



RIDER FITNESS ACADEMY

8-WEEK RIDER PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

Ride Strong • Ride Balanced • Ride Better

VOLUME 1 • STUDENT WORKBOOK

90-minute weekly classes focused on rider strength, mobility, balance, coordination and mounted application.

Welcome to Rider Fitness Academy

Becoming a better rider does not begin only in the saddle. Every stride your horse takes is influenced by your posture, balance, mobility, strength, breathing and confidence.

This eight-week program develops the rider as an athlete while keeping the exercises practical and approachable. All off-horse exercises in this workbook are performed **standing, seated in a chair, or seated on a stable training barrel**. There are no floor exercises.

The goal is not to become a gym athlete. The goal is to become a rider who is balanced, mobile, coordinated, strong enough to support their own position, and able to communicate clearly without gripping or bracing.

A stronger, more balanced rider can become a quieter and more comfortable partner for the horse.

Our Mission

To develop athletic, balanced, knowledgeable and compassionate riders through fitness, education and horsemanship.

Student Name: _____

Instructor: _____

Program Start Date: _____

Contents

Section	Workbook Content
1	Welcome & Program Philosophy
2	Course Information & 90-Minute Format
3	The Equestrian Athlete
4	Rider Posture & Biomechanics
5	Mobility for Riders
6	Balance & Coordination
7	Warm-Up & Recovery
8	Week 1 - Foundation & Posture
9	Week 2 - Strong Legs, Stable Seat
10	Week 3 - Core Without the Floor
11	Week 4 - Mobility & Symmetry
12	Week 5 - Endurance & Posture
13	Week 6 - Coordination & Independent Aids
14	Week 7 - Balance Under Challenge
15	Week 8 - Final Rider Challenge
16	Standing Exercise Library
17	Seated Exercise Library
18	Training Barrel Exercise Library
19	Mobility Library
20	Balance Library
21	Home Training Tracker
22	Fitness Assessments
23	Goals & Rider Journal
24	Certificate & Next Steps

Course Information

Length: 8 weeks **Frequency:** once per week **Class:** 90 minutes

The class is primarily about **rider fitness**. Mounted work is used to help students feel how strength, mobility, balance and coordination change their position and communication with the horse.

Class Component	Time
Welcome & weekly goal	5 minutes
Dynamic standing warm-up	10 minutes
Standing & seated strength	20 minutes
Mobility & flexibility	15 minutes
Balance & coordination	10 minutes
Mounted application	25 minutes
Cool-down & reflection	5 minutes

Program Outcomes

- Improved posture and alignment
- Stronger legs and trunk control
- Greater hip, ankle, shoulder and upper-back mobility
- Improved balance and body awareness
- Better endurance without losing riding position
- More independent hands and legs
- Greater confidence in and out of the saddle

Safety Standard

Use a sturdy, non-rolling chair and a stable, purpose-built training barrel. Barrel exercises are performed only when the barrel is securely supported and supervised. Students should never stand on a barrel.

The Equestrian Athlete

Riding can look effortless when it is done well, but that quiet appearance requires constant small adjustments. The rider must absorb motion, stay centered, breathe, guide the horse and make decisions at the same time.

Five Rider Fitness Pillars

1. Strength	Enough strength to support your position without gripping.
2. Mobility	Enough usable range of motion to follow the horse instead of bracing.
3. Balance	The ability to stay centered as the horse changes direction, speed and rhythm.
4. Coordination	The ability to use hands, seat and legs independently.
5. Endurance	The ability to maintain good position as the lesson continues.

Coach's Tip: Fitness should make your riding softer, not stiffer. The goal is control with relaxation.

My strongest area is: _____

The area I most want to improve is: _____

Rider Posture & Biomechanics

Good riding posture is not a frozen pose. It is an organized, adaptable position that allows the rider to move with the horse.

Neutral Rider Alignment

- Head balanced over shoulders
- Shoulders relaxed rather than rounded or pulled back
- Rib cage stacked over pelvis
- Pelvis centered rather than tipped excessively forward or backward
- Knees soft
- Heels able to sink without forcing the ankle
- Hands carried independently of the torso

Seated Posture Check

Sit near the front half of a sturdy chair with feet hip-width apart. Imagine a string gently lifting the crown of your head. Exhale and let the ribs settle over the pelvis. Keep the shoulders wide and relaxed.

