

Fine-tune *your* schooling

Become more in-tune with your horse - both in mind and body - and you'll soon be riding in harmony. **Yogi Breisner** tells us how



THE ART OF training and riding horses is often over complicated, and with so many different training methods around, it's no wonder that some riders lose their way and feel they're not progressing. At the 2015 Centaur Biomechanics Rider Confidence Conference, trainer Yogi Breisner shared a number of methods that we can all use to improve the way we think as riders. He also explained key areas to work on with your horse to ensure your training stays on track.

"The number one thing I want riders to achieve with their horse is 'rideability'," Yogi said. "Obedience out hacking, the ability to turn and gallop across country, or being on the beat in a dressage to music test, all require your horse to be rideable."

This, he explained, all begins with being more aware of how our thoughts influence

our horse's way of going and our ability to train them. Only when you've cracked this can you truly create a horse who's easy and a pleasure to ride. And, according to Yogi, this starts with you thinking differently about schooling.

For instance, it can help riders to think about the time they spend schooling their horse (on the flat or over fences) in the same way as they would a session at the gym.

"In a gym you see various different pieces of equipment that work on different areas of your own fitness," explains Yogi. "It's the same with the exercises you ask your horse to do during your schooling, each one is targeting and working on different areas of your horse's body and overall fitness."

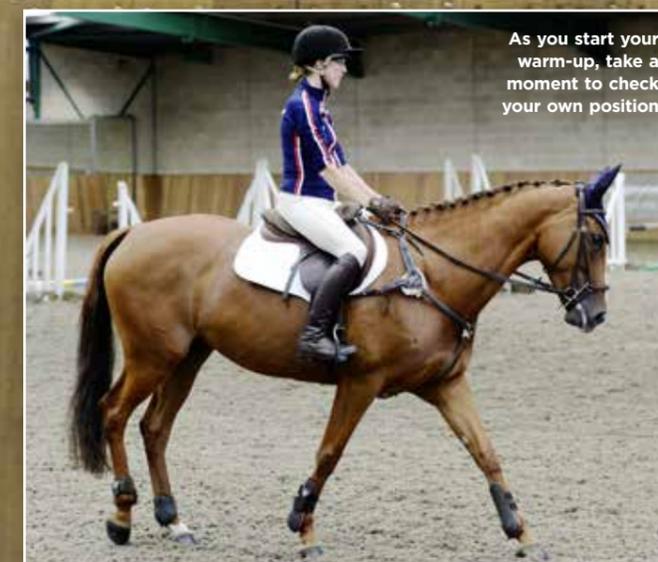
Think... less

Yogi is adamant that getting the best from your horse only happens if you are able to remain focused, so imagine it's just you and your horse in your own little bubble when you're riding and try not to over think what you're asking him to do.

"Imagine you're sitting at home watching the TV and eating an apple," says Yogi. "When you've finished you throw the core from your seat into the bin and it lands in the bin perfectly. Now, imagine I turn up and offer you £100 to throw your apple core in the bin. It now matters and so you're more likely to miss. It's the same scenario when your riding, the moment it matters, the more pressure you put on yourself and this is when mistakes creep in. This is why you need to train yourself to remain relaxed, yet focused, even under pressure."

Utilise your warm-up

As well as giving you clues about your horse's temperament or how he's feeling on a day-to-day basis, spending time in walk while you're warming up is also a good opportunity to check your own position. It can be easy to sit correctly in halt - it isn't until you start moving that your riding position may alter. That's why Yogi encourages his riders to run through a position checklist in their heads each time as they walk round at the beginning of



As you start your warm-up, take a moment to check your own position



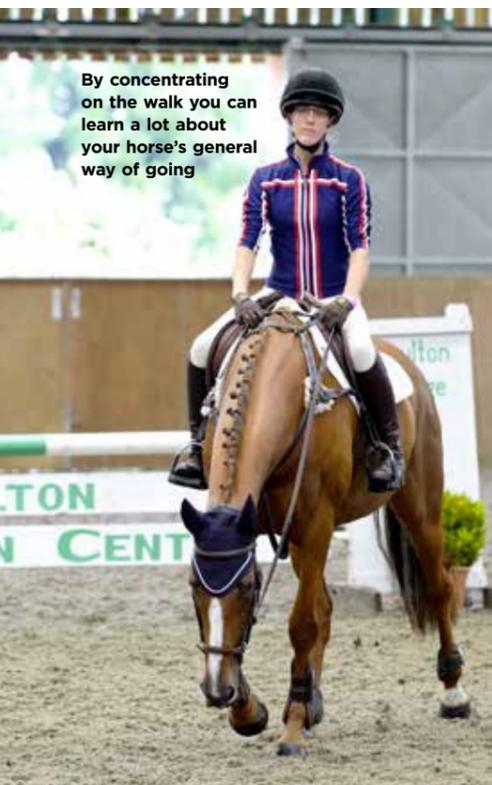
A bit about Yogi Breisner

YOGI BREISNER is Team GBR's eventing manager, as well as being British Eventing's national coach, and training many jockeys and National Hunt

racehorses. Before turning his attention to coaching, Yogi was a member of the Swedish eventing team and won European team gold in 1983. He also finished in the top 10 at Badminton Horse Trial four times.

