

# Obstacle course

## OUR EXPERT

Liz Beaddows



Liz is based in Oxfordshire and runs training sessions for TREC in the South East. She competes at Level 2 in individual and pairs classes.

Discover how to maximise your marks in the obstacle section of TREC and learn why this could be the perfect sport for you and your horse



TREC can improve the partnership between horse and rider

If you are looking for a fun discipline to enjoy with your horse or pony this year, then look no further than TREC.

Offering a chance to explore beautiful countryside on horseback and improve your riding skills, it's an equestrian sport that is fast growing in popularity.

TREC fan Liz Beaddows fell in love with the discipline nine years ago and is now a regular competitor as well as holding training courses for riders.

"I was fed up only riding to keep my husband and daughter's horses fit for hunting and cross-country, and decided I wanted to do something myself," she says.

"TREC appealed to me because I wasn't keen on jumping – I had a go and loved it!

"While you may come across a jump in TREC, you don't have to attempt an obstacle if you don't want to. By doing so, you're not eliminated but just pick up fewer marks."

According to Liz, TREC is an activity that anyone can take part in, whatever type of horse they have.

"You can go along and have fun, or take it a bit more seriously and try to win a prize," she says.

"Doing TREC can improve your horsemanship and your horse or pony's manners – they will learn to stand patiently for you to mount or open a gate, for example."

TREC involves three phases – orienteering, control of paces and obstacles. The obstacle section – also referred to as the PTV – is based on challenges you may encounter on a hack and is similar to a handy pony course.

Here, Liz talks you through some common obstacles you might find in a TREC competition and gives tips on maximising your marks...

## TIP from the TOP

If you use a running martingale, you will need to have a headcollar and leadrope over your bridle for the obstacle section.



Your horse should follow quietly on a loose rein

"Line the horse up for the corridor, to give you the best chance of going through without knocking the poles," says Liz.

All ridden or led TREC obstacles are marked out of 10. Seven points will be awarded if you complete the test without making a mistake – knocking off a pole in the S-bend for example.

An additional three marks will be given for style or pace. Some obstacles are timed – such as mounting – and marks will be lost if you take too long to complete them.



Practise the corridor in walk before moving up to trot

## 1 In-hand obstacles

"In a full PTV course there will be 16 obstacles and you can expect at least two or three will require you to lead the horse," says Liz.

Common led obstacles are the bridge, corridor and S-bend.

"With any of the led obstacles you want the horse to follow you quietly on a loose rein," Liz continues. "The handler should keep walking forward and not turn around to face the horse."

The bridge and S-bend should be done in walk, but to achieve maximum marks for the corridor, you will need to trot.

## 2 Mounting up

In this challenge, the mounting block is placed in a marked-out area.

At TREC's entry level, Level one, from the time your horse places one foot in the area, you have 25 seconds in order to mount and place both feet in the stirrups.

Before you lead your horse into the box, you can place the reins over his head, to save a few seconds. If you uncross your stirrups outside of the box, you will lose one mark.



You have 25 seconds to get on board



### 3 Low branches

The aim here is to pass under the 'low branches' (light rails sat on a frame) without the rider touching them with their head, or knocking them off completely.

For top marks at each level of competition, you need to canter. However, if you approach in canter and break into trot, you'll lose points.

"Three 'branches' are set 35cm above the horse's withers at Level one, and the obstacle is adjusted for each competitor," reveals Liz. "At Level two, the branches are lower, with three poles set at 30cm above the withers."

For those starting out, Liz will remove the branches and get them to ride through the stand.

"With any obstacle, it's better to make it nice and easy to start," she says. "For example, make it higher or wider. The low branches can be nerve-racking for a lot of horses, and breaking the exercise down helps them understand what's required and builds up confidence."

The knack for this obstacle is to make yourself as flat as possible and keep your head tucked in on one side.

"While doing it in canter might look alarming at first, it does actually make things easier," states Liz. "In canter, horses tend to elongate their frame and get a bit closer to the ground."

### 5

## S-bend

Everyone stays in walk for this test. If the S-bend is formed of poles on the ground, you'll pick up penalties if the horse taps them with his foot; if the poles are raised you'll only lose marks if you knock them down.

"Ride forward so the horse's head is over the end pole before you turn," advises Liz. "It gives the hindquarters more room to come round. "You want the horse to keep moving without stopping, but aim for a slow walk that allows you to have control of every step."

Negotiate the S-bend slowly and precisely



When training at home, make the dimensions of the S-bend bigger so you're not requiring your horse to make such a sharp turn. Or you can begin with a U-shape and build up to the full obstacle.

"While your horse is working out what he's supposed to be doing, it is OK to pause before each turn," says Liz.

### TIP from the TOP

You will be timed around the whole obstacle course, so trot or canter between obstacles where you can.

## The corridor

When this is featured as a ridden obstacle you can walk or trot, but will achieve more marks for completing it correctly in canter. For Level one, the poles are set 75cm apart.

"Start with the poles nice and wide, and walk and trot through first, before attempting canter," says Liz. "In a competition, take time to line your horse up and stay as straight as possible – every time the horse clunks a pole, you'll lose marks."

"The key to keeping straight is to have the horse between your hand and leg – practising the corridor will improve your centre lines if you do dressage!"

How obstacles are placed within a course can make them trickier to perform, Liz says.