Training Barrel Posture Check

Sit astride the barrel with equal weight on both seat bones. Let the legs hang long. Practice finding neutral pelvis, then gently tip the pelvis forward and backward before returning to center.

My posture cue: _____

Mobility for Riders

Mobility is the ability to move through a useful range with control. Riders especially benefit from mobility in the hips, ankles, shoulders and thoracic spine.

Exercise	Rider Purpose
Standing hip circles	Hands on hips; make slow controlled circles without twisting the knees.
Standing ankle rocks	Keep heel down and gently move knee forward over toes.
Standing open-book reach	Stand tall, arms forward; rotate one arm and upper body to the side.
Seated hip rotation	Sit tall and gently rotate one thigh inward and outward.
Seated thoracic rotation	Cross arms over chest and rotate the rib cage while pelvis stays quiet.
Barrel pelvic clock	On the barrel, slowly move the pelvis forward, back, left and right, then return to center.

Mobility should feel controlled and comfortable. Never force a joint into pain.

Balance & Coordination

Balance is trainable. Good riders constantly make small corrections without appearing busy.

Standing Progressions

- Feet together, eyes forward
- Tandem stance: one foot directly in front of the other
- Single-leg stand with fingertip support as needed
- Single-leg stand while slowly turning the head
- Standing weight shifts left/right and forward/back

Seated Progressions

- Sit tall and lift one heel at a time
- March slowly without leaning
- Reach one arm forward, then sideways
- Turn head while keeping torso centered

Training Barrel Progressions

- Hands on hips while maintaining equal seat-bone pressure
- Arms out to sides, then overhead
- Slow torso rotations
- Alternate heel lifts while keeping pelvis quiet
- Simulated rein position with shoulders relaxed

Balance is not about never moving. It is about returning to center efficiently.

Standing Warm-Up & Recovery

Complete the warm-up before strength or mounted work.

Warm-Up	Amount
March in place	2 minutes
Shoulder rolls	10 each direction
Arm circles	10 each direction
Hip circles	8 each direction
Alternating knee lifts	10 each side
Standing heel raises	15
Supported reverse step	8 each side
Standing torso rotations	10 each side

Cool-Down

- Slow walking and relaxed breathing
- Standing calf stretch
- Supported standing hip-flexor stretch
- Seated hamstring reach with a long spine
- Seated chest-opening stretch
- Gentle seated neck rotation

Rate how your body feels today (1 = stiff/tired, 10 = loose/energized): _____

Week 1 - Foundation & Posture

Weekly Objective: Learn neutral posture, basic balance and controlled breathing.

90-Minute Class Plan

5 min	Welcome & goal
10 min	Standing warm-up
20 min	Standing/seated strength
15 min	Mobility
10 min	Balance/barrel work
25 min	Mounted application
5 min	Cool-down & reflection

Fitness Circuit

- Chair sit-to-stand - 2 x 8
- Standing heel raises - 2 x 12
- Seated alternating knee lifts - 2 x 10
- Standing wall posture hold - 3 x 20 sec

Balance / Barrel Focus

- Standing weight shifts
- Tandem stance with support
- Barrel neutral-seat practice

Mounted Application

- Walk posture check
- Halt-walk transitions
- Hands on hips briefly at walk if appropriate

Home Challenge

Practice 5 sit-to-stands, 10 heel raises and 30 seconds of tandem balance on 3 days.

What felt stronger or easier this week?

Instructor note:

Week 2 - Strong Legs, Stable Seat

Weekly Objective: Build lower-body strength without gripping.

90-Minute Class Plan

5 min	Welcome & goal
10 min	Standing warm-up
20 min	Standing/seated strength
15 min	Mobility
10 min	Balance/barrel work
25 min	Mounted application
5 min	Cool-down & reflection

Fitness Circuit

- Chair sit-to-stand - 3 x 8
- Supported split-stance mini squat - 2 x 8/side
- Standing heel raises - 3 x 12
- Seated knee extension - 2 x 10/side

Balance / Barrel Focus

- Single-leg stand with support
- Slow standing lateral weight shifts
- Barrel long-leg position

Mounted Application

- Two-point at halt/walk
- Posting rhythm
- Walk without stirrups as appropriate

Home Challenge

Complete the Week 2 circuit twice before next class.

