
SECTION 1: Materials Necessary to Begin

A. Barrel

1. A barrel is an inexpensive and invaluable surrogate horse. It can be made out of oil drums, drums from a car wash facility, or other suitable materials. It will prove its worth repeatedly, not only in teaching vaulting, but when teaching riding as well. The use of a vaulting barrel saves the real horse from unnecessary discomfort and fatigue and makes practice indoors and at home both feasible and productive. The vaulter's progress is hastened because confidence and mastery of the mechanics of the exercises can be developed under optimum conditions of security.
2. For construction of a vaulting barrel, see Appendix 1.

B. Horse

1. A horse is not an essential item at first since a vaulting program can function quite well without a horse for many months. In fact, if the ground and barrel work are interesting, the horse hardly will be missed.
2. Acquisition of a suitable vaulting horse should not present too great a difficulty. With a bit of sorting out and a little sensible training, no great difficulty need be encountered in finding at least one or two Pony Club mounts at least six years of age who will work agreeably at the trot, possibly the canter as well. Long lists of qualifications such as broad back, good gaits and a well set-on neck are academic. The primary consideration is that the horse will good-naturedly tolerate or resign itself to anything on its back. Gaits, carriage and way of going can be improved by training and pads can soften lumpy conformation; but nothing can make up for a horse which finds sport in using Pony Clubbers for target practice. NO STALLIONS.
3. Once a suitable vaulting horse is found, it is critical to protect him from being hurt by beginning vaulters. It is up to the instructor to emphasize kindness to the horse by emphasizing it on the barrel, referring to the barrel as the horse. Vaulters must learn to put their weight on their shins, not their knees and toes; to stay squarely over the horse, not off to one side; and to come down softly on the horse by squeezing his sides gently as they come down. A vaulter should be given a leg up on the horse until he demonstrates on the barrel he can mount quickly, correctly and without dragging on the surcingle. All this, including the leg up, must be insisted on on the barrel "horse" before allowing a vaulter onto the living horse. A good horse can quickly sour if these considerations are not met. The horse is the most important member of the team. Without him, you have nothing. Remind the vaulters of this frequently and make being on the horse a privilege.

4. Vaulting can be learned and practiced at walk, trot, or canter. Availability, training and benignity of horses are generally the main factors in deciding which gait to use for training. Horses tire less quickly at trot than at canter. Official events offer competitions at both trot and canter. AHSA and International competitions are always at canter.

C. Soft Landings

1. From the Barrel:

The barrel should be placed on either a clean, flat surface that is free of rocks and other debris and has soft footing such as carpets or mats, or it can be put in an arena on soft footing. It should be positioned far enough away from walls on all sides so as to have plenty of clearance for safe dismounts and, if indoors, be where the ceilings are sufficiently high to allow for full extension on high flight exercises and standing kür work.

2. From the Horse:

A proper vaulting arena is essential for safety. It should be a clean, flat surface, free of rocks and dirt clods. It also should be on soft, springy footing such as sand, shavings, or well-worked ground. This arena should be sufficiently large to allow for safe dismounts to the outside of the longe circle. Since the longe line is 22-30 feet long, the horse will describe a 45-60 foot diameter circle. Therefore, a 60-80 foot diameter arena with good footing is required. Sand is good in areas of moderate to heavy rainfall; sand and (used) shavings are good in areas with dry weather most of the year.

D. Equipment and Turn-Out

1. The horse equipment should include a snaffle bridle with cavesson or (preferably) a dropped noseband and plain snaffle bit; a vaulting surcingle (web, leather or nylon) with rigid handles and cossack straps; side reins with rubber doughnuts; a cotton (not nylon) longe line; and a longe whip long enough to reach the horse. Two thick Western type saddle pads and foam or sheepskin padding under the surcingle are advisable for the horse's comfort. Put the Western pads together inside a fitted cover made of terry cloth towels. Maximum thickness 2 inches when compressed. Pad may not extend more than 8 inches in front and the surcingle nor past the point of the croup. Bandages and protective boots are optional.

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2. The main consideration in the vaulter's turn-out should be comfort (for both human and horse). Sweat suits, gymnastic suits and leotards are all suitable. Boots or hard-soled shoes are out of the question for work on the horse as these will bruise its back. Smooth-soled tennis shoes are acceptable, but gymnastic or vaulting shoes (canvas or leather) are the best.

E. Horse Management

1. In addition to the adult horse handler/longer, there should always be a designated Horse Management horse handler who may be a Pony Clubber, and may also be a vaulter, and that person should (whenever handling the vaulting horse) wear appropriate footwear. (See current HORSE MANAGEMENT Rulebook.)

2. The responsibility for caring for the vaulting horse should be assumed by the Pony Clubbers (wearing appropriate footwear) taking part in the activity. The care should be in accordance with procedures explained in the current USPC HORSE MANAGEMENT Rulebook.

F. Facility:

1. Spectators must be located a reasonable distance from vaulting circle and judges booth.
2. For Judges, steps and protection from elements must be provided. Refer to AHSA Vaulting Rules, Art. 3709.
3. Arena should be at least 20 meters in diameter.