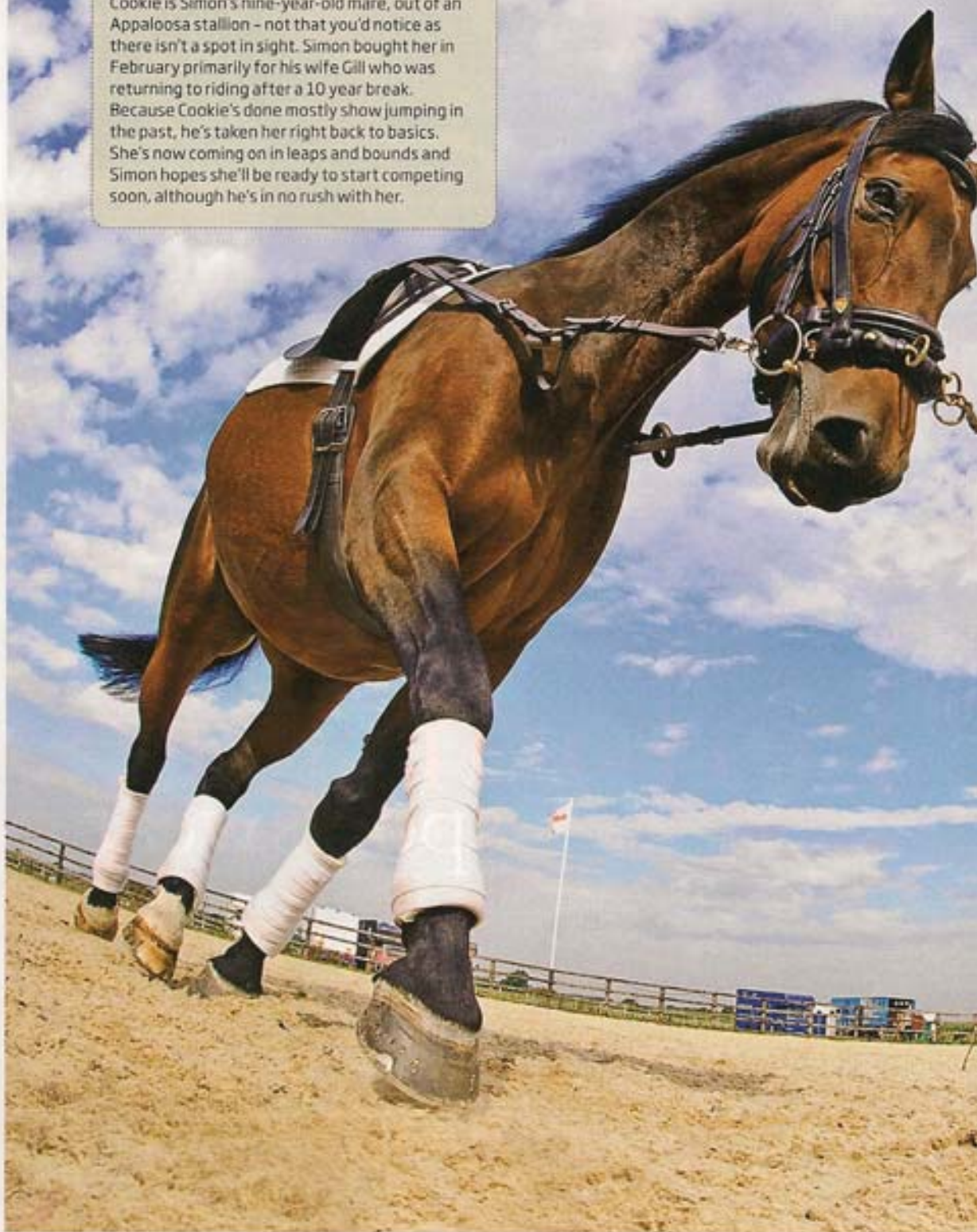


## MEET THE MODEL

Cookie is Simon's nine-year-old mare, out of an Appaloosa stallion – not that you'd notice as there isn't a spot in sight. Simon bought her in February primarily for his wife Gill who was returning to riding after a 10 year break. Because Cookie's done mostly show jumping in the past, he's taken her right back to basics. She's now coming on in leaps and bounds and Simon hopes she'll be ready to start competing soon, although he's in no rush with her.





SAVING  
TIME AND  
MONEY  
£ ⌚ £

# Lunge perfect

Properly done, lungeing is the perfect way to give your horse a short but effective workout – ideal for winter when time is at a premium and the weather restricts exercise

**W**hen the dark nights draw in and the time and motivation for riding is not at its peak, lungeing can be a great tool. Twenty-five minutes is all you need to improve your horse in all sorts of ways. We've enlisted the help of dressage expert Simon Battram to show us the best way to lunge effectively. Read on to find out what you should be doing.

