



DRILL DESIGN

Maneuvers

Maneuvers are a sequence of movements that form a pattern. The sequence may be short or more involved for a more intricate maneuver. Maneuvers are linked together by transitions to form your drill. Maneuvers and transitions make up the choreography of your performance. We call a maneuver a “Simple” maneuver not because it is necessarily easy to perform, but because it is basically a one - step maneuver. A single file cross is considered a “Simple” maneuver. A “Complex” maneuver has many more steps to it, like an “Itsy bitsy spider”. In a well-designed drill maneuvers flow together seamlessly and transition the team from one-unit size to another from one end of the arena to the other with a combination of simple and complex maneuvers.

Transitions

Transitions are the actions taken to move from one maneuver to another. Transitions are the links in your drill chain and are critical to the overall look of your drill. The flow of the drill really depends on the smoothness and attractiveness of the transitions between your maneuvers. A well-designed drill appears seamless and flows easily from one maneuver to the next. Anytime it looks like you are simply positioning a team for the next maneuver it is a difficult transition and will detract from the overall flow of your drill design.

Maneuver Difficulty

How difficult a maneuver is to perform, not necessarily the intricacy is the determining factor. Usually the timing, spacing, and alignment requirements of a maneuver determine its degree of difficulty. A simple looking maneuver can be difficult for a team to perform well. Speed will be noted because it is more difficult to perform a maneuver well when it is done at a faster pace. Precision should not be sacrificed for speed. A difficult maneuver done smoothly and aligned can look easier to perform than many simple maneuvers. Good and experienced judges know the difference. There is no official ranking system in our sport that clearly defines one maneuver as worth more than another.

A circle even though considered a basic low difficulty move can cause problems if you haven’t worked on your vertical spacing and tracking enough. Use of spacing is way to add or subtract difficulty points and a great way to adjust the difficulty of your drill during the season as your team’s skill increases. An interchange done with thirty feet distance between riders is significantly easier than performing it with twelve feet and experienced judges will reward your team for that accordingly. Like with the proper use of speed though, it is important to remember that riding with reduced spacing also increases the danger. If your team is not ready to handle riding with closer spacing, wait, you can easily transition your team closer when they are ready. It is advisable to transition to closer spacing on easier maneuvers first then more difficult maneuvers later. Not only does reducing spacing and increasing speed increase difficulty it will also spark a lagging interest from riders’ mid-season. Once a team feels comfortable with a drill they can become complacent. Ramping up the difficulty without making significant drill changes is a sure-fire way to recapture their attention.

Use of Speed

The speed of your drill depends on the skill and drill knowledge of your weakest riders. Speed should come only after you can perform a maneuver flawlessly time after time. Precision, and safety should always come first. Even when these instructions are followed accidents in drill happen and are usually worse when speed is involved, just like in a car. Speed can, and should, vary during your drill, a circle may be performed at a faster pace than an interchange when you are starting out or have an inexperienced team. Speed becomes a greater issue where timing is involved, such as in interchanges, weaves, charro's, etc. Increase your speed wisely and error on the side of caution. The use of speed can greatly impact the look of your drill. The same maneuver done at a slow lope can have a completely different impact than when done at a dead run. Experimenting with the use of speed effectively in a drill can yield enormous results. As mentioned above under difficulty adjusting your speed during certain maneuvers mid-season is an easy way to chalk up difficulty points when your team is ready. Use of speed should grow with your team!

Attractiveness

Does something have to be difficult to be impressive? No. Attractiveness is defined as how visually pleasing the drill and the maneuvers you have chosen are. The patterns, symmetry, and the method used for transition from one maneuver to another will determine the overall attractive quality of your drill. This is where watching other teams perform really comes in. Just watch as many teams in performances and competitions as possible, which patterns are really pleasing to watch. You will be surprised they are not always the most difficult maneuvers. Some very difficult maneuvers are just not that attractive. Watch and listen for what crowds react positively to. Be aware however that using only maneuvers attractive to spectators may not garner the difficulty points you may need in competition. Choreographing a pleasing competition drill is a balancing act of many components.

