

Move it like... Harry Meade

The 32-year-old eventer on building confidence, teaching horses to jump in cold blood and the value of working on grass

Working on grass

- Between April and October the horses work mostly on grass. My yard is surrounded by hills and springy old turf, which is great for soundness. Schooling in the open means you don't rely on a wall to do the job of the outside leg. It's easier to teach a horse to extend and you can use undulations in your training.

IN training, I focus on how a horse moves naturally. I do a lot of stretching, allowing freedom of the neck for balance, but keeping the hind end engaged. I concentrate on the quality of the three paces and the transitions rather than on specific movements, working on softness and lightness.

I aim to develop suppleness through the ribcage rather than the neck, using travers and renvers in all three paces. This develops core strength and coordination in both horse and rider.

When jumping I do a lot from trot to encourage the horse to stay in a relaxed rhythm and use power to create the jump, rather than momentum. This requires horses to be very deliberate with their technique. On the approach I look ahead rather than at the fence to encourage the horse to judge the distance and think for himself, enabling me to stay still and quiet.

When galloping I keep the horse up through the shoulder and balanced. This saves energy and prolongs the horse's career as it puts less strain on the front legs.

● **NEXT WEEK:** showjumper Bertram Allen

Jumping from walk

- I do lots of walking on a loose rein across deep ditches, up and down steps into water and on and off fairly big banks. I like my horses to look at and accept what they have to jump and do so in "cold blood", not rely on adrenalin, momentum and strong riding.

- This helps the horse remain mentally relaxed so he can digest and accept what he's overcoming, instilling independence and deep-rooted confidence.

A small string

- Deliberately keeping a small string allows me to treat each horse as if it were the only one on my yard. I know how each horse's legs handle and can pick up on subtle changes.

- It's not logistically easy but I try to tailor each horse's training programme to their individual needs, and not compromise on their ideal development. This gives a horse every chance to fulfil its potential.

Cashing in credit

- I think of my horses' confidence levels as credit to be built up gradually through training; every good experience is a bit of credit, so each time they step up a level nothing fazes them. When you have to make a big withdrawal, such as at a tough CCI4* in the mud, the banked credit means they are mentally robust and I don't "go overdrawn" and scare them. **H&H**



Picture by Peter Nixon. Words by Sue Polley