*It's a great way  
to bond with  
your horse*

## THE BENEFITS OF LUNGEING

Lungeing is a fantastic form of exercise but just like with any training, if done incorrectly it can cause more problems than it solves, so it pays to make sure your technique is top notch. I lunge at least once a week and for the following reasons:

- Purely for exercise, especially if my horse is having more time in the stable than usual
- To increase fitness and suppleness
- To introduce a new exercise – jumping or advanced dressage movements for instance
- It's a great way to build a bond with your horse
- To start a young horse off

## TOP TIP

Remember 25 minutes of lungeing is equivalent to around 45 minutes of ridden exercise, so don't overdo it

## MEET THE EXPERT



### Simon Battram

Simon has been riding since a child and trained under a former chief rider of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. He specialises in working in-hand to help dressage horses at all levels. For more info visit [www.stepintodressage.com](http://www.stepintodressage.com)



# Riding Lungeing



## Get the right kit

I try to never over-complicate things when it comes to training horses, and my approach to lungeing equipment is quite simple. I use a lunge cavesson over the bridle, which has had the reins removed. And the only 'gadget' I use is a set of side reins - the ones made of leather but with a rubber ring insert. I particularly like these as they have a bit of give in them and I feel they mimic the action of the rider's hands - which should also be giving.

I've invested in a Spanish Riding School cavesson as they fit really well and are top quality so will last a lifetime. Whichever cavesson you use, the important thing is that it should stay put - I find a lot of them slip to whichever side you're using them from, sometimes getting close to the eye, so make sure it's a snug fit. I prefer to use a cavesson rather than attach the line to the bit because I can then guarantee I'm not interfering directly with my horse's mouth, but I still have plenty of control.

I generally lunge with a saddle on, mainly because I know it won't slip, as rollers can.

To help protect my horse's legs from knocks and brushing, I bandage all round with exercise pads underneath for extra protection. I carry an extra long lunge whip - short ones aren't as effective in encouraging the horse forwards. Buy the longest you can.



## POSITION IS IMPORTANT

I usually work on a 20m circle through all of my lunge work - remember you're lungeing for a reason and if you're going large or doing straight lines, then this isn't technically lungeing. Moving around like this also makes it much harder to ensure the lunge work is correct and, as it's pretty hard to keep your horse straight on the lunge to start with, there is no guarantee you'll be 'riding the straight lines' properly, so in my book there's no point trying. I like to stay on the spot - the heel underneath my hand holding the lunge line stays in the same place. Make sure you keep your body nice and relaxed and your shoulders down - you'd be amazed how much tension can pass along the lunge line to your horse.



**TOP TIP**  
Hold the lunge line just as you would the reins. This allows you to communicate with your horse effectively and give half-halts when needed. Attach it to the middle ring of the three rings on the cavesson.

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

For me, the first five to 10 minutes of any lungeing session should be dedicated to allowing your horse to stretch and warm up his muscles. I know it's tempting to get on with things straight away, but it's unfair to start the hard work before your horse is ready, and the stretching is good for developing his topline and allows him to work over his back correctly.

You may find that without the side reins to help you, your horse gawks a bit and will go round with his head too high. Don't panic - he just needs a bit of help to stretch down. It will take

a bit of practice and time, but I just use the lunge line to gently flex the head to the inside a little. Then release. Then flex again and release.

Your horse might not get it at first, but persevere and praise him with your voice when he stretches even an inch. This will help him get the message.

Stretch him on both reins in walk and trot then it's time to hook up the side reins. Don't forget to think of your own position when lungeing. You are the tip of an imaginary triangle with your whip and your lunge line making two sides and your horse being at the bottom.



## GEARING UP

I attach the side reins high on the girth straps, as I like them to be in a position similar to where they would be if I was on board – effectively I want lungeing to be as similar to riding as it can possibly be. Fix them too low and your horse will be tempted to go over bent and will probably fall onto his forehead.

I know the ideal length is always a hot debate with everyone having different opinions, but for me the important thing is that my horse is seeking the contact,

not being held or forced into a shape. I measure the side reins so the clip reaches the bars of the bit, then I attach them to the bit rings as normal. At first you might think these look too long, but once your horse is working correctly they'll be spot on.

All horses have different lengths of neck and body, so the best advice is to start with them long and shorten them if you need to. You're looking for a working frame – not too long in the neck but definitely not too short either.



## The working phase

As with ridden work, lungeing must be done correctly to be of any benefit. Starting in walk, pay attention to your horse's footfalls as he goes round the circle. He should be tracking up or preferably overtracking – this is an indication that he's working forward and starting to engage his hindquarters.

Look for each hindleg to follow the front legs – if you over flex or use too much rein, your horse may pop his hindquarters out and his back end won't be following his front.

Lungeing incorrectly like this will eventually result in a crooked horse. He must be actively seeking the contact not sitting behind it. The lunge whip can be used just behind him to encourage forwardness – this will help with achieving the correct contact.

I would move quite quickly into trot, driving the horse forwards from the off using the whip for encouragement if need be. You're looking for your horse to really stretch over the back and neck – he should really be able to swing along, as he hasn't got a rider to impede him in any

way. The whip is used as you would your legs – to create a driving force, and the side reins are the 'receiving hands.' It should all be very calm and easy. Done correctly, lungeing can give your horse confidence in his work.

