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CYCLE GYMKHANAS :

HOW TO PREPARE AND PRACTISE FOR THEM.

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ACCORDING to Major Wingfield, who has written a five-shilling book entitled *Bicycle Gymkhana and Musical Rides*, the origin of the word gymkhana comes from India, and is indeed comprised of two languages. The first syllable is of Greek derivation, but the second is Hindustani. A new and better, because more appropriate, term is "cyckhana," but this is Major Wingfield's own coinage. Gymkhana has lost its true meaning, but in common language it should really mean gymnasium, whereas it now

refers to a club for the furtherance and concentration of sports of all kinds. "Cyckhana" represents a home, school or *manège* where cyclists exercise.

Neither a gymkhana nor cyckhana can be held without an open space, either roofless or covered, where the various cycle performers can exhibit their skill and prowess to an audience. Indeed, the first difficulty in connection with a gymkhana is the



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PLAITING THE MAYPOLE.

occupation of a place or an enclosure. Some gymkhanas have been held in the public thoroughfares without the knowledge of the police, but this is only permissible in lonely places. In Ireland I heard of one being given in a road leading to the seashore, the audience accommodating itself on the surrounding hills, and the police, although thoroughly conversant with the fact, kept conveniently away for a season. Little, if any, traffic frequented this road, but strange to relate, on that particular afternoon, the driver of a seaweed cart wished to pass, so some friendly lads cleared the way, and the driver's hand was judiciously covered with palm-oil in order that he would show his discretion with the aid of a silent tongue, and fail to reply to any pertinent questions asked by too curious townsmen. Of course, such an experience gives piquancy to the gathering, for at any moment the untimely presence of a gentleman in blue would summarily close the proceedings, and cause the party to break up.

If a large country house, standing in its own grounds, with a fairly good lawn or side-walks conveniently situated for the propulsion of a number of cycles, can be obtained, all well and good, or, better still, a private park; but if such is lent, the difficulty lies in keeping the date secret, and yet letting it be sufficiently known privately to ensure a goodly attendance of invited guests. If any publicity is given to the gathering, the whole town will be on the spot hours before the fray to see the fun, and nothing is more undesirable than to have innumerable uninvited guests, accompanied by the riff-raff of the environs, crowding round the gates, climbing the walls, the adjacent trees, anywhere and everywhere, provided any suitable accommodation is forthcoming. Such an audience displays too great enthusiasm in regard to the items selected for the programme, and uproarious guffaws, shouts, vociferous declarations of applause, accompany any variation of the afternoon's entertainment.

It is pleasanter, weather permitting, to have outdoor gatherings, but in large towns this may not be possible, for large gardens or open spaces of any kind are unobtainable, and a hall might be chosen instead. In this case a gymnasium or riding-school is preferable. A

covered building should be at least forty-five by thirty feet for a cycckhana, but forty by twenty-five yards is desirable for some eight riders if the gymkhana is to be held out of doors. Should the performers be exceptionally expert, from twelve to twenty-four riders might join in the ride, but to prevent accident each cyclist should be allowed twelve feet of space, *i.e.*, there should be six feet, or the length of a cycle, between each machine. The surface, whether wood, macadam, grass, or asphalt, should be level.

Apart from the exhibition point of view, the cycckhana solves the question of what shall be done with our cycles in the winter and during the rainy season, when it is scarcely inviting to brave the elements. However well a girl may cycle, there is always room for improvement, for graceful riding only comes with long practice. To be able to manipulate a cycle in a creditable fashion is not everything, for to join in a musical ride it is imperative to be able to ride, not only slowly, but to time with music; also to make small circles, to steer accurately, take either and sometimes both hands off the handle-bars, and mount and dismount at a moment's notice. Such training in a cheerful interior of four walls, accompanied by pleasant companions, will enable the novice to sally forth in more sunny times perfectly self-reliant, and ready to negotiate any difficult manœuvring in the government of her cycle.

The metropolitan girls awheel have in Goy's Porchester Hall Cycling Academy, or Mr. Eamson's Drill Hall Riding School of Hampstead, exceptional opportunities for practising for proficiency in expert riding. Musical rides and drills are but the A B C of a gymkhana, but gymnastic exercises whilst riding bicycles to most lovers of the wheel are quite a novelty. Even to reflect upon the ability to systematically go through a series of dumb-bell, bar-bell and lance performances, and at the same time pedal a cycle with the feet so gracefully, and with such ease as to show no loss of equilibrium or strain to retain it, is sufficient for all but the ambitious enthusiast. The lance exercises perhaps are the most difficult, but not the less graceful if the operator is a skilled

expert, for it is essential to not only change the lance from hand to hand, but to strike it out vigorously, all of course in unison with the harmony of the music, for, be it remembered, the performance when perfected is almost a work of art, and to realise its interest to the audience it is necessary to picture in one's mind some, say, twelve cyclists who, in rhythmical movement, stand ready lance in hand, mount their machines, and wheel forward, and cycle as they go through the exercises, with coloured flags adorning the lances. The effect is as remarkable as it is picturesque.

