it becomes necessary.
   c. Do not expect the horse to be perfect. He may have to be trained slowly to accept some of the work.

7. Finally, have the vaulters do any number of inventive exercises in doubles, at walk and trot, in order to determine what the horse’s reaction will be.

8. If it is determined the horse is a suitable prospect, then training can begin, review Chapter 2, Safe Horsemanship.

3.2 Use and Adjustment of Equipment for the Horse

In order to assure the safety of the vaulters and comfort of the horse, only correct vaulting equipment, properly adjusted, should be used.

Necessary equipment includes: a snaffle bridle, side reins, a vaulting surcingle, a thick pad, a lunge line and a lunge whip.
A. Snaffle Bridle

1. It is very important that vaulting horses not be lunged in halters. It is not possible to exert proper control in a halter nor to achieve correct head and neck position in a halter.

2. Use an English type bridle with a plain cavesson (noseband), a cavesson with a flash or with a dropped noseband and remove the reins.

3. Make sure the bridle fits properly.

4. Many camp horses are customarily fitted with hackamore bits to prevent beginners from yanking or pulling on their mouths by accident. However, these horses will readily accept a smooth snaffle mouthpiece without noticeable resistance. The same is true for western horses ordinarily ridden with curb bits.

5. Selection of the mouthpiece depends on the sensitivity and preference of each horse.
   
a. A smooth snaffle bit of average thickness is a good starting point to transition a horse from a different bit. Examples of mild snaffles: eggbutt, D-ring, rubber, or hollow mouth are good choices.

b. A horse with a sensitive mouth may require a heavier or copper coated mouthpiece. Gradual adjustments should be made to find the right mouthpiece for your horse.

c. Never use a twisted wire snaffle or other severe bit. If the horse’s mouth should suddenly be hurt by a severe bit, he might react with unwanted behavior that would create an unsafe situation for the vaulter. If you are unsure about the severity of a particular bit, make sure you consult a professional.

6. The bit must be the correct width for the size of the horse’s mouth:
   
a. If it is too narrow, the rings will pinch the corners of the mouth.

b. If it is too wide, it will be pulled sideways by the lunge line into an incorrect position in the mouth.

c. Adjust the bit so that there are two wrinkles in the corners of the mouth.

d. A bit fitted too low does not allow for good control and may start undesirable habits.

e. A bit fitted too high will pinch or chafe the corners of the mouth causing great discomfort for the horse and eventually creating sores.

7. If at all possible each horse should have its own bridle and side reins, thus lessening the chances of improper fit and saving time.
B. Side Reins

1. Side reins with or without rubber rings are suitable; however, do not use the side reins which have elastic webbing as that type stretches too much and unequally.

2. For the trained horse, side reins should be of equal length and adjusted so that his face approaches the vertical when he is moving. This position will vary with the amount of experience the horse has and its way of going.

3. It is imperative that the side reins be adjusted very loosely at first and gradually tightened over a period of weeks or months into their final position which should never be uncomfortable for the horse at the performed gait.
   a. The horse’s head should never be behind the vertical at the performed gait. A horse which is behind the vertical (over flexed) is not in balanced, is not comfortable and could be unsafe.
   b. Cranking horses in on side reins without proper preparation can cause some horses to throw themselves over backwards.
   c. Under no circumstances should vaulters be allowed near the horse until it accepts the side reins with no trace of resistance at all gaits.

4. The horse should be warmed up on the circle in both directions without side reins so that he can freely stretch his neck and back muscles and so that he can get rid of any playful bucks and for soundness evaluation. With side reins attached, it is harder to see lameness.
   a. During this warm up attach the side reins to the rings on the surcingle.
   b. Do not let side reins hang loose or flip them over the horse’s neck.

5. Remember during rest periods to always unfasten the side reins, being careful to re-snap them to the surcingle rings.

C. Lunge Line

1. The lunge line should be made of flat cotton or nylon material, neither too heavy nor too light so that the lunger may maintain a steady, elastic contact with the horse.
   a. Never use a rope of any kind. It is too apt to tangle and cause injuries.
   b. Make sure the line is kept flat and free of twists so that the lunger can have the best possible feel of the horse’s mouth.

2. The lunge line is customarily snapped into the near side ring of the snaffle bit.
3. However, there are times when it is useful to put the line through the near bit ring to the bit ring on the other side and over the horse’s head, then snap it to the far side bit ring.

   a. This method is used when greater control is needed.

D. Lunge Whip

The whip shaft should be 6 to 10 feet with a lash long enough to reach the horse. The light weight telescoping whips are ideal and an inexpensive alternative can be made from fishing poles without line guides.

E. Vaulting Surcingle

1. A vaulting surcingle is necessary for vaulting on horseback.

2. Surcingles are commercially available.

3. They are manufactured with handles in various styles and sizes.

4. They also come with or without loops called Cossack straps. Surcingles with two Cossack straps (one on each side) provide vaulters with the means to perform a number of freestyle exercises.

5. The surcingle should be placed on the horse’s back with the side rein attachment rings facing towards the horse’s head. The girth will rest in the groove immediately behind the front legs.

6. After warm up, before vaulters begin work on the horse, check to see that the surcingle is placed correctly on the horse. It should be tight enough to stay in place without pinching, chafing, or turning the hair in the wrong direction.

7. Contact, location and padding are especially important in tightening a surcingle in preparation for actual vaulting on the circle:

   a. The surcingle should always be checked at the top of the withers to be certain it does not contact the wither at any time during vaulting.

      1) This contact can happen easily as wear occurs on the surcingle back pads and they crush down.

      2) Many newer surcingles have adjustable trees and padding. If the surcingle cannot be adjusted correctly to clear the horse’s withers, extra padding of foam or wool under the surcingle can be used to raise the surcingle off the horse’s withers. This padding should extend several inches beyond the surcingle’s front and back or it will slide out frequently. For foam padding, a trough can be carved out with an electric carving knife or narrow strips of
padding clued onto the under pad to prevent sliding. The under padding should be covered with a sleeve of absorbent washable material. A fabric with some stretch is much easier to take on and off!

b. The surcingle should be checked to make sure there is enough clean padding to prevent chafing anywhere in the girth area.

1) Some surcingles require woolskin or foam girth covers to prevent chafing.

2) Some horses have elbows that point inward and which may cause a sore by striking the top of an unpadded surcingle. Woolskin sleeves may be used to correct this problem.

8. If the surcingle “heels over” toward the lunger after vaulting has been in progress for a while, never reset the surcingle or push the surcingle back into correct position without loosening it first. To do so drags the back pads across the most sensitive part of the withers and can cause soreness to develop.

F. Pad

1. The horse’s back should be well padded, especially for beginning vaulters.

a. Back pads for vaulting typically measure 100cm by 90cm and are made of dense felt (maximum 2 inches thick) or a dense synthetic foam material or a combination of both.

b. Large western pads can work if they are thick and provide a firm platform for the vaulter.

c. If properly fashioned, a removable terry cloth (or other absorbent cloth) cover over the pad provides soft contact for the vaulters and is easy to remove and clean. The cloth cover may also prevent heat buildup when using pads made of synthetic materials.

