

Celebrity Q&A

TRAINING & COMPETING

Dodson & Horrell Brand Ambassadors Laura Collett, Lee Pearson and Yazmin Pinchen share their advice on training and competing

If you are looking for advice to improve your horse's performance or overcome issues in the training arena or at competitions, who better to consult than three of the leading riders in their field – eventer Laura Collett, para-dressage star Lee Pearson and showjumper Yazmin Pinchen.

The riders – who are Brand Ambassadors for Dodson & Horrell – have come to the aid of three *Horse magazine* readers who are looking to boost their horse's performance.

They want advice on how to tackle various aspects of training and competing.

Last issue, Dodson & Horrell veterinary surgeon, Chloe Casalis de Pury, analysed the horses' diets and made suggestions for improvement, to provide the right amount of energy and nutrients to keep them healthy and support their workload.

Now, it's the turn of Laura, Lee and Yazmin to pass on their knowledge, starting with keen event rider Melanie Pecheur's queries...

Our expert panel

The Dodson & Horrell Brand Ambassadors sharing their tips and advice are:-

Laura Collett

Top event rider Laura has competed on junior, young rider and senior teams for Great Britain.



Lee Pearson CBE

Para-dressage star Lee is a 10 time Paralympic Games gold medallist, six time World Champion and three time European Champion.



Yazmin Pinchen

Leading showjumper Yazmin has ridden for Great Britain as a young rider and on senior Nations Cup teams.



For tailored feeding advice for your own horse or pony, visit: www.dodsonandhorrell.com or tel: 0845 345 2627.

THE EVENTER

Melanie Pecheur and Orion

Melanie started eventing her six-year-old gelding Orion, an Irish Sports Horse, in 2015. This year, Melanie aims to move up to BE100 level, before trying a Novice section. She would love to compete in a one-star event in the future.



Repetition is the key to success over angled fences

Practising angled fences

Q What is the best way of practising angled fences, so my horse is used to them before we get to a competition?

LAURA SAYS Begin by schooling over a small upright fence. Gradually increase the angle at which you approach it.

Once you feel confident that the horse is happy and staying on the line you want, introduce combination fences that require you to hold a good line on an angle.

It's all about repetition and practice until you and your horse trust each other enough to be able to stay on the line you want.

One of the most important things is to not over complicate the exercise and to make it a work in progress. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day!



Cold therapy after an event helps the tendons to recover

Recovery programme

Q Following a competition, I want to give my horse the best after-care. What routine should I follow for the few days after a one-day event?

How much time off should my horse have, when can I restart his work, will he need feeding differently and should I provide any special care for his legs?

LAURA SAYS I always ice the horses' front legs after going cross-country, to help the tendons recover. My preferred method is to place a jay cloth next to the skin, then the ice, followed by a boot to keep it in place.

Overnight I will use ice clay, wet paper, pads and bandages.

My horses have the following day off, and usually get turned out in the field. I then hack them for two days before going back to their normal work/training routine.

Varying a horse's workload will help him stay supple



Compiling a winning fittening programme

Q Can you suggest a useful fittening programme, to help me best prepare my horse for the new season? Also, how do you keep yourself fit?

LAURA SAYS I like to vary my horses' work to keep their bodies supple and all their muscles working. A varied programme also keeps their brain occupied.

Even when I'm having a schooling day, I will use trotting poles to help a horse stay active in his hindlegs and get him lighter on his feet.

I do lots of gymnastic jumping over grids, which is a great way of getting a horse to use his whole body.

Where my fitness is concerned, I go to the gym before the competition season starts and work on my core strength and cardio fitness.

How often should I compete?

Q During the eventing season, what is the correct balance to strike between training and competing?

LAURA SAYS I believe training never stops. Even when you're out hacking you can practise transitions, leg-yielding, lengthening and shortening of the strides. All of these will help improve the horse and his paces.

It does depend on the individual horse as to how many competitions he needs to do. With young horses, it can be beneficial to go to events quite regularly for a few weeks and then have a bit of a break so they can process what they have done.

My older, more experienced horses don't need to run so often because they know their job and I like to save their legs for important competitions.

