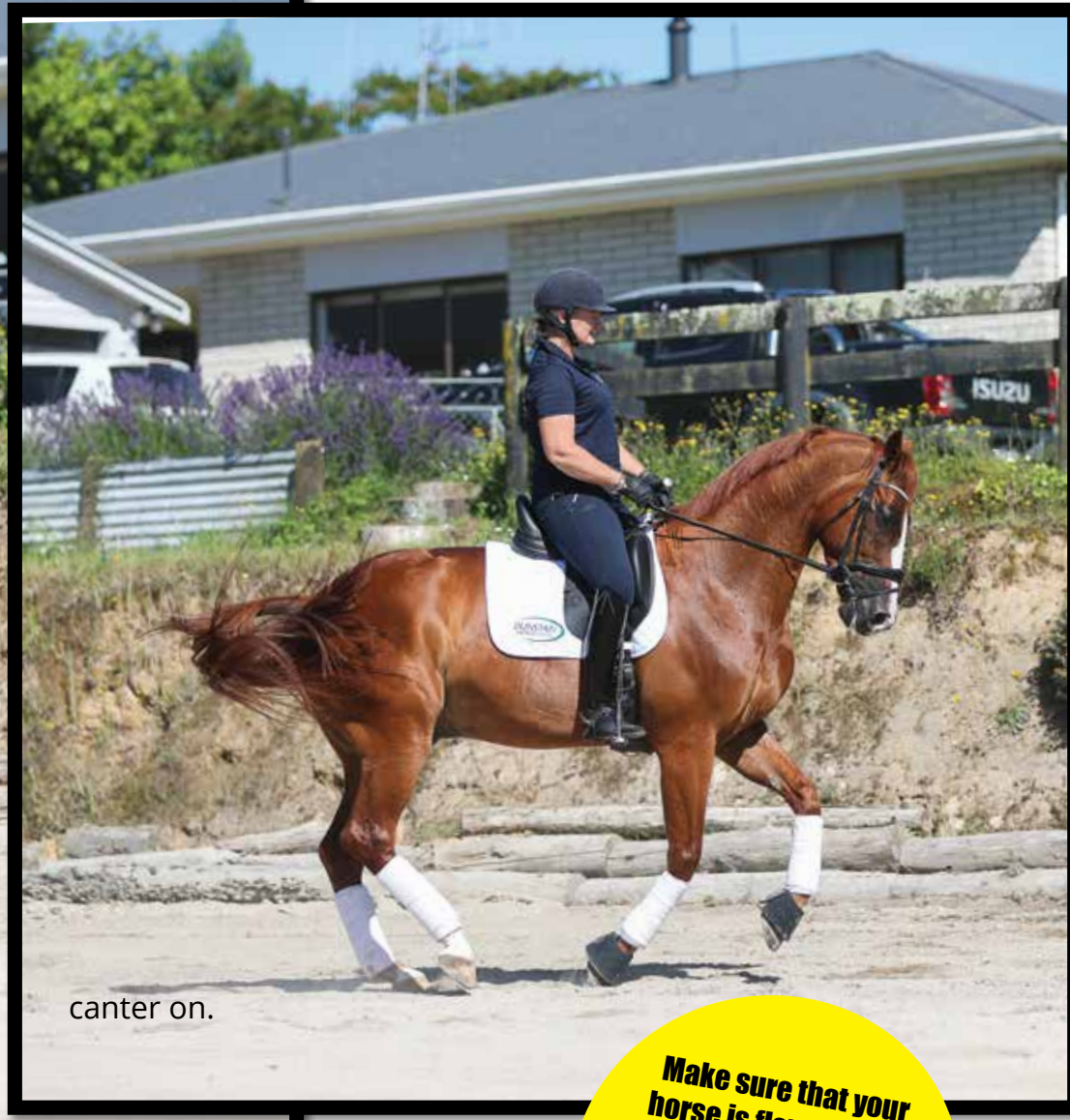




The walk



your aids...



canter on.

Make sure that your horse is flexed to the inside. Your inside hip should be slightly forward, and the outside hip slightly back.

A closer look at CANTER TRANSITIONS

MASTERING CANTER TRANSITIONS IS ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTALS OF RIDING; HOWEVER EVEN RELATIVELY EXPERIENCED RIDERS CAN FIND MAINTAINING THEIR POSITION AND SITTING QUIETLY THROUGH UPWARD AND DOWNWARD TRANSITIONS QUITE CHALLENGING. WE ASKED CHRISTINE WEAL TO TAKE US THROUGH IT IN A LITTLE MORE DETAIL.

Preparation is the key

The quality of the transitions between all paces is an overall indicator of both how the training of the horse is progressing, and also how the rider is progressing. Good transitions are smooth and fluent, while poor transitions show up through a variety of resistances in the horse.

Mistakes in the transitions often relate to inadequacies in the rider. A lack of core stability, the rider losing position and falling forward, 'pumping' with the seat or upper body, or releasing the contact too much are common problems.

One exercise which can be helpful is the transition from walk to canter. The prerequisites for this exercise to be successful are that the rider must have a basic degree of balance in walk, trot and canter, and the horse

must be sufficiently trained to understand what is being asked. For a novice rider, it is most helpful to practice this on a schooled horse.

Quality of the walk

In the walk, you are looking for energetic but quite short steps. The horse's outline should be round, rather than stretched out and long. Ride him into a nice contact, using your fingers to encourage him to soften his jaw without losing contact. If he is too strong in the contact, half-halt by stilling the hands momentarily, then when he responds, soften the hands forward. Repeat this half-halt as many times as is necessary. If he resists, make sure that your hands aren't too strong – he needs to feel that he can go forward without being punished.

Position

Make sure that your horse is flexed to the inside. Your inside hip should be slightly forward, and the outside hip slightly back. The inside leg at the girth provides the energy, while the outside leg is stretched down and back from the hip joint. If you simply take your lower leg back, your heel will come up and your leg will become sloppy, losing its tone.

Strike off

Timing is everything – feel for the moment. It's not always easy to catch the perfect moment within the horse's stride. For a fluent transition, use a quiet and discreet canter aid.

Ask for the canter using your outside leg. A well-schooled horse will respond to the seat bone and upper leg pressure; however a horse which is not so well-trained may require a stronger aid, such as a nudge or light tap from your outside leg. If necessary, carry your dressage whip in your outside hand and use a flick behind your outside leg to encourage your horse to canter.

Deal breakers

- Contact is too strong or non-existent
- Leaning forward
- Locking hips or gripping with the thighs
- Unbalancing your horse
- Pumping seat or upper body
- Stiff elbows that do not 'give' forward as the horse strikes off

The horse will probably trot, or if he does canter, the transition will be flat, sloppy and disengaged and feel awkward and ungainly.

When in canter

Establish the canter so that each stride is regular and consistent, with a steady tempo. Sit quietly – do not move more than your saddle! ■