2. The back pad should be adjusted so that it extends 6” to 8” forward of the surcingle to give padding for exercises and basing from on the neck but extending no more than eight inches. The pad should be far enough back to protect the horse’s back and upper loin area but not extending past the point of the croup. Newer vaulting pads are made of thick felt and contoured at the withers and beveled on the sides so as to conform to the horse. If your horse has high whithers, a slit in the pad at the withers can help alleviate pressure points there. Some have found auto upholstery shops that can create back pads at a fraction of the cost of the imported European made vaulting pads.
G. Care of the Tack and Equipment

1. The care and cleaning of tack is a part of good horsemanship.

2. All vaulting equipment should be attended to after each use by whomever is in charge.

3. The leather equipment (surcingle, bridle, side reins, and galloping boots) should be kept clean, oiled as required, and maintained in good repair.
   a. It is important to check for signs of wear, especially in the stitching, each day before vaulters begin work on the horse.
   b. Sweat will rot the stitches if not cleaned off with a damp sponge after each use.

4. Back pads, girth covers, and bandages must be laundered so that the accumulated sweat does not cause sores. Be certain to rinse them well because any soap, which remains in the material and mixes with the wet sweat, will irritate the horse’s skin.

5. Clean the bit carefully, making sure there are no remains of dried saliva or food, which could irritate the corners of the horse’s mouth the next time the bit is used.

6. Care should be exercised when putting the vaulting equipment away.
   a. The equipment should be stored in a cool place out of the sun and dampness.
   b. The surcingle should be kept on a saddle tree, never hung up or laid flat.
      1) Never lay the surcingle down on the handles. The leather covers on the handles damage easily and are expensive to repair.
      2) Never leave the surcingle lying on the horse’s back with the girth unfastened for more than a moment. One good shake and a step forward will almost guarantee a repair bill.
      3) Never tie your horse to a post or tree unattended where the horse could rub the surcingle which can result in broken or torn handles and a scuffed surcingle!
   c. The lunge line should be folded so that it will be free of tangles when let out the next time.
   d. The lunge whip should never be left lying in the vaulting circle. A horse stepping on it spells the end of its usefulness. After vaulting practice, the knots should be untied from the lash, the popper checked for wear, and the whip done up neatly and stored in a vertical position or hung up. This care gives it a better chance of survival without damage, and it is ready for the next time.
3.3 Techniques for Training the Horse to Lunge

A. Introduction

1. After selecting a horse that may be suitable, that horse should receive lunge line training. The horse should stay out on the circle, listen to the longeur’s commands and have a steady gait before being asked to accept vaulters.

2. Remember, when he begins real work on the vaulting circle, he will have to:
   a. Travel in a perfect circle around the lunger to the left and right.
   b. Maintain a constant gait.
   c. Stop and start on command.
   d. Tolerate vaulter’s mistakes without misbehavior.
   e. Be attentive and obedient to the lunger, even with vaulters constantly moving between them.

3. The techniques given here are for use with a horse that is already gentle and obedient under saddle.

4. Since no two horses are the same, these suggestions must be adapted to the responses of each particular animal. They are offered only as guidelines.

B. Equipment

1. For the first lesson on the lunge line, fit the horse in a lunging cavasson or snaffle bridle and vaulting surcingle.

2. Be attentive that the girth remains tight to avoid sores on the horse and for the safety of the vaulters.

3. Adjust the length of the side reins you have chosen so they are the same length and allow the horse a natural head carriage at the walk. Snap them up on the surcingle to begin the work.

4. When the horse finds his balance on the circle, accepts the bit and learns to become obedient, the side reins may be shortened.

C. Procedure

1. Getting started
   a. If possible select a quiet, fenced area in which to train the horse. A round pen is an ideal place to start.
b. Before you attempt to lunge the horse, make sure he leads well and comfortably with the lunge line snapped in place. (May use a lead shank.) Ask him to start, stop, and turn with you walking around him as he turns.

2. The next step is to acquaint the horse with the lunge whip.

a. At no time should the vaulting horse fear the mere sight of the whip. This fear can lead to accidents.

b. For starting a horse completely green to lunging, it is preferable to use a lunge whip that is a few feet shorter than the standard one used on the 13-meter circle. It is also preferable to use a smaller circle so the horse is closer to the lunger.

c. Hold the horse by his lead shank with your left hand, and stand a short distance away from the left front shoulder facing toward the horse’s barrel.

d. If you have an assistant, have him hand you the lunge whip in a vertical position with the lash done up. If you have no assistant, pick up the whip slowly, being careful to keep your eyes on the horse’s eye at all times.

e. With a slow but deliberate motion, point to and rub the horse on the left shoulder with the handle of the whip.

1) If he shows no anxiety, proceed up over the withers, down the back, and over the hindquarters, gradually moving the whip away and toward the horse with a more pronounced motion but at no time in a threatening gesture.

2) If the horse is very nervous, for whatever reason, continue reassuring him until you can move the whip around him with the lash undone, and he shows no sign of uneasiness.

3. Use of voice commands

a. Since vaulting horses must work on remote control, the use of the voice is of great importance.

b. The horse learns to recognize the different intonations of your voice as much as the words you use, so try to always use the same intonation for the same command.

c. The verbal commands you will need to teach are:

1) A tongue click to start the horse out or to move him on faster in the same gait.

2) “Brrr” (a raspberry sound) or “Whoa” for stop; “brrrr” is preferred as it is not used in conversation, and you don’t want to confuse the horse by something the vaulter might say.
3) “Walk” and “trot” in separate stages each with a specific intonation.

4) “Hup” for canter.

5) “Oust” or “out” for when the horse cuts in.

d. Give a voice command once only, then reinforce calmly but firmly with the whip.

4. At this point you are ready to put the horse on the circle.

a. The lunger will benefit from wearing gloves and should hold the lunge line so that it cannot coil around a hand if the horse should make any sudden moves.

b. Also the lunger must not let loops drag on the ground where his feet, or those of the horse, could be entangled.

c. Attach the lunge line to the bit and have the assistant begin walking with the horse in a left-handed circle.

d. At first walk parallel to and a few feet away from the assistant’s left side.

e. Follow the horse with the lunge whip and use the lunge line to guide the horse on the circle as he walks.

f. Little by little lengthen the lunge line, keeping the whip pointed at the horse, and step away from him toward the center of the circle.

g. Finally, have the assistant gradually move back away from the horse as he is encourage to walk on alone.

5. As soon as the horse is walking calmly on a small circle, ask him to stop, using a voice command “Whoa” followed instantly by a gentle tug on the lunge line.

a. If not trained to the lunge line, he will probably turn his hindquarters outward and try to face you.

b. Move toward him and make every effort to teach him to stop on the track of the circle, looking at you with the near eye only. Make him stand still until told to move forward again. Sometimes stopping him next to a wall is helpful.

