

CONTRIBUTING EXPERT ADVICE: **SHOW JUMPING**

How do you work through first jump-itis?

By Madison Wayda Smith, International Show Jumper and Instructor

The whistle blows and you're heading towards the first jump on course. As you approach, you're looking for the distance, but you don't see it, so you pull; you still don't see it, so you pull again; you still don't see the distance and now you're at the jump with no power, so your horse either stops or, if it's a Saint, adds in a little stride and does its best to get over the fence.

First jump-itis; it's happened to the best of us, but how do we prevent it? It all starts from that first canter step. As we pick up the canter to approach our first jump, what kind of canter do we have? Is it one where your horse is pulling you with all its weight on its forehand or one where you put your leg on and feel like you get no response? Both of these canters will not lead to a successful first jump. We need our horses to be balanced and powering off of their hind ends. As we approach the first jump and notice that the distance is a little short, we have the ability to rock the horse back on their hind end with a half halt to help fit in the tighter distance, or if the distance is a little longer, we have the power coming from behind to push the horse forward to close the gap.

Developing a balanced canter that has power

A canter that has power and is in balance is a canter that gives us options. So what does this canter feel



Keys to Success

- **Focus on the first canter step. Your horse should be balanced and powering off their hind end.**
- **If the distance is short, rock the horse back on their hind end with a half halt.**
- **If the distance is long, power from behind to close the gap.**

like and how do we know we have it before heading to the first jump? You want to feel a connection with the horse's mouth. If your horse is behind your leg or the vertical, you won't feel the little pull on the reins. You also want to feel that when you put your leg on,

the horse responds and moves forward. Practice riding your horse forward for a few strides and then half halting with a supportive lower leg to make sure your horse is balanced and on their hind end. Do this a couple of times before heading to your first jump and hopefully once you're able to feel the type of canter you need, that first jump-itis will be a thing of the past.

About Madison Wayda Smith

Madison Wayda Smith is an International Show Jumper having competed throughout the United States as well as Canada and Puerto Rico. As a Junior she trained with Olympian Mark Watring and Ilan Ferder in Hidden Valley, CA as well as working for Simpson Show Stables, home of

Gold Medal Olympian Will Simpson. At the age of 16, she competed in her first Grand Prix at the Sacramento International Horse Show and won the 30th Annual Foxfield Jumping Derby, being the second youngest winner. She was one of eleven finalists for the United States Equestrian Federation Youth Sportsman's Charter Award for leadership, sportsmanship, commitment, and dedication. At seventeen she traveled to Brussels, Belgium and Copenhagen, Denmark to work as a working student for Tal Milstein and M&K Equestrian. In college, she competed on the Kansas State Equestrian Team becoming an NCAA All American and captain of the team for three years. Presently, Madison lives in Ocala, FL where she has been competing at The World Equestrian Center and the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center in Wellington, FL.

SPECTRA Team Member

Madison has been using Spectra products since 2023. Her favorite products are MEGA-FLX +HA and EPICOAT. Spectra is thrilled to have Madison on our team and as an educational contributor to SPECTRA EQUINE NEWS.



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