Should horses have a break?

Q I'm unsure whether to give my horse a break at the end of each eventing season. If I do give him time off, how long should it be for? My horse is six years old.

LAURA SAYS I think it's important for horses to have a proper break at the end of the season.

All my horses have a rest, and are turned out in the field for six weeks.

They will go on the horse walker every day for two weeks before starting work.

When they start being ridden again, I do one month of hacking and then start schooling and jumping. I gradually build up their regime until they are back in full work and ready to start gallop work.

THE DRESSAGE RIDER

Lyndsey Abercromby

Lyndsey owns "very willing" Welsh Section D Rocky, and the pair competes in dressage at Medium level. The rider plans to make the transition from unaffiliated to affiliated tests, following a break from competition.



The horse should maintain a clear four-beat walk during a pirouette



Perfecting pirouettes

Q What makes a great walk pirouette different from an average one? And what are the common mistakes to avoid?

LEE SAYS Here are the ingredients to a great pirouette:-

- The horse is in shoulder-fore;
- The walk is collected and the horse maintains a four-beat rhythm and activity;
- The horse accepts the inside rein, to assist in correct inside flexion and bend. The outside rein controls the shoulders and speed through half-halts;
- The rider moves the outside of the horse towards the inside through an outside rein contact. The outside leg guards the quarters from falling out, so the horse steps forwards and inwards, creating a pirouette;
- The inside leg on the girth helps to encourage bend and engagement.

Mistakes can happen when the horse is not accepting the leg and rein aids before and during the movement.

If the rider loses activity and the horse loses the four-beat walk rhythm, the horse may pivot on the inside hindleg.

Start by breaking down the movement by collecting the walk until you can stay straight between two reins.

Ride it with a straight horse at first. Do quarter pirouettes in a square shape so the horse doesn't get fixed and pivot, changing the size of the squares.

Non-riding homework

Q What can I do when I'm not riding to improve my dressage? I regularly do yoga and fit in a couple of Pilates classes a month to work on core strength. I've enjoyed writing for judges at different levels of competitions and have learned a lot through doing that.

LEE SAYS Writing for a dressage judge is a really useful way of picking up extra tips.

Something I do is to watch YouTube videos of professional riders. You can access training clips or watch them compete. I then take away the information and aim to use it to improve my own riding and knowledge base.

I also watch videos of myself, as what we feel is not always what others are seeing.

Introducing flying changes

Q At what stage in a dressage horse's training would you introduce flying changes? We regularly do simple changes and changes through trot, and Rocky's counter canter is becoming more established.

He will occasionally pop a change in for fun if he's feeling fresh on a hack, but I'm not sure when or how to introduce them in the school.

LEE SAYS Every horse is different, so timing of training anything new is unique to that horse.

You say your horse pops in the odd change and that's great, as it means he knows how to do a flying change. Never tell him off for that.

Horses who don't yet understand flying changes may need a little extra help, which is why you have to train every horse differently.

Try riding your horse in counter-canter and then change his flexion and bend towards the

inside of the arena. When you get to a corner, swap your leg aids over as if you were riding true canter. This might instigate a flying change.

Some horses are so balanced in counter-canter that they are reluctant to change. In this case you could try cantering over a pole on the ground to invite him to make a flying change.

Don't worry if the horse changes late behind or becomes disunited. As he gets stronger and more balanced and understands what you want, you'll start to get a true change.

How do I achieve self-carriage?

Q Rocky thrives on variety in this workload, and I try to do a balance of activities. We school two or three days a week, and I'm keen to introduce more variety, while improving our dressage. Can you recommend any pole work exercises? I'm working on his self-carriage, so anything to develop this would be good.

LEE SAYS I don't do much polework, but we do in-hand work, such as lungeing, long-lining and leading the horses out on the roads.

Lungeing is a great opportunity to watch your horse's way of going and make tweaks.

On the lunge you can work on getting the horse to be more engaged, improve balance, encourage him to use his hindlegs more and create bend on smaller circles.

All training is interlinked, so on the lunge you could work on a flying change reaction every time the opportunity arises.