their schooling session:

- Are you sitting equally on both seat bones?
- Is your spine straight?
- Are your shoulders level?
- Do your stirrup leathers hang straight?
- Do you have even weight into each stirrup?
- Is there equal pressure down both reins?



By concentrating on the walk you can learn a lot about your horse's general way of going

Learn from his walk

Walk is often the forgotten pace, as most of us spend the majority of our schooling sessions in trot and canter, only walking at the beginning and the end with a few short walk breaks to give your horse a breather.

"At the start of every training session I like to see the horse walking on a long rein (on the buckle)," explains Yogi. "This allows me to see the horse moving naturally without interference from the rider. What the horse does can tell me a lot about his temperament and helps me use the best exercises to help him improve."

For example, the chestnut pictured (above) dropped her head, pulled at the reins and rushed off. This tells Yogi that perhaps this horse felt a little restricted by the contact and was probably an anxious type and he suspects she'd like to rush her fences. This horse is almost testing her rider by snatching at the reins saying 'aren't you going to interfere'? With this type of horse it's important to leave them to realise that nothing is going to happen.

Taking time to listen to your horse allows you to learn more about their individual personalities, helping you identify what areas you need to work on, which makes training much easier.

Now create a 'rideable' horse

ONCE YOUR MIND's in the right place and you're more aware of what you're doing as you ride, you'll be better equipped to give your horse clear and effective aids. Ensuring that your riding is consistent and focused is the way to a more 'rideable' horse. A 'rideable' horse is one who you know where all his buttons are, and he knows what the buttons mean - it's a bit like driving a car, you don't have to

think about changing gear, you just do it and the car responds. When you're out of sync with your horse, or not communicating, it's like getting in the car turning on the radio only for the windscreen wipers to come on! Yogi suggests key areas to perfect your riding:

Help him understand contact

Yogi likes to see where the horse wants to carry his head and neck when you take up a



At the conference, Yogi explained that all horses should learn to give and accept a contact on the reins

contact. What we want to see happening is your horse carrying himself, not leaning on the contact. He should bring his hind legs underneath his body, which will then lighten his forehead.

In all paces, the rider uses their legs to activate their horse's hindlegs. Combine this with riding on a consistent contact and your horse should go in a rounded shape, otherwise he'll simply go faster and onto his forehead.

"Your horse needs to learn to give to the contact," says Yogi. "But he'll only learn this if you give him a nice, consistent contact to begin with. If you're struggling with position put your hands quite high up the neck - the bit acts on the corners of his mouth and he'll be less able to evade your contact. When your horse is still and soft, the pressure goes away. If he argues, up the pressure again, being quick to release when your horse softens."

Control the pace

If you like to jump, it's important you can control your horse's canter. Being able to lengthen and shorten his stride will make jumping a course of fences so much easier, but it does take practise to get this right and is an important part of improving your horse's 'rideability'. Ride canter to walk transitions, with a walk pirouette to change direction, before riding a walk to canter transition. This is a simple way to teach your horse to shorten his canter as the direct transitions do the work for you.

Perfect your bending

Your horse must also be able to bend to the left and right. Gymnastic work will help to make your horse equal on both reins. Riding between poles that are set at about three yards apart is a great stretching exercise for your horse, and the constant changing of direction helps you coordinate your aids, too. Stay in walk until this feels smooth and easy for both you and your horse. Then you can move up to trot - this will be hard work for your horse as you're asking him to really flex and use his inside hindleg each time he turns.

Improve his coordination

Riding over poles improves your horse's all-round way of going. "Trotting over five poles set at a distance of three and a half yards will improve his eye-foot coordination and check his natural reactions," says Yogi. "This isn't quite the right distance for trotting, but it encourages your horse to lift his legs a little higher, which is good for his joints and muscles, as well as improving his elasticity."

Reap the benefits

Whatever you do with your horse, whether your schooling on the flat, jumping a course of fences or hacking out, it's important your riding is consistent. Be disciplined and work on the key areas Yogi has suggested and you'll soon have a much more 'rideable' horse, one you'll always look forward to riding. 📧



Being in control of your horse's canter will make jumping much easier



Constantly changing direction as you weave in and out of the poles is great for improving suppleness



Working your horse over poles is an all-round workout for him