6. Repeat the starting, walking, and stopping until this training step is mastered without hesitation.

7. At this point you may want to start using the side reins.

a. The assistant will no longer be needed when the horse goes forward from a cluck and accepts a tap of the whip with a generous but not violent forward response, and stops instantly to the voice command given in a loud voice.
b. Follow starting, walking and stopping with “trrrrot,” and teach the transition from trot to walk into trot again.

c. Master a comfortable stop from either gait. Though the response should be immediate, it should not be so abrupt as to throw vaulters forward onto the neck.

d. Do not start trying to canter until the horse is absolutely calm and cooperative at the trot.

e. Enlarge the circle without losing control as soon as possible. It is hard for a horse to work on a small circle.

f. The horse should keep the lunge line stretched, maintaining a steady, light contact.

g. If the horse tries to come into the circle, point the whip at his nose or shoulder and walk toward him. In most cases this technique will make him remain on the circle.

h. Always walk up to the horse when you finish or stop; never allow him to turn off the circle and come to the lunger because he can easily step on his lunge line or turn the other direction.

D. Conclusion

1. Training a seasoned horse to something new should not differ much from teaching a completely green horse. Twenty minutes is usually enough at one time but each horse is different.

2. The attention span will vary with different horses, but if the training is to be hurried it is far better to work in two sessions, AM and PM, than one long one.

3. Do not pursue the project with a horse that cannot be quickly discouraged from trying to kick.

4. Practice, repeat, play it by ear. Reward with much patting – frequently.
5. Remember, prevention of injury should be the goal of every vaulting instructor, and the correct training of the horse is vital to this end.

**FIVE SECRETS OF TRAINING HORSES**

1. Work with your horse every day.
2. Set high goals and expect consistent improvements every day but be willing to compromise.
3. Be honest with yourself. Reflect on your work and its results between sessions.
4. Constantly work the “figure eight” under saddle. Circles help the horse improve balance and carriage.
5. There are NO secrets in training. NO miracles or magic. It’s all about thoughtful, consistent work and the development of the horse’s and your skills.

### 3.4 Horse Care and Special Considerations

**A. Care of the Horse**

*It is not the purpose of this book to give detailed instructions on animal husbandry or veterinary medicine. Suffice to say that a vaulting horse must be given the same conscientious care as any other working horse.*

1. In any equestrian sport, first priority must be given to the well being of the horse, for without the horse nothing can be accomplished. Anyone who has the responsibility for a horse’s care should learn as much as possible about how to keep the horse in top condition, both physically and mentally, and how to identify problems if they should appear.

2. Overall sensitivity to your horse’s well being can help you and your horse enjoy a long, safe and pleasant career in vaulting.

3. Basic care must include:

   a. Twice a year vaccinations
   b. Regular worming
   c. Regular hoof care
   d. Twice a year vet checks for general health including the teeth
   e. Daily grooming and hoof cleaning (Best time to check for any heat, soreness, bumps, cuts, etc.)
   f. Regular exercise
   g. Good nutrition
1) Make sure the amount and type of hay and grain given is in proportion to the age and size of the horse and the amount of work being done. Both overfeeding and underfeeding can cause serious health problems.

2) Be sure to have salt and water available at all times.

h. Daily cleaning of stall or paddock. (Dirty living conditions will lead to health problems, especially parasites and flies.)

B. Special Considerations for the Vaulting Horse

1. Uneven physical stress

a. Vaulting horses for beginning and even for advanced vaulters are often worked to the left much more than to the right. The horse is apt to suffer physical damage as a result of this uneven stress.

b. To prevent damage to the horse, work the horse to the right as often as he is worked to the left. It is good for your vaulters as well.

1) Make it a rule to warm up and cool out the horse by going to the right.

2) When training a vaulting horse, or just conditioning on the lunge, always work in both directions.

3) Vaulters can vault to the right.

c. Additional work under saddle is required to physically condition the horse off the vaulting circle. Such work will help to keep the horse’s mental attitude fresh as well.

2. Care of the back

a. A vaulting horse’s back must be protected from “pounding,” especially from inexperienced vaulters. Training your vaulting horse under saddle and on the lunge line develops and strengthens his back and prevents soreness.

b. It is of utmost importance that the back be checked every day for soreness or strain.

1) Press with some force on both sides of the horse’s backbone from the withers to the loins with the heel of your hand.

2) Soreness is present if the horse hollows his back or moves away from the pressure.

c. Measures must be taken to completely eliminate any soreness.

1) Increasing the padding, massaging with a linament wash, or hosing down with cold water (hydrotherapy) can all help.
2) Encourage the horse to stretch the back without vaulters or riders.

3) Of course, laying the horse off until the soreness is gone is the best treatment. Then the muscles should be strengthened before returning to work.

3. Care of the legs and feet

a. There are many things that can be done to help assure the soundness of the vaulting horse’s legs and feet.

b. Wrapping the legs with polo wraps or medicine boots can help prevent strains.

c. Using galloping or splint boots and bell boots can help prevent injuries, which may occur from the horse interfering or overreaching.

1) The instructor’s judgement will determine whether these protections are really needed.

2) If bandages are used, the instructor must be careful to wrap the legs correctly so as not to cause tendon problems.

3) Hydrotherapy can be a great aid in maintaining tightness and strength in the legs. Cold water can be sprayed with some force on the legs below the knees and hocks after every workout. Linament may be used to increase blood circulation.

d. Observe the horse’s way of going throughout each workout for any signs of distress, and check his legs and feet after every session for any signs of excessive heat.

1) Extra warmth in the joints or hoof indicates some kind of inflammation and should be treated with hydrotherapy and/or rest.

2) This heat is usually the first sign of a developing problem that if detected early, may be prevented.

e. Seeking help from your local veterinarian should always be considered if any questionable condition develops.

4. Shoeing

a. A vaulting horse can work barefooted if it has naturally tough feet and the working surface is kept soft.

b. A barefooted horse is less likely to cause injury if it steps on or kicks a vaulter.

c. However, shoes, at least on the front feet, may be necessary if the horse’s feet do not hold up.
5. Maintenance of body condition
   a. Vaulting horses should have a bit too much rather than too little flesh.
   b. Using a horse that is in poor condition is not fair to either the horse or the vaulters. The damage is two fold. On a thin horse the vaulters get painful bruises from exposed sharp bones. A thin horse has no fat to pad its back.
   c. If a thin horse must be used, the padding should be doubled and the horse’s diet improved. WARNING: Consult your veterinarian for a diet, which will increase the horse’s weight quickly without causing it to founder from over eating. He can also determine when the horse is ready to begin work.
   d. On the other hand, many horses tend to be naturally round and can suffer the problems associated with being overweight, such as additional strain on legs and feet and on heart and lungs when asked for strenuous work.
   e. As with any athlete, a good vaulting horse should be kept in top condition with strong, supple muscles and be kept neither too fat nor too thin. This ideal is the result of proper diet and exercise.

