

How to...

Horses don't come with a manual, so we've pulled together a host of expert tips to help you tackle everything from riding like a star to coping when things go wrong

Words: *Katy Islip*

Life with a horse can be manic, messy and testing at times, and we'd all like to be better, more confident riders with more time to enjoy our horses. So we've spoken to top riders and trainers for advice to help you improve your riding, boost your horse's confidence, care for him like a pro and make sure you get the most from your kit, lessons and time.



How to... Find the right instructor

An instructor who understands you and your horse makes all the difference to your progress, but finding your perfect match can be a bit like searching for a needle in a haystack. Use these tips from classical rider and BHP columnist Emily Baker to find your ideal instructor.

- **Don't be afraid to ask recommendations** - ask your horse friends why they like their instructor
- **Decide if you want a specialist or someone with a broader knowledge base**
- **If you're interested in competition**, make sure you choose someone who's up-to-date with the current rules for your discipline
- **Investigate their style of teaching** - ask if watch a lesson or don't be afraid to ask questions about the approach
- **Check your instructor's and horse's insurance**
- **Have a trial lesson** and don't be afraid to ask the instructor to be afraid to work
- **Be clear over your fee** - need to feel able to ask the extra help to make sure your instructor is supportive and will actively help you achieve things
- **For more information on Emily and her work visit www.ebakerhorse.com**

Ride like Charlotte Dujardin

Make like Olympic dressage hopeful Charlotte by following her training tips.

- 1 Think about forwardness. "I do lots of transitions to pace and trot, but I like to keep the tempo of my canter."
- 2 Get beside "I also make sure any horses are supple and elastic during, or after, the session with stretches like shoulder in, front leg yield, because it all helps keep them supple."
- 3 Back up the work "I stretch my horses a lot at the start of a session, then ride them up to the bit, do some work then ride them back down and stretch them again. I also use lots of walk breaks so they can relax their muscles - you don't want them to be tired."
- 4 Focus on a good seat "To check up on my position, I'll often ride without stirrups to help keep my seat correct, because you can find yourself gripping a bit - it's good to take your stirrups away and do some work without them to prevent that."
- 5 Monitor your position "We have mirrors in the school which I find a great help, because you can look to see if you're wobbly or need to lift your shoulders."
- 6 Check you're not the problem "It's important to make sure you are straight as well - if you are wobbly it makes your horse wobbly. If a rider says their horse feels stiff but a back check has shown no problems, I ask if they've had their back checked too because it's often them transferring the problem to their horse."



Charlotte's philosophy

"When I ride I try to be very harmonious. I'd like to make it look hard, and I try to let my horses enjoy everything they do. I never force them to do something. I think if he wants to work that's great. If he wants to be perfect, you need a lot of patience and accept every horse is different and allow yourself to be perfect. We always work the horses five days a week in the school, and they don't do more than six minutes. They back do more than six minutes and again on Saturdays with holiday off, and they all go out after they've worked each day - they have a nice life!"

Stay clean at the yard

Winter months at the yard can be messy, especially if you're going straight to work. Try these tips for keeping clean and free of mud on your clothes.

- Have a pair of overalls or waterproof trousers to put on over your clothes.
- Leave your horse's outdoor rug on overnight so it's ready to go.
- Try and avoid muddy areas.
- Try to avoid muddy areas by using a wheelbarrow to transport your horse's feed.
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Get the most from your lessons

Continue learning when your instructor has gone home by following these tips from Emily Baker

- **Write down your questions** - if you have any questions, write them down before the lesson so you can ask them.
- **Take notes** - write down what your instructor says and do it.
- **Review your notes** - after the lesson, review your notes and think about what you've learned.
- **Practice what you've learned** - try to do what you've learned in the lesson at home.
- **Ask for help** - if you're struggling, ask your instructor for help.

Find the right instructor

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- **Don't be afraid to seek recommendations** - ask your friends why they like their instructor
- **Decide if you want** a specialist or someone with a broader knowledge base
- **If you're interested in competition**, make sure you choose someone who's up to date with the current rules for your discipline
- **Investigate** their style of

teaching - ask if you can come and watch a lesson first

- **Don't be afraid to ask** questions about their knowledge/background
 - **Check your potential instructor** is fully first aid trained and has insurance
 - **Have a trial lesson** and don't be afraid to admit if the relationship isn't going to work
 - **Make sure you feel comfortable** talking to them - you need to feel able to ask for extra help
 - **Discuss your goals** You need to make sure your instructor is supportive and will actively help you achieve them
- For more information on Emily and her work visit www.equinethos.com**

Make the most of your lesson!

