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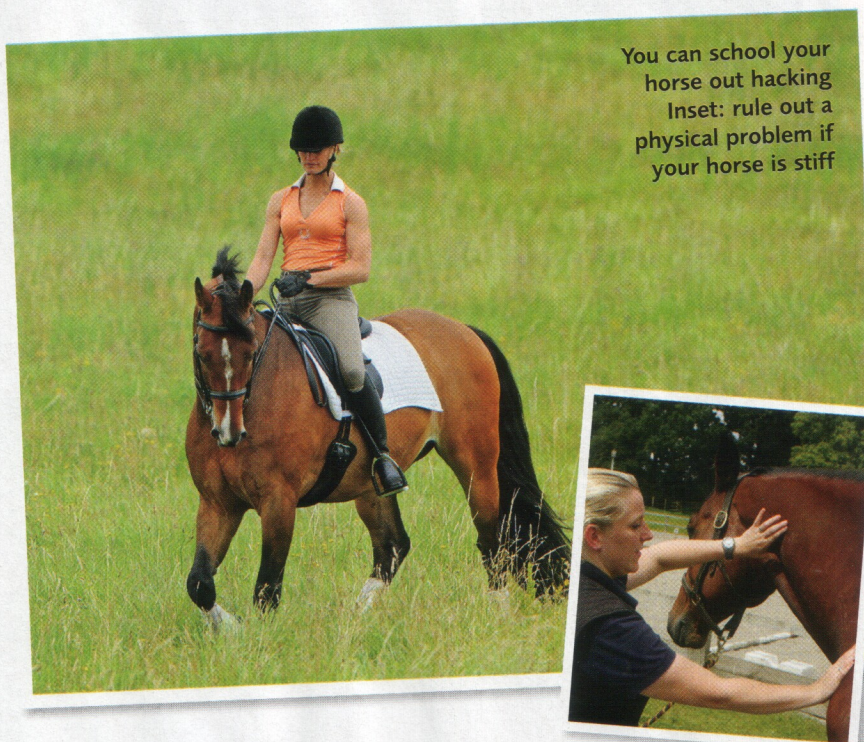
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Q&A

SUPPLING A STIFF PONY

My five-year-old pony is stiff and right-handed. My trainer advised me to school him regularly, but I don't have an arena. How can I help him to become more supple on the left rein?

Charlotte Hillier, Epsom, Surrey



You can school your horse out hacking
Inset: rule out a physical problem if your horse is stiff



Event rider and trainer Rosie Thomas says:

You don't need an arena to work in and can school your pony out hacking. Ensure you are in a safe place, though, such as on a quiet bridleway rather than a busy road.

An easy exercise you can try is to walk in a straight line, flexing your pony's head to the left for a few steps, then straightening and repeating to the right.

Over a period of time you can build up the amount of flexion and increase the number of steps. You can also practise this exercise in trot.

Try asking your pony to leg yield away from your legs, and ride shoulder-fore. These exercises should help him to become more supple.

When you are trotting, make sure you are using both diagonals an equal amount, even if you are riding in straight lines. This will ensure he builds up his muscles evenly. Sometimes, I change my diagonal each time I pass a telegraph pole or alternate the diagonals.



Chartered physiotherapist Sue Palmer says:

It may be either the pony or you who has a physical difficulty, so it is worth visiting a physiotherapist yourself, as well as having your pony assessed by a professional.

Your pony could be tight through his neck or poll – carrot stretches (see below) will help you assess this.

Stand to one side of your pony, holding a carrot near his shoulder, and allow him to reach round for it. Then repeat this exercise on his other side.

Is your horse able to reach farther to one side than the other to get a carrot? You might also have noticed that he only reaches around to scratch himself on one side.

If so, practise the carrot stretches every day until he is able to reach more evenly to both sides.

Another possible cause is that he is stiff through a hindleg, or sore through a front leg. I recommend getting a professional opinion from your vet or physiotherapist to help you decide where the problem stems from.



Carrot stretches

1. Stand to each side of your horse, holding a carrot near his shoulder and letting him reach round for it.
2. If he can reach farther round on one side than the other, practise each day until he can move evenly on both sides.
3. Hold the carrot by his front hooves to stretch the muscles along his topline.