6. Maintenance of a good attitude
   a. To maintain the vaulting horse’s good attitude vaulting should be only part of his weekly workout routine. Trainers need to ride their vaulting horses the rest of the time and find additional activities for the horse.
   b. Frequent rest periods during the vaulting session will help to keep him happy and in the right frame of mind.
   c. Praising the horse constantly and really “fussing” over him can never be overdone. Carrots or other treats at the end of a session can keep your horse looking forward to the next time.

7. Care during rest periods
   a. After every 15 - 20 minutes of steady work on the circle, the horse should be allowed to stretch and relax. These rest periods should be even more frequent with a green horse.
   b. The side reins should be unsnapped from the bit and hooked onto the surcingle; the surcingle should be loosened a few holes and the back pad raised off the back for a short time to allow air to the area under the pad.
   c. Check any boots or working bandages, which you may be using for sand or dirt which can accumulate on the inside. If it is a hot day, remove boots or bandages for a few minutes to avoid scalding the skin.
   d. Be sure to walk the horse until his breathing and body temperature return to normal.
CHAPTER 4
PROGRESSION AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES

4.1 Preliminary Work

A. Safety Exercises

1. There are four essential safety exercises which must be taught on the ground and then practiced on the barrel and finally on the horse:
   a. Forward roll
   b. Backward roll
   c. Sideways roll
   d. Correct landing technique from every position - feet together and knees bent.

2. Young children will sometimes hit chins on knees if asked to jump from too great a height before they practice landing correctly.

B. Warm-up Exercises

1. Vaulters should always warm up sufficiently on the ground before vaulting.

2. As in other sports, warm-up exercises help to prevent injuries and soreness.

3. The warm-up should consist of three phases:

   a. Supple the muscles by a progressive stretching rather than by a sudden bouncing. Include exercises for all parts of the body.

   b. Aerobic exercises such as in-line running with toes touching the ground first, leap-frog, jumping jacks, etc.

   c. Strength and balance exercises such as wheel-barrows, push-ups, skipping rope, leg lifts, cart-wheels, supported hand-stands, etc. Strength conditioning may be done at any point during the lesson.

4. If vaulters arrive at staggered times, a list of required exercises may be posted.

Note: All moves should be practiced on the barrel before attempting on the horse at any gait. Also, moves here are presented in possible competition sequence, but not in the order they may be taught. For example, you may want to postpone teaching the vault on if the participants have little or no upper body strength. Choose exercises that the participants can be successful attempting. You can then set a rule that vaulters must be able to perform x number of pullups before attempting a vault on.
4.2 Vaulting on the Barrel

A. Overview

1. Vaulters should learn to vault on, to vault off, and to master the mechanics of the six mounted 1* compulsories on the barrel before executing them on the horse.

2. This barrel work saves unnecessary strain on the horse and gives the vaulters greater confidence when they begin to vault on the horse.

3. Vaulters should practice consideration for the horse in all exercises on the barrel. It is important from the beginning not to dig in elbows, knees or heels, or to land with a thump on the horse’s back.

4. Safety in the barrel area is also very important. Vaulters should not be close behind the vaulter who is mounting or swinging their leg, they may not see someone behind and deliver a serious blow.

B. The Routine

1. Teaching vaulters to follow the correct routine at all times will help to ensure their safety.

2. During their work on the barrel, vaulters should learn the customary routine that is always followed on the vaulting circle.

   a. Vaulters line up a short distance from the barrel, in some kind of order – usually tallest to shortest.

   b. At the coach’s signal each vaulter approaches the barrel, and performs one exercise or designated series of exercises at each turn.

   c. Since they will approach the horse at a trot or canter on the vaulting circle, it is good practice to have them quickly trot out to the barrel without time wasted between turns.

   d. As one vaulter is vaulting off, the next should be starting towards the barrel.

   e. After completing the designated exercise, the vaulter trots back to the proper place in line.

   f. The line must be kept moving briskly to avoid any hint of boredom or straying attention among the vaulters, a fast moving session prevents boredom and carelessness.
g. Warn vaulters that their “fooling around” while standing in line will not be tolerated because inattentiveness can be the cause of an accident.

3. The instructor should be especially alert to watch that from the beginning hands are correctly placed on the grips for each exercise.
   a. In particular, do not allow dismounts with “no hands” while sliding off the barrel. This habit tends to carry over to the horse and may cause injury to beginners.
   b. Make sure that over-hand grips are used on the handles instead of under-hand. Under-hand grips tend to pull the elbows into the horse’s back and cause strain in some exercises.

C. Using the Barrel to Practice Compulsory Moves

1. Mount or Vault On
   a. The vaulter stands beside the left side of the barrel facing forward. Taking the grips, right hand on right grip, left hand on left, (or for small vaulters, left hand on bottom of left grip, right hand on top of left grip) and keeping both feet together, the vaulter springs (using knees and ankles) into place as high as possible coming lightly off the balls of the feet. The vaulter’s right leg swings over the barrel while the vaulter’s head drops, looking downward. The vaulter should land behind the grips in a basic riding seat.

   b. When this Vault On has been practiced, the Swinging Leg Mount should be taught for barrel work. Using the same grip and stance, the vaulter stands on tiptoe and swings the right leg (with straight leg and pointed toe) forward, backward, forward, and backward right up into the air and over the barrel. This is an easier, airier, and more dynamic Vault On, but is not suitable for use with the horse.

   c. A vaulter who at first has difficulty with the Vault On can be assisted by having a spotter or the next vaulter in line give them a “leg up” to aid in getting onto the barrel. If this is the case always have the vaulter pass through the correct position of the mount, which will help them learn correct body position and mechanics.

2. Dismount or Vault Off
   a. There are two kinds of basic dismounts for the barrel:

      1) Simple Dismount

      The vaulter brings the right leg over the barrel (each hand letting go of the grips and retaking the grips in turn as the leg passes) and jumps down, landing with feet together, knees bent, and facing forward in the same position as the beginning.
2) Half Flank-Off

The vaulter, sitting astride, holds the grips with both hands, takes a forward swing with both legs, kicks up high behind and then goes off to the left side, landing with feet together, knees bent, and facing forward.

b. Practicing “offs” from many different positions, such as kneeling, standing, sitting astride backwards, etc., is a necessary part of the preliminary work for the following reasons;

1) It is possible that there may be a disaster, such as equipment failure or a frightened horse, which endangers the vaulter’s safety and requires an immediate dismount.

2) Instructors must teach their vaulters to respond instantly to the word “off” from any position on the barrel and later from any position on the horse.

3) On the barrel, practice from the beginning aborting an exercise during each of its stages until the vaulters feel confident that they can get off at any time from any position.