See how on the opposite page



Photo: Kevin Sparrow

Ride like Charlotte Dujardin

Ride like Olympic dressage hopeful Charlotte by following her training tips

- 1 Think about forwardness** "I do lots of transitions to make sure my horses react to my leg. Transitions within a pace are great too, like changing the tempo of your canter."
- 2 Get flexible** "I also make sure my horses are supple and elastic-feeling, so I'll move them around with exercises like shoulder-in, travers, leg-yield, because it all helps keep them supple."
- 3 Break up the work** "I stretch my horses a lot at the start of a session, then ride them up to the bit, do some work then ride them back down and stretch them again. I also use lots of walk breaks so they can relax their muscles - you don't want them to be tired."
- 4 Focus on a great seat** "To check up on my position, I'll often ride without stirrups to help keep my seat central, because you can find yourself gripping a bit - it's good to take your stirrups away and do some work without them to prevent that."
- 5 Monitor your position** "We have mirrors in the school which I find a great help, because you can look to see if you're wonky or need to lift your shoulders."
- 6 Check you're not the problem** "It's important to make sure you are straight as well - if you're wonky it makes your horse wonky. If a rider says their horse feels stiff but a back check has shown no problems, I ask if they've had their back checked too because it's often them transferring the problem to their horse."



Charlotte competing on Valegro at the 2011 European Championships

Charlotte's philosophy

"When I ride I try to be very harmonious, I'd hate to make it look hard, and I try to let my horses enjoy everything they do - I never force them to do something. I think a happy horse makes the job easier. If he wants to work that's great - I want it to be fun for them. You need a lot of patience, and you've to accept every horse is different and allow yourself to be patient, especially with young horses. We only work the horses four days a week in the school, and they don't do more than 40 minutes. They hack on Wednesdays and again on Saturdays with Sunday off, and they all go out after they've worked each day - they have a nice life!"



Stay clean at the yard

Winter mornings at the yard can be messy, especially if you're going straight to work, so try these tips for keeping clean and free of 'eau de cheval'.

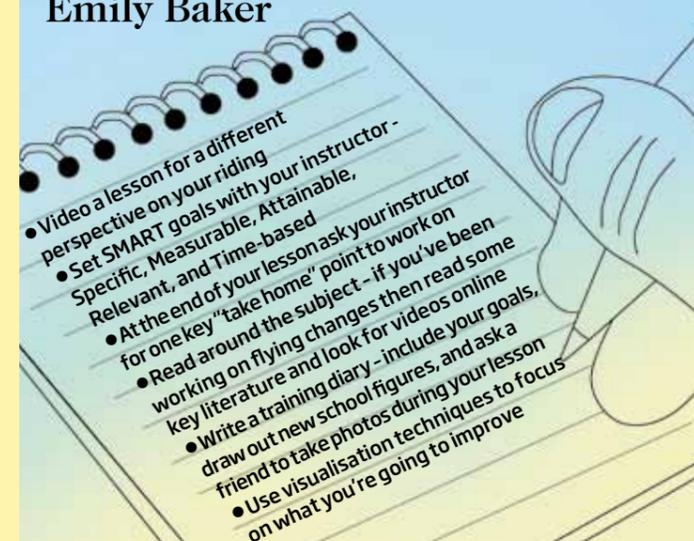
- Have a pair of overalls or waterproof trousers to pull on over your clothes
- Leave your horse's outdoor rug on overnight (unless it's soaked). This will also help it

dry ready for the next day

- Fill haynets en masse each weekend and invest in a hay bag to move them each day
- Keep a bucket of water by your stable for easy stable bucket refilling
- Invest in a pair of rubber yard gloves or surgical gloves to keep hands clean
- Use dry shampoo to freshen up your hair

Get the most from your lessons

Continue learning when your instructor has gone home by following these tips from Emily Baker



Ride a winning jump-off

In a jump-off every second counts, but how do you balance timing and accuracy to clinch that red rosette? Trainer and show jumper Tom Davison shares his winning tips.