For example, if Rocky gets disunited or picks up the wrong lead, don't always go back down to trot. Engage the horse and encourage a change back to true canter, thus giving him an idea about changes when back in the saddle.

How do I improve my hand position?

Q I have a tendency to either fix my hands or to fidget with them, and sometimes I really struggle to make them do what I tell them to! Do you have any tips for improving the issue?



LEE SAYS This can be a chicken and egg situation! What's creating the fidgety hands – is it your horse not accepting or understanding your hand aids? Is your body not in balance, or could it be some stiffness in your shoulder, elbow or even wrists or hips that's creating an inconsistent contact?

I find working the horse on a smaller circle helpful. This creates more bend through the body to unlock back and muscle tension. If the horse is engaged and working forward it helps him accept the contact.

Some people get confused about where the hand should be. Your wrists/knuckles should be the same distance apart as the bit in the horse's mouth and your hands should never go lower than the wither. Aim to create a straight line from your elbow to the bit.

To create bend, take your inside hand to your inside hip bone.

THE SHOWJUMPER

Amy Oblajulu and Tish

Amy was given Tish, a six-year-old, 17hh mare as a Christmas present in 2014. Amy plans to compete in showjumping at 90cm over the winter, and says Tish is "bold but not very careful".



Maintaining canter rhythm

Q I struggle to keep the same canter rhythm around a course. I tend to panic at related distances and doubles and end up too far away or too close. How can I stay calm and maintain the same canter?

YAZMIN SAYS My dressage trainer Dane Rawlins tells me to count 'one, two, three' over and over, in time with the canter.

Breathing is important. I often don't breathe enough around a course of fences. The more you practice jumping around courses the easier it will become, too.

Gridwork is a great way of improving your confidence and eventually you will start to find things smoother and less nerve racking.

I often practise over grids and distances where I can shorten and lengthen, keeping the fences small so it doesn't matter if I get it slightly wrong.

Should I lunge over poles?

Q Would you recommend lungeing over poles or fences? Or, is it more beneficial to practise jumping when in the saddle?

YAZMIN SAYS I don't lunge my horses over poles or fences. I do use lungeing as a bit of



Keep fences small during training to build confidence

extra fitness training, though. Otherwise, I just ride my horses.

I think you can achieve more on the horse and feel more than you can on the ground.

If I have a young, spooky horse I might loose jump them but otherwise I will ride.

If you have a horse that is stopping with you, loose jumping or lungeing them over a jump could help the horse's confidence, but it depends on the individual horse.

Getting the right lead

Q Do you have any tips on getting my horse to land on the correct leg after a fence?

YAZMIN SAYS Step into the left stirrup over the fence to land left, or into the right stirrup to land on the right leg.

Open your left (or right) hand when you step into the stirrup and look up to help your horse understand where you're going.

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Perfect polework

Q Do you have any polework exercises I can try on my own?

YAZMIN SAYS Set out two poles a good distance apart, and practise lengthening and shortening your horse's stride.

As you canter over the poles, count how many strides you take between them. Then, take one more stride by shortening the canter. Next, lengthen to take a stride out.

Raised poles will help strengthen the horse's back and uses different muscles.

I use trotting poles to warm up and warm down, and also ride serpentine between the poles.

I don't tend to jump too much at home but when I do, I keep the jumps small.



Lengthen and shorten the canter over poles

How can I make my horse more careful?

Q My mare is still very green over show jumps. While she is bold and doesn't look at a thing, she knocks lots of poles. What can I do to make her more careful?



Gridwork can teach a horse to become more careful over fences

YAZMIN SAYS Try doing some gridwork as it gives horses confidence and teaches them to go slower.

Start off small, especially as your horse is young and fairly inexperienced.

Begin with a cross-pole going into

the grid, to keep her straight, and have a ground line in front.

Then, seven yards on build a taller vertical, followed by another seven yards to an oxer.

Stride out 3.5 yards and place a plank on the floor, in the middle of both distances.

Once your horse is happy with this, add a few bounce elements.

WE'LL LEAD YOU THROUGH THE CONFUSION

If you're unsure of how to best move forward with your horses nutritional needs, please call 0845 345 2627

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