3. Landings

a. The vaulter should land with knees bent to absorb the impact and, therefore spring slightly upward.

b. If the vaulter loses balance, a forward or backward roll away from the horse, whichever is appropriate should be executed. The vaulter then jumps up and jogs forward.

4. Basic Seat

a. This exercise is merely sitting astride in the same attitude as for riding, but with the toes pointed, legs wrapped and stretched down. The arms should be extended straight out to the sides slightly above the horizontal. The vaulter’s head should be up, eyes forward, and back straight. Fingers should be closed and thumbs pressed against the forefingers. The exercise is completed with a Simple Dismount to the left or inside.

b. Once the student vaults on and assumes the Basic Seat, the instructor can correct any problems by physically aligning the vaulter’s head, shoulders, arms, hips, and ankles for him. In this way he can learn the feel of the correct position.

c. While working on the barrel, the vaulter should learn to follow through in one smooth motion from the Basic Seat to the Simple Dismount.
5. Flag

a. From astride, the vaulter, with both hands on the grips, swings softly to knees forming the ‘box’ position with elbows slightly bent so that the shoulders are no higher than the hips. The knees are at a position far enough from the handles so that the ‘box’ has a base and top line which are equal. The vaulter then shifts both feet slightly to the right crossing the midline of the barrel (as they will do over the backbone of the horse). Then the right leg is extended out behind as high as possible and the left arm is extended forward and up. Ideally the tip of the hand and tip of the foot should be as high as the top of the vaulter’s head. This position should be held the equivalent of four strides of the horse.

b. To finish, the vaulter retakes the grips, springs up onto the knees, and continues into the stand or should have right leg lowered followed by left and returns to seat astride. The exercise is completed with a simple leg over dismount to the left side.

c. It is important that the vaulter develop arm and leg strength which will result in the ability to land softly on the horse’s back by sliding down slowly.

d. Alignment of the vaulter’s flag position can be taught first on the ground. One way is to lay the lunge whip down and have the vaulter align over it. The shoulders should be even so the profile can be seen and both hips should be even instead of elevated.

e. A vaulter can begin the Flag by doing a Half Flag (leg only extended) and then extending the arm. This method should be continued until the vaulter has developed the necessary strength, balance and confidence to extend the leg and arm out simultaneously.

6. Stand

a. From astride, the vaulter, while holding both grips, comes gently to both knees and then gently hops to feet. Letting go, the vaulter then straightens the upper body by pushing up through the knees and finally stands up, maintaining a slight bend in the knees/ankles with which to follow the motion of the horse. It is important to maintain even weight all the way through the foot – from ball to heel.

b. To finish, the vaulter re-takes the grips, and with the toes and inside of the legs grips the sides of the barrel with stretched legs to return softly back down into the astride position. The exercise is completed by a Simple Dismount.

c. The Stand should be taught by having the vaulter stand up as though being pulled up by a string in the center of the chest. Never allow the vaulter to go “bottoms up” first! Remind vaulters: “Eyes up” and “Chin up.”
d. Sometimes it helps a vaulter to let go of the handles and clap hands once quickly before re-taking the grips. One of the greatest confidence builders is to have the vaulter stand up and immediately jump off, first to the inside and then to the outside.

7. Swing Frontways Legs Closed

a. From the Basic Seat, the stretched legs are swung upward (back) in the attempt to reach a handstand position. The legs are closed and stretched at the highest point. Without interruption in the movement the vaulter returns softly to seat astride.

b. The exercise is completed with a Simple Dismount.

c. Height in the kicks come partly from a correct head position. The instructor should stress that to master this exercise, the vaulter must keep his head down in the kicks.

d. The Swing can be greatly improved on the barrel by having a spotter large and strong enough to physically put the vaulter into the air during the swing phase. It helps the vaulter correct body tension and improve orientation.

8. Half-Mill

a. The Half-Mill has 2 phases. Each phase is performed in a four stride count, beginning with Phase 1 followed immediately by the second phase.

b. Phase 1 - Starting from astride, the vaulter holds both grips and passes the right leg over the front of the barrel. (Each hand lets go and retakes its grip in turn as the leg passes.) Phase 1 ends with the vaulter sitting in a sideways seat, legs together and in contact with the side of the barrel.

c. Phase 2 – Begins when the left leg is passed over the back of the barrel. Only after this movement is complete are the hands changed by putting both hands on the inside grip, then moving the left hand to the outside grip. The exercise is completed when the vaulter is sitting reverse with a hand on each grip.

d. Vaulters should practice the Mill on the barrel, striving to raise their legs as high as possible in the passes while keeping their back straight and upright, keeping their seat bones in contact with the barrel and their ‘down’legs wrapped. Good posture is more important than height of the leg pass! Instructors must emphasize that great height is achieved from the stretch acquired by doing regular gymnastic exercises. Lots of practice on the barrel will help give the vaulters confidence and core strength to perform this exercise when they begin mounted work.

9. Swing Rearways, Legs Open, Followed by Dismount to Inside

a. From reverse seat, the vaulter swings their stretched and open legs upward, the legs remain open (hip width apart) and do not come together at the highest point
of the swing. Arms are extended to attain the maximum elevation and the angle between arms and torso is as great as possible. Then the vaulter softly returns to reverse seat.

b. The dismount for the Swing is a ¼ mill to the inside. The vaulter brings the left stretched leg over the croup to inside seat. While holding the inside grip the vaulter rotates onto the right hip to face forward. With legs closed and hips stretched the vaulter pushes against the grips upwards and away from the horse. Releasing the grips the vaulter lands with nearly closed legs and bent knees and continues forward in the same direction as the horse.

c. The Swing can be greatly improved on the barrel by having a spotter large and strong enough to physically lift the vaulter into the air during the swing phase. It helps the vaulter to correct body tension and improve orientation.

4.3 Vaulting on the Horse

A. Getting Started

1. Usually after beginning vaulters have mastered the mechanics of the 1* compulsories on the barrel, they will be ready to try out their skills on the horse.

2. Begin this work on the horse first at the walk and then at the trot, only after the vaulters are secure and confident, proceed to the canter.

3. Remember that vaulters should master each elementary step before proceeding to an exercise with a greater degree of difficulty.

4. When beginning work with the horse, review and practice the basic safety techniques of:
   a. Landing correctly,
   b. Forward, sideways and backward rolls,
   c. Pushing away from the horse in both of the basic dismounts,
   d. Dismounting off from all positions.

5. Vaulters should follow the correct routine as outlined in Chapter 2, Safe Horsemanship Procedures on the Vaulting Circle.

B. Teaching How to Count Strides

1. Vaulters must be able to count strides in order to correctly perform the exercises.

2. The instructor should stress that vaulters must learn to feel the horse’s rhythm so that they can determine each stride.

3. Ask the vaulters in the line-up to assist the mounted vaulter by counting out loud the number of prescribed strides for each exercise as it is performed.
4. Having the vaulter count for each other helps them establish a sense of timing and cooperation.