What felt stronger or easier this week?

Instructor note:

Week 3 - Core Without the Floor

Weekly Objective: Train trunk stability in riding-specific positions.

90-Minute Class Plan

5 min	Welcome & goal
10 min	Standing warm-up
20 min	Standing/seated strength
15 min	Mobility
10 min	Balance/barrel work
25 min	Mounted application
5 min	Cool-down & reflection

Fitness Circuit

- Standing anti-rotation press with band - 2 x 10/side
- Seated marching - 3 x 10
- Seated opposite-arm reach - 2 x 8/side
- Standing suitcase hold - 3 x 20 sec/side

Balance / Barrel Focus

- Seated march without torso sway
- Barrel arms-out balance
- Barrel torso rotation

Mounted Application

- Walk-trot transitions
- Posting without leaning on reins
- Quiet upper body on circles

Home Challenge

Practice tall seated posture and controlled marching for 5 minutes on 3 days.

What felt stronger or easier this week?

Instructor note:

Week 4 - Mobility & Symmetry

Weekly Objective: Improve hip, ankle, shoulder and upper-back motion.

90-Minute Class Plan

5 min	Welcome & goal
10 min	Standing warm-up
20 min	Standing/seated strength
15 min	Mobility
10 min	Balance/barrel work
25 min	Mounted application
5 min	Cool-down & reflection

Fitness Circuit

- Standing ankle rocks - 10/side
- Standing hip circles - 8 each way
- Seated thoracic rotations - 10/side
- Seated hip rotation - 10/side

Balance / Barrel Focus

- Tandem stance with head turns
- Barrel pelvic clock
- Barrel equal-seat-bone check

Mounted Application

- Serpentine
- Changes of direction
- Compare left and right turns

Home Challenge

Do the mobility sequence on 4 days. Note which side feels tighter.

What felt stronger or easier this week?

Instructor note:

Week 5 - Endurance & Posture

Weekly Objective: Maintain alignment while heart rate and fatigue increase.

90-Minute Class Plan

5 min	Welcome & goal
10 min	Standing warm-up
20 min	Standing/seated strength
15 min	Mobility
10 min	Balance/barrel work
25 min	Mounted application
5 min	Cool-down & reflection

Fitness Circuit

- March in place - 60 sec
- Chair sit-to-stand - 12
- Standing band row - 12
- Heel raises - 15
- Standing knee drives - 10/side

Balance / Barrel Focus

- Balance immediately after circuit
- Barrel posture reset while breathing slowly

Mounted Application

- Sustained posting sets
- Transitions while maintaining posture
- Short two-point intervals

Home Challenge

Take two brisk 20-minute walks and complete one posture circuit.

What felt stronger or easier this week?

Instructor note:

Week 6 - Coordination & Independent Aids

Weekly Objective: Improve the ability to move one body part without disturbing another.

90-Minute Class Plan

5 min	Welcome & goal
10 min	Standing warm-up
20 min	Standing/seated strength
15 min	Mobility
10 min	Balance/barrel work
25 min	Mounted application
5 min	Cool-down & reflection

Fitness Circuit

- Standing opposite knee/hand taps - 2 x 12
- Seated alternating arm/leg patterns - 2 x 10
- Standing band row with staggered stance - 2 x 10
- Seated heel-toe changes - 2 x 15

Balance / Barrel Focus

- Single-leg stand with arm reaches
- Barrel simulated rein/leg cues
- Barrel eyes-up head turns

Mounted Application

- Steering pattern
- Transitions at markers
- Independent hand-position practice

Home Challenge

Practice one coordination drill for 5 minutes on 4 days.

What felt stronger or easier this week?

Instructor note:

Week 7 - Balance Under Challenge

Weekly Objective: Keep a stable base while adding movement and decision-making.