Variety

There are four parts to variety; unit size use, changes of pace, use of the arena, and variety in maneuvers used.

Variety - Unit size

Unit size should flow back and forth smoothly to different size units constantly during your drill. One maneuver may be single file while the next has the team building smoothly for a maneuver in fours. Single file, pairs, three's, fours, eights and full team maneuvers should all be used in a well-designed drill. While it may seem easiest to knock out all your maneuvers in a full team abreast at once, it is recommended that you flow back and forth into different unit sizes for successive maneuvers to add depth to your drill.

Variety - Speed

Usually a change of gait once or twice in a drill is enough. Breaking to a trot for an intricate maneuver or for effect in a full team maneuver can be very effective. Many competitions require at least one change of pace during your drill, this is a change in gait, most likely breaking to a trot from the lope. You probably won't have too much trouble finding a place to fit this in. Full team maneuvers like the Chevron or a full team oblique can look impressive at a jog.

Variation of speed can add an effective element of surprise to your program. Increasing the speed of your lope during clean line maneuvers and slowing down your lope during an intricate move adds dimension to your choreography. A drill done entirely at the same speed can lull the audience and judges into a daze, adding a dash of speed is guaranteed to pull them right back into the program. Proper use of speed adds strength and intensity to a drill. Timing the changes in speed to maneuvers and corresponding your music to those changes will produce a dynamic program that will draw in spectators and judges alike.

Variety - Arena Use

For variety in arena use, design your drill to incorporate the use of as many angles and parts of the arena as possible. Resist coming in from four corners for an interchange then coming back in from the corners for a circle. Try to alternate angles using long sides, short sides, corners etc. in a random pattern. If you have a small team, try to space out distance and chose maneuvers that will fill up the arena as much as possible. You do not need to alternate every maneuver but be conscious of your arena use in your design. Not every maneuver needs to be done in the center of the arena. Using only the center of the arena for your maneuvers can result in using a lot of transitions that do little to add to your choreography. Experiment with options like instead of doing one maneuver in the middle break the team in half and do one at each end.

Variety – Maneuvers

Incorporating a wide variety of maneuvers into your drill is essential to an attractively choreographed program. Circles, weaves, interchanges, threads, sweeps, suicide charges, fans, wheels, and charro's, are just some of the moves to incorporate. Don't have too many of any one type of move or multiples of the same type of move in a row. Crowds seem to go crazy for circles but too many in a row will have the judge's heads spinning. Too much of a good thing can be overkill, your team may be great at interchanges but one interchange after another will lose the impact of correctly spaced interchanges throughout your drill. A circle is a circle, regardless of the unit size or arena location look at your drill to see how many circles in a row do you may have? It is easy to not even realize how many circular maneuvers you may have in your program until you sit down with it on paper and count.

Originality

Originality is one area that sometimes gets forgotten. It is always a pleasure to watch a team that comes to their first competition that has been isolated from the drill community. They usually have some refreshing ideas, regardless of how well, or not, they perform them. Many competition teams fall into a rut of using only tried and true maneuvers and just trying to do them better and faster. For the sport of drill to continue to evolve and not stagnate, teams need to be driven to strive for originality in maneuvers and the transitions into moves. If you take a break between seasons it is always fun to have a practice at the season end to try maneuvers team members have made up. Have anyone that wants to come up with a maneuver then try it out. The maneuver may or may not work out as intended but it may also spawn another idea that will. Having this at the end of a season allows the choreographer time to digest ideas and incorporate them into the drill for the next season.

Please view “*What is Difficulty*” presentation under the Judges Symposium topics for more detailed information regarding how the difficulty category is judged in CSHA and how your team can take your drill to the next level.