Now, most girls love skipping, and yet few would imagine it to be possible to skip with a piece of flexible cane whilst mounted on a cycle! Such a feat indeed is difficult, and requires weeks, maybe months, of continuous practice. But some girls are so ambitious, and such accomplished wheelers, that they revel in the delight of showing their prowess awheel, and so well is this performance appreciated that it generally calls forth a round of applause from the amazed spectators.

Have you ever tried to ride a cycle side-saddle? is a question that would strike awe to the novice's mind, yet even skirted cyclists have proved themselves to be so expert in this achievement that their refractory drapery has been wonderfully managed. Indeed, nothing appears to intimidate the enthusiastic gymkhanist, for she will without the slightest hesitation practise very difficult feats of trick and fancy riding that would baffle experienced road-riders. Another exercise is to mount a cycle, ride at a fairly good pace, and dismount without touching the handle-bars, a most expert piece of balancing workmanship.

For effect, and to amuse as well as instruct the audience, it is preferable to start the entertainment with a musical ride, at varied intervals to introduce specialists who are adepts at certain performances, then to follow with companion riding, and to conclude with a maze or some mass exhibition.

Companion riding always creates a sensation, and causes considerable amusement. Take, for instance, the parasol trick. A lady rider sallies forth mounted awheel, carrying her parasol; the sun streams from the heavens (this may be purely imaginary), and a gentleman friend overtakes her, salutes by raising his hat, then shakes hands, after which he relieves her of the parasol, offers his arm, and the pair ride arm-in-arm under its canopy.

Perhaps the most dainty and picturesque sight is that of a musical ride of ladies in fancy uniform riding decorated machines, for if the various colouring is harmonious the effect is very pretty. Riding in harness is another charming spectacle, and for this the shortest cyclists should be placed in front, leaving the tallest to ride in the rear and take the reins. This is an excellent performance for children, who can easily be trained, and become accomplished riders with very little practice.

In addition there are several cycle evolutions such as tilting at rings, bending competition, handkerchief race, plank riding, etc. But the exhibitions of plaiting the maypole, Gretna Green, golden maze, ladies' chain, etc., are the most popular for mixed audiences, for in all these both ladies and gentlemen are required, and the fun comes in when in competitive performances some favoured couple wins. Mention also should be made of the Japanese umbrella race, which is most picturesque and quaint; then there are the polo, bat and ball, the Siamese twins, the tortoise, the bill-sticking, the needle-threading, the egg and spoon, the leading bicycle, the hoop, the telegram, and the obstacle races.

I can record an amusing episode which occurred at a Gretna Green race. Four pairs of riders rode to receive bundles of clothing, which were hurriedly put on by the gentlemen;



A DRIVING PARTY; OR, RIDING IN HARNESS.

then the pair who arrived first at the winning post was presented with two rings, which each had to put on to the other rider's finger. The bundles of clothing contained most elaborate headgear, a trailing skirt, and sundry other articles of adornment, of various tints and hues, and the wearing of these indiscriminate shades gave the unfortunate riders a most ludicrous appearance; but to crown the proceedings the winner happened to be a gentleman who had been paying very marked attention to his lady partner, and the exchange of rings was but a pretty preliminary to their being acknowledged an engaged pair.

The first desideratum, then, for the preparation of a *cyckhana* or *gymkhana* is an open space sufficiently large to accommodate the performers and audience. Next, the expert wheelers should be trained and tested, and their special capabilities discovered, after which a programme of events should be compiled, and such officers as umpire, starter, and judge appointed. The judge will require for the races a special watch. Mr. Shipton, of the Cyclists' Touring Club, has in his possession a split seconds or treble fly-back chronograph, which is an invaluable aid to the correct timing of race events, as it checks and records the respective time of the first and second riders.