"If you have to make a sharp turn before turning to the corridor, it can be harder to set your horse up correctly," she states.

"Or, you may be required to up your pace to canter for the corridor, then have to pull out to a halt for the 'immobility' obstacle."

Line your horse up to have the best chance of staying straight



### 4

### 7

## Neck reining

Here, the task is to take the reins in one hand and perform a figure-of-eight around two cones.

"The key is to bridge the reins," says Liz. "Then, you can twist your wrist to ask the horse to turn, and you can guide him around the cones using your leg aids."



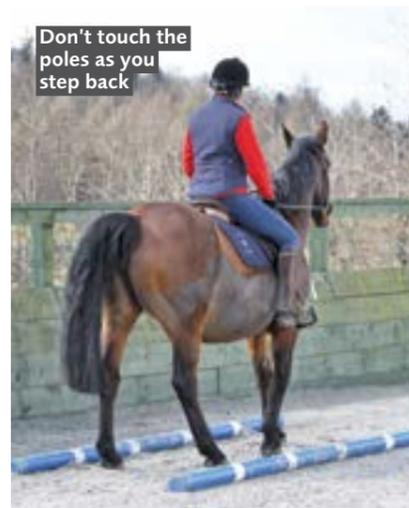
"Looking up and around the circle also helps let the horse know where you want to go."

This obstacle is performed in walk, and will be judged on style as well as accuracy.

Use your leg aids to guide the horse around the cones



Don't touch the poles as you step back



### 8

## Rein back

Even taking a few steps back can be difficult and Liz recommends teaching your horse rein back from the ground.

"In TREC, you are required to walk forward along a one-metre wide corridor – when the horse's front feet reach a mark on the ground, you should stop and rein back for a distance of two metres," she says.

"Aim to stay straight and avoid knocking the poles, which will be costly and lose marks."

"Performing rein back smoothly and with discreet aids will gain maximum marks."

Practising against the fence-line first can help with straightness, or raise the poles at the side.

### 6

## Immobility

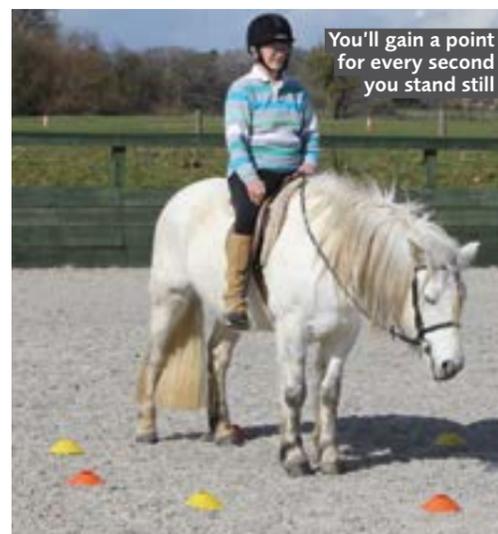
If you ask your horse to halt and give him a loose rein, would he stand obediently, or march off?

In TREC, you are required to halt and stand for 10 seconds – each second gains you a point.

The immobility test is performed in an area that's 2.5m across. Once you enter the area you have 10 seconds to bring your horse to halt and to release the reins.

The horse may graze, as long as he doesn't move his feet. "What can be tricky is if the immobility is done on a bare patch of ground, and there's juicy grass just outside the circle," laughs Liz.

You'll gain a point for every second you stand still



### 9

## Bending

Anyone who did gymkhana games may think this is straightforward, but beware that if you break pace while bending through the poles, you will be heavily penalised.

"Canter is required for maximum marks, but if you don't think your horse can keep the pace right to the end, you'll be better to play it safe and do it in trot," says Liz. "In competitions the bending poles will be within a corridor that you shouldn't step out of." ▶

Canter through the poles if you can maintain the pace



The aim is to walk – not jump – off the bridge



## 10 Wooden bridge



This is another obstacle which you may be asked to do in-hand or ridden.

When tackling a bridge in the saddle, stay in walk and encourage your horse to step on and over it calmly.

"He should step on and off – not jump up or jump down," says Liz. "The rider should keep looking ahead – you will lose marks if you look down."

You can make a bridge at home out of non-slip, safe boards.

"Often, you find that horses and ponies who are good at loading are happy to walk over the bridge,"

Liz adds.

### TIP from the TOP

If your horse refuses an obstacle two or three times, move on. Then, practise at home before your next competition.

## 11 Opening and closing a gate



Position your horse alongside the gate

It is useful to practise opening and closing gates as you may encounter them out hacking, or on a hunter trial course.

When a gate is included in a TREC competition, it won't be latched but will be secured by a loop of rope.

Your challenge is to open and close the gate without letting go of the rope – otherwise, you'll lose lots of valuable points.

"A mistake many people make is to walk straight up to the gate, and meet it head on," says Liz. "Instead, aim for the hinges, then turn your horse so he is standing alongside the gate, with his head towards the rope."

"This is another thing you should practise in stages – get your horse used to standing calmly alongside the gate, and then to you leaning down towards the rope."

Manoeuvring the horse through the gate without releasing the rope requires you to perform a turn-on-the-forehand. This is a skill you can develop on the flat before attempting it at a gate. ■



Don't let go of the rope until the gate is closed



● To find out more about TREC, visit: [www.trecgb.com](http://www.trecgb.com). Thanks to our models Liz Beddows, Rebecca Champion and Lee Austin.