90-Minute Class Plan

5 min	Welcome & goal
10 min	Standing warm-up
20 min	Standing/seated strength
15 min	Mobility
10 min	Balance/barrel work
25 min	Mounted application
5 min	Cool-down & reflection

Fitness Circuit

- Chair sit-to-stand with pause - 3 x 8
- Standing lateral step and return - 2 x 10/side
- Standing suitcase hold - 3 x 25 sec
- Seated band row - 3 x 12

Balance / Barrel Focus

- Tandem stance with arm movements
- Single-leg balance with light reach
- Barrel pattern: arms, turns, posture reset

Mounted Application

- Pole pattern
- Figure eight
- Position changes without rushing

Home Challenge

Repeat your three most challenging exercises twice this week.

What felt stronger or easier this week?

Instructor note:

Week 8 - Final Rider Challenge

Weekly Objective: Demonstrate progress in strength, mobility, balance, coordination and riding.

90-Minute Class Plan

5 min	Welcome & goal
10 min	Standing warm-up
20 min	Standing/seated strength
15 min	Mobility
10 min	Balance/barrel work
25 min	Mounted application
5 min	Cool-down & reflection

Fitness Circuit

- 1-minute chair sit-to-stand test
- 30-second single-leg balance each side
- Seated posture hold - 60 sec
- Standing march - 2 min

Balance / Barrel Focus

- Tandem balance
- Barrel neutral seat and pelvic control
- Controlled reach without losing center

Mounted Application

- Final riding pattern
- Walk/trot transitions
- Posture, steering and balance evaluation

Home Challenge

Celebrate progress and choose three exercises to continue for the next month.

What felt stronger or easier this week?

Instructor note:

Standing Exercise Library

All standing exercises may be performed near a wall, rail or sturdy chair for support.

Exercise	How to Perform
Supported mini squat	Feet hip-width. Hinge slightly at hips, bend knees comfortably, then stand tall. Keep knees tracking over toes.
Split-stance mini squat	One foot slightly forward. Lower a small amount while keeping torso tall. Use support.
Heel raise	Rise onto the balls of both feet, pause, and lower slowly.
Standing knee drive	Lift one knee toward hip height without leaning backward.
Band row	Anchor band securely. Pull elbows back while keeping shoulders down.
Anti-rotation press	Stand sideways to an anchored band. Press hands forward without allowing torso to twist.
Suitcase hold	Hold a light weight at one side and stand tall without leaning.
Lateral step and return	Step sideways, control the landing, then return to center.
Opposite knee/hand tap	Lift one knee and touch it with the opposite hand; alternate slowly.

Seated Exercise Library

Use a sturdy chair placed on a level, non-slip surface.

Exercise	How to Perform
Chair sit-to-stand	Scoot toward front of chair, feet under knees, stand without using hands if able, then sit with control.
Seated march	Sit tall and lift one foot a few inches, then alternate without rocking the torso.
Knee extension	Straighten one knee, pause, lower slowly and switch sides.
Seated heel raise	Keep toes down and lift both heels.
Seated toe raise	Keep heels down and lift toes.
Seated thoracic rotation	Arms crossed; rotate rib cage while pelvis stays forward.
Seated band row	Pull band toward ribs while keeping neck long and shoulders relaxed.
Opposite arm/leg pattern	Lift one knee while reaching the opposite arm; alternate with control.
Seated posture hold	Maintain tall neutral posture while breathing normally.

Training Barrel Exercise Library

A training barrel can help riders practice position without asking a horse to carry repeated balance drills. Use only a **securely supported, non-rolling barrel** designed for supervised rider training.

Exercise	How to Perform
Neutral seat	Sit equally on both seat bones with rib cage stacked over pelvis.
Pelvic clock	Gently tip pelvis forward, back, left and right; return to center after each direction.
Long-leg release	Allow thighs to relax downward without squeezing the barrel.
Arms out / arms overhead	Move arms slowly while keeping torso centered.
Torso rotation	Turn rib cage left and right while pelvis remains centered.
Simulated reins	Hold imaginary reins and practice soft elbows and quiet hands.
Independent aids	Maintain rein position while gently moving one lower leg, then the other.
Eyes-up turns	Turn the head to look toward a target without collapsing the torso.
Breathing reset	Inhale comfortably; exhale slowly while keeping posture tall and shoulders soft.

Never stand, kneel, jump on, or use an unsecured barrel.