5. At the walk and trot use a voice count of “one and two and three and four,” etc.

4.4 The Compulsory Exercises

A. Vault On

The vaulter starts from the center or the circle, and runs out along the lunge line toward the horse. As the horse’s shoulder is approached, the vaulter turns parallel to the horse, “cantering” in step with the horse’s front legs. While facing forward, next to the surcingle, the vaulter reaches to the side and takes the surcingle grips while still facing forward. The vaulter then jumps with both feet together, to land with the horse’s lead foreleg, legs angled forward.

![Figure 1, Preparation to Vault On](image1)

The vaulter then uses the horse’s forward and upward motion to add energy to the jump-off. The head is lowered and the outside leg raised as high as possible - lifting the hips above the head - while the inside leg remains stretched downwards.

![Figure 2, High point of Vault On](image2)

When the hips reach their highest point, the vaulter lowers the stretched outer leg and comes to a soft landing, erect and centered, with the upper body held vertically.

![Figure 3, Vaulter astride at completion of Vault On](image3)

At the completion of the Vault On, the vaulter is seated astride the horse, centered behind the surcingle, hands on both grips.
1. When teaching the Vault On, use a spotter behind the vaulter attempting the mount until that vaulter is secure in his ability to vault onto the horse unassisted. A youngster clinging to the horse’s side in a “limpet-like” position because he did not get all the way on and is not confident enough to push away from the horse, may be hurt if he should let go and land beneath the horse.

2. Do not try to teach the Vault On at a walk. This gait has no spring to help the vaulter. Start vaulting onto the horse at a trot or give the vaulter a leg-up at the walk.

3. Plan an appropriate reward or establish an incentive of some sort for all vaulters (having the rest of the group cheering for them is a great help) but especially for those who do not have the support of a group (awards, small treats, etc.).

B. Basic Seat

From the seat astride position at the end of the Vault On, the grips are released and both arms brought up simultaneously to extend outward in a straight line, fingers together, palm down, with the fingertips held level with the vaulter’s eyes.

From the side, shoulders, hip and heel form a straight vertical line, and the arms are aligned with the ears. Legs are stretched downward, maintaining contact with the horse, and the shin, ankle and toes form a straight line. The back is straight (not arched) and the hips absorb the rocking motion of the horse, upper body held still. The head is held upright, eyes straight ahead. The Basic Seat is held for four canter strides, and at the completion, the vaulter retakes both grips simultaneously returning to seat astride. The vaulter must sit down on his hip bones this will improve contact with the horse and develop a natural seat position essential to all riding disciplines.

C. Flag

From seat astride, the vaulter swings lightly into a kneeling position with both legs moving together, weight taken by the arms to permit a soft landing, head facing forward, legs diagonally across the horse’s back to the outside, and weight distributed from knee to toe. (see correct “pre-flag” position, the box on next page)
The inside arm and outside leg are raised simultaneously to a stretched position even with the top of the head, forming a smooth arc from the hand to the foot from the side, and aligned with the horse’s back from the top. The alignment of the vaulters spine with the alignment with the horses spine. This will reinforce the rider’s ability to move in harmony with their horse.

Shoulders and hips are held parallel to the ground, with the shoulders above the surcingle grips. The Flag is held for four strides, after which the vaulter retakes the grip with the inside hand and the flag leg comes back to the ‘box’ position.

For beginners, always start with a ‘half flag’ with just the leg extended and work up to both arm and leg extented together!

![Figure 6, Flag]

**D. Stand**

The stand begins from the kneeling ‘box’ position after the flag has been performed. The vaulter hops onto both feet, with the head remaining up and looking forward. Feet remain stationary, and pointed forward, with the legs close together. The surcingle grips are released simultaneously, and the vaulter rises smoothly into a standing position, shoulders and hips centered over the ankles. The arms are brought up to extend outward in a straight line, fingers together, palm down, with the fingertips held level with the vaulter’s eyes. This position is held for four strides, while the hips, knees, and ankles absorb the horse’s motion and the upper body held still.

At completion, the vaulter retakes the grips - looking forward with head up - and slides gently back into seat astride.

When teaching the stand, always use a spotter. An experienced vaulter on the neck basing the beginning vaulter is also a good way to teach the stand safely.

![Figure 7. Stand]
E. Swing Frontways, Legs Closed

The vaulter begins from seat astride, the stretched legs are swung upward (back) to reach a handstand position. The vaulter's arms are extended to attain maximum elevation. The vaulter's legs are closed and stretched at maximum elevation. Without interruption in the movement, and at the point of maximum elevation, the vaulter returns softly to seat astride. Because this compulsory exercise needs lots of strength and body control.

The Swing Frontways is not often taught in a summer camp setting. It is also important that a vaulter uses the barrel to perfect this compulsory to prevent undue roughness to the horse!

(Figure 8, Swing Frontways)

F. Half-Mill

In the Half-Mill, the vaulter makes two leg passes and ends sitting reverse on the horse. The Half-Mill is performed in two phases, each taking four canter (or trot) strides to complete. Each leg is stretched over the horse as high as possible, with the upper body remaining vertical, and rotating with each pass of the leg. Comfort in the mill will develop all riders confidence in different positions on the horse.

Phase 1  Beginning from seat astride. The outside leg is brought smoothly over the horse’s neck. As an arm is approached, the grip is released and the leg passes by. The first phase ends with the vaulter seated facing to the inside of the vaulting circle, hands on the grips, hips and shoulders facing in, and legs in contact with the horse.

(Figure 9, Mill, Phase 1)

Phase 2  From the ending position of Phase 1, the leading leg (left if going to the left) is carried over the horse’s croup, with the hands changing position on the grips. At completion, the vaulter is seated facing backwards on the horse, hands on the surcingle grips, legs in contact with the horse.
G. Swing Rearways, Legs Open Followed by Dismount to Inside

From reverse seat, the vaulter swings their stretched and open legs upward, the legs remain open (hip width apart) and do not come together at the highest point of the swing. Arms are extended to attain the maximum elevation and the angle between arms and torso is as great as possible. Then the vaulter softly returns to reverse seat.

(Figure 10, Swing Rearways)

The dismount for the Swing is a ¼ mill to the inside. The vaulter brings the left stretched leg over the croup to inside seat. While holding the inside grip the vaulter rotates onto the right hip to face forward. With legs closed and hips stretched the vaulter pushes against the grips upwards and away from the horse. Releasing the grips the vaulter lands with nearly closed legs and bent knees and continues forward in the same direction as the horse.

H. Dismount or Vault Off

1. Although in competition there is no dismount between the compulsories, for training purposes you will want your students to be familiar with the Simple Dismount. The right leg comes over the horse’s neck, as in Phase 1 of the Half-Mill, then left and right leg coming together with legs straight and toes pointed, the vaulter rolls onto their right hip and pushes against the grips to push away from the horse. Care should be taken to not dig the hip into the back of the horse.