At home

- Dressage will really benefit your jumping. Being able to lengthen and shorten strides is vital; work to keep it smooth with the hindquarters engaged
- Use leg-yielding and pirouettes to improve your horse's hindquarter strength and to keep impulsion through turns
- Jumping exercises should include jumping on an angle - use placing poles before the fence to build confidence
- Practise turning to fences using the dressage exercises to maintain impulsion. Also vary the number of strides - start with a three-stride approach, then try two strides and four strides. Practising this means you can decide your strides rather than leave it to chance

At the show

- When walking the course, walk the lines you intend to take and other potential lines - think ahead to a jump-off and take the opportunity to get a plan together
- Use your horse's strengths and weaknesses - if he's a strong vertical jumper go for tighter turns, but if oxers are a challenge take a wider turn or better approach
- Rhythm is key, not going flat out. If you rush, you can miss turns, put your horse on his fore-hand and have a poor rhythm
- If you're unsure about a turn, do a dummy run as you enter the ring - you've got 45 seconds after the bell which is plenty of time for a practice. Send him on and collect him to check he's on your aids, then get into the canter you'll be keeping throughout the round

Visit www.davisonquestrian.com for more information on Tom's work

Fall off as safely as possible

Exercises to help you cut down the risk from falls

Riding is a risky business, and falling off an occupational hazard, but thanks to a new equine simulator, riders can learn how to deal with a common type of fall as safely as possible. The British Racing School (BRS)

has the UK's first Equichute, which reproduces a 'front door' fall over the horse's head with the aim of getting riders to instinctively roll as they fall, with head tucked in and dominant arm extended across the body. Before trying the simulator, trainees do exercises you can try at home - add in your skull cap and body protector once you're comfortable.

Safety first



Only try these exercises if you're fit and well, and always practise on a gym mat or other suitable surface, with plenty of room. Stop if you experience any pain. If in any doubt about your ability, consult your doctor first.

- 1 Practise forward rolls** Falling off generally means being upside down, which can be confusing, but getting used to this sensation means you're better able to influence how you fall.
- 2 Eliminate hesitation** Once you've mastered forward rolls, work to make it instinctive by walking into them - stride purposefully forward and just flow into it. Getting rid of any pause can mean the difference between landing face first and falling safely.
- 3 Get friendly with an exercise ball** Try rolling over an exercise ball in the position you'll be trying to adopt when falling. Kneel down in front of the ball then drape your body over the top. Curve your dominant arm out and around the ball and tuck your head down in the opposite direction, curving your back. Push yourself up and over - once you've got the hang of this, try walking up to the ball, dropping into position and rolling over.
- 4 Try a judo throw** Assume the position you've been practising with the ball, with your arm extended out and across your body with your head tucked in, and go straight into a forward roll. This uses the same principles as judo. At first it feels like you're just throwing yourself upside down, but it helps convince your brain the action is less scary than it thought and makes you less likely to panic.

Did you know?

Putting your arm out and across your body dissipates some of the force of your fall, and vastly reduces the chance of injury

Learning how to fall

The new Equichute is designed to help jockeys learn how to fall if they find themselves going over their horse's head



Photo: BRS

For more information about BRS fall training call 01638 675907, email courses@brs.org.uk or visit www.brs.org.uk



Be a savvy shopper

Check out our tips for making your money go further, while making sure your horse doesn't miss out

- Salt away a bit of cash each month to offset big purchases - this will also help cover emergency buys like replacing shredded rugs
- Think about whether your purchase is a need or a want; if it's the latter and you're feeling the pinch, be strong and wait until you can afford it
- Make sure you get the right product at the right price - check out the Your Horse gear guide each month, and look for customer reviews. If you think it could be a fad item, talk to your instructor and friends about whether they think it's worth it - non-horsey friends will be particularly candid!
- If you can, try before you buy - for example with a new bit, ask around to see if you can borrow one to check it suits your horse before you commit
- Raise cash for new goodies by selling stuff you don't use anymore. Use an online auction site or find a tack car boot sale you can take everything to - get friends involved to make travel and stall costs economical. When you're there, keep an eye out for things you need - you might just pick up a bargain

Top tip

Many bit banks let you try bits on a 30-day trial - visit www.horsebitbank.com



Carry out a 30-minute makeover

If you've caved in to a last-minute plea to join a team chase, then 30 minutes is enough to transform your horse with these tips from British Showjumping coach and rider Mia Korenika.