Gymkhanas are admirable adjuncts to a charitable bazaar or organisation for the benefit of any specific object, as well as for private gatherings of friends, to supplement garden parties and evening gatherings. If time and talent are lent for the furtherance of sport, a most interesting programme can be arranged, such as the following:

Musical lance ride, which might be composed of eccentric circles, sections charge, living arch, interchanging circles, the new living line, etc.; display of driving on cycles, fancy evolutions, trick and fancy riding, plaiting the maypole; sociable, sunshine, and fancy riding, cycle polo match, etc. A good programme of music should be prepared, a band if possible, and should be composed of an overture for commencement, various selections, galops, waltzes, airs and marches, etc. To give an idea of what music is suitable, I may mention *The Geisha*, *The Greek Slave*, *The Circus Girl*, *The Yashmak*, *The Arctic Expedition*, *The Runaway Girl*, *Belle of New York*, *White Heather*, *Come Lasses and Lads*, *Love and Beauty*, etc.

How to practise—ah, there's the rub! If possible, the probationer should attend a cycling academy, and obtain instruction from competent experts, but if this is impossible, the next best thing is to button-hole a skilled

rider, and receive such tuition as is possible under such adverse conditions. A quiet stretch of country road offers a convenient practice ground, or a garden or asphalted playground. Any old cycle is best for the preliminary performances, for many spills are inevitable during the experimental stages. The formation of a small club, with a captain, secretary, and working committee, might create interest and form a nucleus of practising members, who could add to their number as the occasion offered. The services of at least one expert instructor should be engaged, for one hour's skilled instruction is worth a week's unskilled dabbling. If a lady gymnast, who is an expert cyclist, can be secured for tuition under, or in conjunction with, a man, so much the better. But there is so much learning to be obtained that even a dozen enthusiastic riders could very easily train themselves, and start practising mounting, riding hands on and off, and dismounting in company under the command of the captain, who calls out various directions, to prepare to mount, mount, go large, left turn, circle left, break, circle centre, dismount, etc. If the captain takes sufficient interest in the proceedings to study up the organisation and command of double and single musical rides, her staff has simply to obey her instructions, and practise accordingly in class, but in addition to this much private practice is indispensable. If any rider exhibits any special bent, individual tuition should be bestowed upon her, in order that her peculiar gifts may prove profitable not only to herself but to her companions, for any display is much more interesting if, at certain intervals, the programme can be varied to allow for the exhibition of exceptional prowess of any specially gifted cyclist.



EGG AND SPOON.

In summer or in winter, in spring or in autumn, time may be profitably spent in the preparation of, and practising for, a *gymkhana* or *cyckhana*, and would generally result in the increase of interesting friends, adepts of the wheel, for it is commonly acknowledged now that the cycle has come to stay, and to ride it is as essential in these enlightened days as to be able to walk. Graceful cycling adds grace to the carriage of the person, and the skilful manipulation and easy balancing of the favourite mount give to the rider an enjoyment and an education not otherwise obtainable. Let our girls, then, study how to prepare and practise for *cyckhanas*, so that when the time comes it is possible for them to entertain their friends, and increase the happiness of life by such displays of their prowess of the wheel.

HOUSEHOLD HINTS.

A VERY good use for stale pieces of bread is to grate them down into crumbs, and when making a suet pudding use an equal amount of these crumbs with the flour instead of using all flour. This makes the pudding much lighter.

EVERY bedroom as well as sitting-room should have a bell in working order. It is also well to have a whistle in all the top rooms to attract outside attention in case of fire.

FOR a variety from the regulation cloves in an apple tart, try the finely-cut rind of lemon peel without the inside white part. It gives a delicious flavour to the apples.

OIL paintings should not be hung over a fire-place in use. The heat of a fire injures the picture and causes cracks on the surface.

AT afternoon tea it is a good plan to have a small tea-pot with freshly-made tea brought up for visitors who may come in late.

INDOOR plants in pots should have the surface earth now and then stirred and loosened to air the roots.

FLANK of bacon is more economical and quite as good as the back and other parts usually bought.

NEVER spend a shilling without devoting a portion of it to God's service. The habit will grow, and you will always have a reserve fund for charitable purposes.

IF cork soles are worn in shoes or boots, they should be occasionally taken out and dried before the fire or in the sun, otherwise the damp of the feet makes them both injurious and unpleasant.

WHEN choosing a tea-set, it is more advantageous to purchase cups and saucers of different patterns and colours rather than a set which perhaps cannot be replaced if broken; and if chosen of the same shape but in variety of colouring, they make a pleasant contrast on the table.

HAVE a "surprise drill" every now and then in which a supposed fire or burst pipe or accident needs a remedy. Imaginary demonstrations of cookery, nursing, housework and other useful things can be made very amusing as well as useful, and will be remembered in times of emergency.

EARLY rising is absolutely necessary for the well-being of a household. No work is well done that has to be rushed.

FRYING-PANS should never be washed, but only wiped clean with soft paper after use.