2. The vaulter should land facing the same direction as the horse is traveling with feet together and knees bent. If the vaulter loses balance, he should perform a forward roll and then jump up to his feet as soon as he can. After the horse has passed, the vaulter then jogs the same direction as the horse on the outside of the lunge circle to return to their place in line as described earlier.

4.5 Using Spotters

Note: Some exercises are easier to have a spotter than others, although at the slower gaits you can always have someone there that can lend a hand if balance is lost or the vaulter is timid.
A. For the Vault On

For the Vault On the spotter puts his left hand on the vaulter’s left hip as soon as the vaulter reaches the horse. The left hand is used to keep the vaulter close to the horse and to lift him upward. The spotter’s right hand catches the vaulter’s right leg as he kicks it backward and upward and lifts it up and over the horse. The spotter never leaves the vaulter until he is securely seated on the horse.

B. For the Flag

For the Flag the spotter puts his left hand on the lower portion of the left surcingle handle. His right hand holds on to the vaulter’s kneeling leg at the back of the calf on the upper part near the knee. Holding the kneeling leg will prevent it from bouncing, and, if the vaulter becomes too unbalanced, the spotter can pull the leg down to the left side so the vaulter sits down.

C. For the Stand

For the Stand there are two good methods.

1. One is to have the spotter sit on the horse’s neck facing rearward. The vaulter stands facing forward. The spotter steadies the vaulter at the hips as needed. If the spotter sits on the neck facing forward, the standing vaulter may develop balance using the spotter’s shoulders.

2. Another method is to use spotters on each side of the horse, moving with him. They can provide a hand to steady the vaulter when necessary.

D. For the Half-Mill

For the Half-Mill the spotter anchors the non-moving leg.
E. For the Free Kneel

For the Free Kneel the spotter holds the left handle with his left hand and puts his right arm over both the vaulter’s legs in the upper calf area to keep the knees from bouncing.

F. For the Simple Dismount

For the Simple Dismount the spotter puts his right arm around the vaulter’s waist and his left hand on the left handle. As the vaulter lifts his right leg over the neck, the spotter pulls the vaulter off the horse and makes sure the vaulter lands securely on both feet.

G. For the Half Flank Off

For the Half Flank Off the spotter runs with the horse and gives a hand to help guide the vaulter down.

H. For Offs in All Positions

For Offs in all positions, spotters should always be available to help at whatever stage these “offs” are being practiced until the vaulter has demonstrated the ability to land correctly and securely with the knees bent or to roll comfortably if the vaulter does not achieve a good, secure landing.

I. For Freestyles

For Freestyles the spotter(s) run beside the horse to catch vaulters if they fall. For doubles and triples more than one spotter will probably be needed.

4.6 Teaching Freestyles

A. Purposes for teaching Freestyles to vaulters

1. Freestyles establish communication and trust between team (squad) members and increased confidence for individuals.

2. Freestyles provide an opportunity for creative expressions.

3. Freestyles are fun!

B. Freestyle fundamentals

1. Teach Freestyles first on the barrel, then on the horse at a walk.

2. Re-emphasize to the vaulters what to do if the exercise fails or the horse gets frightened or upset. Practice dismounting from every position of a Freestyle.

3. Beginning vaulters should choose Freestyles which maintain two or three points of contact between the vaulter and the horse at all times.
4. Particular care should be taken to teach safe and proper methods of getting into and out of Freestyles.

5. When introducing doubles or triples, use static Freestyles (one posture held for three strides) to give each vaulter the opportunity to practice each position and to get the feeling of being a flyer or base.

6. When doing triples, be careful not to overload the horse with heavy vaulters. Triples should not interfere with the maintenance of the horse’s balanced even gait.

7. Teach vaulters the responsibilities of being a base or flyer.
   a. The flyer calls the execution of the Freestyle.
   b. The base, who is usually the largest and strongest member of the Freestyle, must always protect the flyer no matter what happens.

C. Freestyle Music

1. Selection of music is a key and creative component of designing and choreographing a Freestyle.

2. In AVA Recognized competitions, only A Team (A Squad), Open Pas de Deux, Silver Individuals and Gold Individuals may have music with lyrics (provided lyrics are not offensive and appropriate for all ages). In recreational vaulting and Fun Fests, any type of music is acceptable. For unrecognized events/Fun Fests, it is up to the management of that event to state whether or not lyrics are allowed.

3. The vaulter raises a hand to signal the music to start.

4. In competitions Freestyles must adhere to strict timing rules. Team (squad) compulsories are also timed. This information may be found in the AVA Rulebook, available online at www.americanvaulting.org

D. Freestyle moves

The following Freestyle movements are recommended for their ease of accomplishment.

1. Vault Ons
   a. Inside Side Seat
   b. Scissors on
   c. To knees

2. Vault Offs (dismounts)
   a. Simple Vault off (leg over neck to inside or to outside)
b. V-Sit off (any direction) landing facing frontways

c. Slide off out of inside or outside press landing facing frontways

d. Sliding off any seated, kneeling or lying exercise landing facing frontways

e. Roll over shoulder to outside (from forward facing kneeling position)

3. Singles

a. Arabesque

(Figure 12, Arabesque)

b. Candle

(Figure 13, Candle)

c. Free Kneel

(Figure 14, Free Kneel)
4. Doubles
   a. Double Kneel
   b. Half Flags
   c. Half Flag and Arabesque
   d. Flag and Side Star
   e. Kneel and Arabesque
   f. Kneel and Stand
   g. Riding Seat (any combination)
   h. Riding Seat and Arabesque

ALL MOVES SHOULD FIRST BE PERFORMED ON THE BARREL, THEN
ON THE HORSE AT THE STAND, THEN AT THE WALK, THEN AT THE
TROT, AND, FINALLY AT THE CANTER.
i. Wheelbarrow

j. Supported Stand

k. Supported Shoulder Stand

l. Shoulder Stand and Bielman (for experienced vaulters only)

5. Triples

a. Double Needle and Flag or Kneel or Prince

b. Double Riding Seat and Arabesque

c. Double Riding Seat and Kneel

d. Double Riding Seat and Stand

e. Galleon

f. Riding Seat and Double Kneel

g. Sit, Half flag, and Arabesque
h. Sit, Kneel, and Arabesque
i. Sit and Riding Seat on Quadruped
j. Triple Cross (Riding Seat, Kneel, and Stand)
k. Triple Riding Seat

4.7 Games for Skill Development

A. Games Add An Additional Dimension to Instruction

1. Games help to develop skills and are fun for vaulters.

2. The variety of games is limited only by the imagination.

3. Timed games are a good teaching aid. Ask children:

   a. How many can you do?

   b. How long can you hold the position?

   c. How fast are you?

   d. Examples of timed games:

      1) Who can stand the longest on the horse.

      2) Who can hold the longest ground Flag or Half-flag.

      3) Who can perform the fastest Vault-on and Flank-off the barrel

   e. For multiple winners, run all games against a set time.