- After a quick brush-over, trim whiskers, bridle path and any tufty bits of mane over the withers. No time to

plait? Tidy up the mane and brush out the tail before trimming the end

- With a full bath out of the question, instead shampoo your horse's legs from knee and hock down, and spot-clean any stains elsewhere

- For a polished look, get a bucket of water as hot as you can stand and add a

good dollop of Dettol. Soak a small towel and wring out the excess, then wipe your horse all over - the heat of the water gives a bit of a steam clean and the Dettol lifts off grease. A flick over with a body brush once you're done will reveal a super shiny coat

- Finish off with a slick of hoof oil

Scrub & polish
It's easy to forget grooming is an important part of bonding with your horse, so combine some quality time with a good grooming session. Mia recommends giving your horse a thorough going-over with a rubber curry comb - he'll appreciate it!



Don't let fear spoil your enjoyment

Face your fears

Confidence coach Ian Banyard looks at how to control your fear

For more info, visit www.wired4success.co.uk or search for Ian Banyard's Confidence Clinic on Facebook

Whether your bête noire is bucking or jumping, don't let fear limit your riding activities. Follow Ian's four easy steps to help you be a happy, confident rider

Building confidence starts with understanding how the three parts of our brains work; the reptilian part automatically triggers our fight or flight reaction to a threatening situation; the mammalian produces emotional responses including fear; and the rational allows us to think logically about things. Ian says: "The key is getting those three things working together, with the logical brain in the lead."

If you've had a fall or scary experience, Ian advises against hopping straight back on as you'll still be upset. Instead, take some time to visualise your riding going well, thinking about all the times it's been fine and you've been confident. Don't let your brain turn one bad experience into your future expectation

- instead focus on your riding and why you do it to rebuild your confidence.

In the saddle, you're in charge - the horse's brain is mammalian so you need to be the rational side of the partnership, leading and thinking ahead - use Ian's tips to cope with fear when you're riding.

1 Take 10 deep breaths to slow your heart rate - if you get nervous your horse will pick up on that. Remember you're in it with your horse, and he'll be trying to work out what's going on, so transmit calm by being calm yourself. Ian says: "If something's happened and you're ok, it's all about how quickly you can bring yourself back down."

2 Acknowledge what's happened and your emotional reaction, then think about what you need to do next,

whether that's getting off or just walking on. Remember you're in charge - both of yourself and your horse, and he needs you to be in control.

3 Calm down by talking soothingly to yourself the way you would your horse. Ian says: "Riders can be very good at talking to their horse to calm them, but they often don't do it for themselves."

4 Look ahead to where you want to go. Think about what needs to happen next and take control. Bear in mind if you don't control your brain it can run away with you the way a horse would.

Top tip
If you feel you're getting nervous, smile - it helps you relax

Find the right farrier

It can be hard finding the right person to tend your horse's feet, but the Farriers Registration Council suggests the following guidance.

- Asking questions shouldn't be a problem, so have an in-depth discussion with your potential farrier about your horse's requirements. When it comes to changes or treatments, you should understand what is being proposed and why, how it will be done and any possible side-effects

- Also discuss terms and conditions, fees, payment methods and contact arrangements with your

prospective farrier - you need a clear understanding of the service you can expect right from the start

- Only farriers registered with the council can legally practise in the UK, so look for the red registration badge on their windscreen, ask to see their personal registration card or look them up on the council's website

For more information and to search for registered farriers in your area call the council on 01733 319911 or visit www.farrier-reg.gov.uk



The right farrier will be a great asset to you and your horse



Carry out a tack safety check

For more information visit www.mastersaddlers.co.uk and click on 'Saddle Safety'.

Tack cleaning can be a chore, but regularly ensuring everything is safe could save your life. Master saddler Kay Hastilow has this advice.

Bridle

Crucial areas are those holding the bridle together, so check:

- Straps are in good condition
- Buckles are secure and aren't bent.
- Stitching is sound
- There's no excessive wear on the turn where the cheekpieces and reins attach to the bit
- The bit has no sharp edges and isn't wearing through

Saddle

Points of strain are potential failure points so check:

- Girth straps for wear, especially on the back, and make sure holes aren't splitting. Check all stitching, and that all straps are securely stitched to the girth web
- Buckles and stitching on girths, ensure fabric girths aren't worn and keep leather ones supple
- Stirrup bars are sound and keep thumb bars well oiled
- Stirrup leathers for wear on the turns, and stitching and holes

How to...