It's important to work for the same amount of time on both reins so your horse doesn't become one sided. As the session goes on, you'll find your horse becomes freer and rounder and the quality of the strides will improve. This is the time to rev up the engine and ask for a more engaged trot.





## Transition perfect

Make sure you don't allow your horse to be lazy in his transitions - the walk to trot should be snappy and instant, don't let him pull himself into the trot as you want him to engage his hindlegs and push into it. The downward transition is also important but too many people just let their horse dawdle with the result that he's completely on his forehead and disengaged. You still want him to be engaged, even when he's slowing down, so use your whip to encourage his hindlegs under while you ask for walk. If he doesn't listen to your walk aid or is sluggish into it, drive him forwards into trot again then repeat. Only allow him to walk when he's offered a good transition.

## SAY NO TO CANTER

I personally don't do any canter work on the lunge - I save this for when I'm working with two reins (long-lining) because then I have control over both sides of the horse. I think it's too easy for the horse, when on the lunge, to become unbalanced in canter and work quarters in or quarters out which means the horse is crooked - the walk and trot is symmetrical but the canter has a bias which is why the crookedness happens. Remember lungeing is all about suppleness, straightness and balance so there's no point trying something that isn't going to achieve this or is actively making your horse incorrect.



Make sure your horse is engaged on the downwards transition

Thanks to Bury Farm Equestrian Centre where Cookie is based





## CHANGING THE REIN

When I change reins I like to do a little in-hand exercise with my horse - I find it really helps with suppleness, the horse's responsiveness and builds up the hindlegs - you'll be amazed how your horse's work will improve straight away when you've done this. It's really easy so it's worth giving it a try. I come in close to the horse and, holding the lunge line near to the cavesson, I ask him to walk a circle around me - his front feet walk a 10m circle and the hindlegs take a slightly bigger track. I use the lunge whip, with the lash secured in my hand, to encourage the hindlegs round while keeping the front legs on the smaller circle. He will have to step across and under with his hindlegs and cross with his front legs so it's also introducing lateral work without any stress involved at all.

## Common problems

### Hollowing

Working hollow is a sure sign that your horse is lacking engagement. So the first thing to tackle is his reaction to the forward driving aids. Remember, it's not about speed though. Once he's active enough, you can use the flex-to-the-inside-and-release exercise to help him drop his head.

This is the one time I may work large around the school but I'd move in close to the horse - about 5m away. Then I can use the corners to help him flex and also do 10m circles, which will create greater bend and encourage lowering of the head. Many horses go hollow because they're distracted or worried about the environment. By working large, I can show him that all is ok and there's nothing to be alarmed about.

### Turning in

This is generally a training issue borne out of a positive thing. Most people with a new horse want him to come to them in the field and stable etc because that feels good and the horse gets praised when he does this. So once on the lunge, the horse turns in because he thinks the

right thing to do is to come to you. The way to sort this is to adopt clearer body language and clarity of instruction to ensure he stays out on the circle. Stand your ground and if he tries to turn in, be assertive and drive him forward with the whip. I find standing nearer the tail end helps a lot as you're slightly behind him and more able to drive.

### Spooking

The best way to deal with spooking on the lunge is to not worry about it too much. Generally horses spook for two reasons - they're either concerned about something that's happening right then - a flapping bag in a tree for instance. Or they're uncomfortable with their surroundings and are spooking due to lack of confidence.

If it's an immediate thing, just let them look and get it out of their system - it doesn't really matter too much if they have a bit of a mad few minutes as long as it's safe. If it's their surroundings or lifestyle that's making them lack confidence then the only way to deal with it is to address the underlying issues.

### Not going forwards

If your horse is reluctant to go forwards, move nearer to him but keep him on a 20m circle - so you're walking a bigger circle. Being closer means you can be more effective at driving him on. You can touch him with the whip if you need to - just like you would with a schooling whip. The most effective way to use the whip is to touch the hindleg just as it's leaving the floor so timing is important. I've spent hours with a tin can and lunge whip practising my technique - sounds weird but it really works.

## The perfect 25-minute lungeing session

When time is short, Simon suggests you try this:

### Three minutes of warm up and stretching on each rein without side reins

While you're doing this, check out your horse's responsiveness to your aids and his forwardness.

### 15 minutes working phase with side reins attached - work on both reins equally

To add some variety, mix things up a little. Try the on-and-back exercise - ask your horse for a bigger trot for a few strides before asking him to come back to a normal trot then pushing for a bigger one again. You could also do some spiralling in and out - bring him onto a 10m circle around you then let him back out to the 20m circle before bringing him back in. This is a little like leg-yield and is great for suppleness.

Also try walk to trot to walk transition but decide beforehand how many strides of each you're going to do and aim to get exactly that. For instance, six strides of walk then four strides of trot and then two strides of walk etc.

The 'almost walk' is also a good exercise. From trot, ask your horse to walk and, just as he's about to make the transition, trot him on again - make sure he really springs forward.

Working in patterns like this will help your horse to focus on the work and will ensure he doesn't get bored.

### Four minutes of stretching