4. Stress to all vaulters that they are competing only with themselves. How much each vaulter improves is what is really important.

5. Examples – for the individual

   a. Rolls

      1) Forward Rolls in tuck or straddle position

      2) Backward Rolls in tuck, straddle or pike position

      3) Log Rolls (lying down with arms stretched above head and rolling sideways)

   b. Races

      1) Leapfrog
2) Crab Walk (on hands and feet moving sideways)
3) Seal Crawl (straight arms dragging legs behind)
4) Camel Walk (moving right leg and hand, then left leg and hand)
5) Cartwheel
6) Handstand Walk
7) Hopping

c. Balance exercises
   1) Right and left Flags with weight on ankle and/or hand
   2) Right and left Arabesques
   3) Free V-Seat
   4) Forearm stand
   5) Handstand
   6) Head stands
d. Strength exercises
   1) Sit-Ups
   2) Push-Ups
   3) Chin-Ups
   4) Leg-Lifts
   5) Pullover
   6) Holding arms out
e. Skill exercises
   1) Holding dollar bill under heel for stand on horse
   2) Balancing something on head
   3) Holding something under chin or between knees
   4) Carrying a glass of water
   5) Holding water balloon under armpit

6. Examples – for two vaulters
   a. Piggyback or horse and rider relay
b. Fireman’s Carry
c. Wheelbarrow race
d. Back-To-Back race (back to back locking arms)
e. Leapfrog
f. Three-Legged race
g. Two-man roll (roll at the same time while holding hands)
h. Monkey Walk
i. Horse Walk

7. Examples – for three vaulters
   a. Cradle
   b. Dead-Man Carry
c. Three-Man Roll
d. Double Wheelbarrow

8. Examples – for more than three vaulters
   a. Tug-O-War
   b. Pyramid
c. Tandem Crawl (hands and knees, hold onto the ankles of person in front of you)
d. Tandem Wheelbarrow
e. Tunnel-Straddle (holding hips in front of you, person at rear crawls between straddled legs to front and everyone follows same)
f. Chain Forward Roll (holding hands, side by side, every other person rolls, then second group)
g. Chain Mill (holding hands, side by side, person furthest to right lifts left leg over connected arms with everyone following)
h. Skin the Snake (every one straddled, reach with right arm between your legs to person in back and with left arm forward for person in front – last person in line crawls forward between straddled legs with everyone following without letting go of hands)
5.1 Vaulting Fun Day

The instructor can make suggestions and act as a safety guide, but the vaulters plan the events and make the certificates. Award funny certificates as prizes.

B. Examples of events

1. See games listed in Chapter 4, 4.7 Games for Skill Development.

2. Costume races – vaulter must put on something safe, like an old vest or T-shirt, stocking cap, etc., run to the barrel, vault-on, do the first three compulsories against the stop watch.

3. A vaulting obstacle course – use tires, fence rails, the vaulting barrel (over, under, or around), logs, cavaletti, slant boards, parallel bars, climbing ropes, etc.

4. Play Simon Says, calling out compulsory moves.

5.2 Incentive Certification Programs

1. The kind of awards system should fit the needs of the individual vaulting program. Many established clubs or camps may already have appropriate awards or some which might be readily adapted.

2. The American Vaulting Association has a horsemanship program for vaulters and coaches, with certificates and patches. Consult the AVA website for more information.

5.3 Medal Examinations

1. The AVA offers a Novice Award for beginners working at the walk, trot or canter. This examination may be taken by vaulters who have achieved the basic mechanical skills required for performing all parts of the six compulsories. The following is expected to pass on examination:
   a. Demonstrate the basic mechanics of the six compulsory exercises (the mount is not scored. The vaulter may have an assisted mount)
   b. Demonstrate an awareness of safety
   c. Spotters are permitted in the arena, but if assistance is required the exercise will fail. Two repetitions are permitted.

2. See AVA Rulebook for complete rules governing Medal Exams. The rulebook may be downloaded from the AVA website at www.americanvaulting.org.
Vaulting Barrel

Developing vaulting skills is a process. We recommend that many of the gymnastics and dance skills be developed on the ground and practiced on the barrel before performing them on the horse.

You will need the following equipment:
- VAULTING BARREL
- GYMNASTICS MATS or appropriate footing to provide safe landing area.

A practice barrel is an essential piece of training equipment for clubs and individual vaulters which allows the vaulters to practice their Freestyle moves and sequence before trying them on the horse. Since barrel competition is an integral part of some forms of competition, it is needed both for practice and for competition.

A vaulting barrel which satisfies AVA requirements may be made from two standard 55 gallon drums (or two barrels may be made from three drums).

BODY

The body of the vaulting barrel is formed from one complete 55 gallon drum and one half of a second drum. After cutting the drum in half (crosswise) the open end of the half is welded to the end of the complete barrel, forming a cylinder 23 inches in diameter, by 53 inches long (with three raised “ribs”). Welding can be either electric arc or acetylene gas but the barrel MUST be free of flammable liquids or vapors.

HANDLES

Handles are formed from 5/8” 3/4” round mild steel bar stock, or thick wall tubing (conduit is too thin), in a 6 inch (inner) diameter semicircle with three inch straight legs so that the overall inside height is six inches. Handles are attached over/adjacent to the seam between the complete and half barrel, so that there is a six inch separation between them at the top, and they lean “forward” toward the short end of the barrel at a degree angle. It may be difficult to weld heavy solid stock directly to the much thinner barrel (and appropriately curved) 1/8” x 2” steel stock and then weld the 1/8” plates to the barrel.

LEGS

Legs can be of several different designs, but must provide sufficient stability for energetic movement, and not interfere with the vaulters movements. The legs should place the top of the barrel surface 48” above the base (floor or footing), and not extend beyond the sides of the barrel. If not permanently anchored, a wide base is necessary for stability and safety. Possibilities: Two 2” (or larger) pipe posts, passing through (and welded to) the bottom of the barrel and welded to the top with a reinforcing plate bottoms either set in concrete (permanent installation) or attached to wide “feet” to provide lateral stability. Angle iron “A” frame attached to the ends (can be made removable for portability) similarly attached to wide “feet” for stability.

PAD

Two layers of carpeting works well the first to fit between the barrel’s “ribs,” and the next (and possibly a third) overall, providing a smooth padded surface, over which should be placed a cover.

COVER

Leather is ideal from the standpoint of grip and texture. Heavy denim is also very good, and a lot less expensive. The cover should be washable, and thus removable. An overall waterproof cover is a good idea if the practice barrel is left outdoors in the weather.

FOOTING

Indoors, use regular gymnastic pads a few layers of carpet on a concrete floor is not enough for safety. Outdoors, dry sand or small wood chips mixed with sand (similar to horse arena footing) will give both a safe surface, and one that feels like an arena. Wet sand compacts to the consistency of stone, and should be “loosened” before the barrel is used. For AVA competition, the footing provided around the barrel should be the same as is used in the horse arena.
Vendors
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