Mobility Library

Mobility Drill	Technique
Standing calf stretch	One foot back, heel down, toes forward. Keep torso tall.
Standing hip-flexor stretch	Take a short split stance and gently tuck pelvis until stretch is felt at front of back hip.
Standing side reach	Reach one arm overhead and gently lengthen the side body.
Standing chest opener	Hands behind back or at sides; gently open chest without arching lower back.
Seated hamstring reach	Extend one leg with heel down; hinge forward from hips with long spine.
Seated figure-four hip stretch	Place ankle over opposite thigh if comfortable; hinge slightly forward.
Seated shoulder rotation	Elbows near sides; rotate forearms outward without shrugging.
Barrel hip release	Sit tall and gently allow one knee to soften downward, then switch sides.

Mobility is not a contest. Use a comfortable range and smooth breathing.

Balance Challenge Library

Choose a level that allows good posture. Use fingertip support whenever needed.

Challenge	Task
Level 1	Feet together for 30 seconds.
Level 2	Tandem stance for 20-30 seconds each side.
Level 3	Single-leg stand for up to 30 seconds each side.
Level 4	Tandem stance with slow head turns.
Level 5	Single-leg stand with small arm reaches.
Seated 1	March while keeping shoulders level.
Seated 2	Alternate heel lifts while holding tall posture.
Barrel 1	Arms out while keeping equal seat-bone pressure.
Barrel 2	Slow torso rotation and return to center.
Barrel 3	Simulated reins while moving one leg independently.

My best balance time - Left: _____ sec Right: _____ sec

My balance goal: _____

Home Training Tracker

Aim for short, consistent practice. Even 10-15 minutes can reinforce the skills from class.

Week	Home Practice
Week 1	Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Notes: _____
Week 2	Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Notes: _____
Week 3	Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Notes: _____
Week 4	Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Notes: _____
Week 5	Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Notes: _____
Week 6	Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Notes: _____
Week 7	Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Notes: _____
Week 8	Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Notes: _____

My three exercises I want to keep after the course:

1.

2.

3.

Rider Fitness Assessments

Use the same setup at Weeks 1, 4 and 8. The goal is personal progress, not comparison with other students.

Assessment	Results
Chair sit-to-stand in 60 sec	Week 1: ____ Week 4: ____ Week 8: ____
Single-leg balance - left	Week 1: ____ sec Week 4: ____ Week 8: ____
Single-leg balance - right	Week 1: ____ sec Week 4: ____ Week 8: ____
Seated posture hold	Week 1: ____ sec Week 4: ____ Week 8: ____
Standing march - 2 min	Effort 1-10: W1 ____ W4 ____ W8 ____
Ankle mobility	W1: L____ R____ W4: L____ R____ W8: L____ R____
Barrel neutral-seat control	W1: ____/5 W4: ____/5 W8: ____/5
Mounted posture	W1: ____/5 W4: ____/5 W8: ____/5
Confidence	W1: ____/5 W4: ____/5 W8: ____/5

Biggest improvement: _____

Next fitness goal: _____

Goals & Progress

My Riding Goals

Goal 1

Goal 2

Goal 3

My Fitness Goals

Goal 1

Goal 2

Goal 3

What would make this program a success for me?

Rider Journal

Use this page to record what you notice about your body and your riding.

Which exercise helped my riding the most?

Where do I still feel stiff or unbalanced?

What changed in my position on the horse?

What did my horse seem to respond to positively?

Student Success & Safety

Bring to Class

- Water bottle
- Athletic shoes for fitness work
- Riding boots
- Properly fitted riding helmet
- Comfortable clothing that allows movement
- This workbook and a pen

Academy Commitments

- I will use controlled movement rather than speed.
- I will tell the instructor if an exercise causes pain or dizziness.
- I will use support for balance exercises when needed.
- I will only use the training barrel when it is secured and supervised.
- I will respect my horse, classmates and instructor.
- I will focus on progress rather than perfection.

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian if applicable: _____



CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

Morris's Shadow Mountain Stables Rider Fitness Academy

This certificate is proudly presented to

for successfully completing the 8-Week Rider Performance Program and demonstrating commitment to strength, mobility, balance, coordination and horsemanship.

Instructor	_____
Date	_____

Ride Strong • Ride Balanced • Ride Better

Continue training the rider, and the horse will feel the difference.