Cope in an emergency

An emergency situation can send the most level headed of us into a tailspin just when we need to think clearly, but these tips from equine vet Charlie Briggs, of Hale Veterinary Group, should help.

- 1 Stay calm as your horse will pick up on your fear. If you've prepared an emergency plan and contacts list, you can fall back on this and be confident you won't forget something crucial.
- 2 If your horse is going berserk, make sure you and others are safe. Don't do anything heroic - if you're hurt you can't help your horse.
- 3 If you're not sure you need the vet, call for advice - they won't mind running through questions to assess when or if they need to come.
- 4 If your horse is bleeding heavily apply a pressure bandage immediately. If you're rusty, speak to your vet or instructor and brush up your technique, because bandaging badly can be worse than not bandaging at all. The first few hours are crucial for wounds and if the vet can't come immediately what you do in the first 30 minutes can be key.

Emergency kit must-haves

- Sterile bandages, including gauze and cotton wool for padding
- A clean towel or sheet, which can be ripped up for a tourniquet
- Tools such as wire cutters and scissors
- Sterile water to flush wounds
- A torch, especially a head torch to leave both hands free

Check out

www.yourhorse.co.uk/emergency for tips on how to be prepared



Make your horse more confident

Coping with a nervous horse can take the fun out of riding, but with a little know-how and patience you can teach your horse to cope with once-scary situations, says Yorkshire-based behaviour specialist Sarah Kreutzer



If your normally calm horse suddenly starts spooking, Sarah recommends a medical, including back, tack and teeth, as the problem could be an underlying issue you're not aware of. Once you're sure nothing's wrong, try Sarah's "teach, practise, test" concept, which is split 15%, 80%, 5% time-wise.

Horses respond to pressure by returning it. This is why, when your horse treads on your toe and you try and push him away, he leans on you more.

The teaching phase uses this natural response to build confidence - for example if your horse is scared of plastic, work on him very closely with a plastic bag, rubbing him with it somewhere like

the withers where other horses would groom him, and progress to the rest of his body when he gets used to it.

Sarah says: "When he gets it wrong and moves away, stay with him and maintain pressure, and when he does what you want you can move it away as a reward."

The key is teaching your horse there's nothing to be afraid of, without making it worse by pushing him too far.

Once your horse has learnt not to be scared in close proximity, you can begin to move the offending item away, for example shaking the plastic bag nearby. The trick is to start gently using the pressure-and-release system.

For the practise stage, surround your horse with the problem - hang bags in his stable, attach them to his buckets, the field fence and around the school. Sarah says: "You want him to get used to seeing it and to know it's not a threat. If he's still frightened, you haven't taught him enough, so go back a stage."

The final phase is just 5% of the work - placing him in a challenging environment to test his new knowledge. Don't move on too soon though or you risk undermining all your hard work.

Sarah says: "If you haven't taught your horse not to be scared and he's put straight into a test situation they've got little chance of dealing with it."

Enjoy happier hacks by teaching your horse to overcome his fears

Improve your position in five minutes

If you don't have regular lessons, bad position habits can sneak in, so zap them before they start with these tips from performance analyst Russell Guire of Centaur Biomechanics

Body

- Think of lifting your chest and sitting tall through your ribcage, allowing your shoulders to be softer. Elongate your neck - imagine a piece of string is attached to the top of your head and is pulling you up
- Keep your head and chin up, look where you're going and keep breathing deeply and steadily, with a strong abdomen

Relax

- Smile and enjoy it! If you're relaxed and happy your position will be much better

Hands

- Carry your hands forward with a soft, elastic elbow. If you feel tight, roll your shoulders and exhale

Seat bones

- If it's safe to do so, sit with your feet out of the stirrups and find your seat bones. Have a walk around, using your seat to move with the horse. Stretch your legs out, letting the weight fall into your lower leg

Top tip
Run through these tips each time you get on to make sure you get it right

For more information on Russell's work and his new Position Perfect clothing range, designed to help improve your position, visit www.centaurbiomechanics.co.uk