

HORSESENSE



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Training to perform or just training?

Performance coach Poppy Blandford discusses how you can tailor your training to prepare for the pressures and environmental factors you may be exposed to in competition

HORSE SENSE

This weekly feature is edited by **Leanne O'Sullivan**. Leanne graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Equine Management from the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) – Enniskillen Campus.



I'M writing this time from the Winter Equestrian Festival in Florida, a place like no other to immerse yourself in all forms of equestrian sport and a place like no other to learn as much at the ring side as on a horse.

In fact, many riders like Darragh Kenny or Conor Swail mention that they enjoy basing themselves here for a few months to have the chance to watch and learn from other riders at home and at competition. What makes this show so unique is the visibility of the riders' routines and preparations for competition over an extended time period.

It's an insight we rarely catch a sight of at other five star venues and it's here we can learn more about our own systems, training approaches and attitudes than it's possible to see when immersed in our everyday routine at home.

Being able to spend time watching the riders flat their horses early in the morning or coaching their students later in the afternoon it strikes me how meticulous the process of

other muscles we train so enthusiastically. This is what you call training to perform, a conscious effort to tailor your training to the pressures and environmental factors you may be exposed to in competition.

When you watch an 18-year-old girl gallop out through the in gate and into the Saturday night Grand Prix lights brimming with confidence and focus, you know that the practice has not only been physical.

We all arrive at competition wanting to demonstrate what we are capable of achieving, especially after achieving it in our own arenas at home. However, competition presents its own dynamics and we can often find ourselves performing inconsistently or struggling to stay focused.

Having invested so much time, money and effort into preparing for the event, and under the scrutiny of new eyes, it's not surprising that we begin to feel a little different at competition. Pressure

pre-competition preparation is here. Coaches put the same amount of mental and physical preparation into clients jumping the meter class as they do the 1.50m class.

Nothing here is left to chance and the training that happens behind the scenes is all relative to how the rider will approach the challenges of competition. While we Irish tend to be a little shy when it comes to sharing our feelings, here the communication lines between coach and rider are well and truly open.

There's talk about how they are feeling, what they are thinking and discussions on their approach to a cavalletti is as important as to a big oxer. While of course the training focuses on the technical acquisition of riding skills and physical development of the horses, it seems here one muscle they never forget to train is the mind.

TRAINING THE MIND

This mental muscle needs building too if it's to perform on the big day alongside the

Competition presents its own dynamics and we can often find ourselves performing inconsistently or struggling to stay focused

is generally signalled by the body before we are even aware of it, sweaty palms, increased heart rate and tension.

This feeling of pressure can have a legitimate effect on how the brain thinks, connects and feels when exposed to new circumstances and can cause us to do all sorts of things we would never consider doing at home.

Conor Swail enjoys basing himself at the Winter Equestrian Festival in Florida because it affords him the chance to watch and learn from other riders at home and at competition



Mancini Photos



Steve Butler

MUSCLE MEMORY

When we encounter performance issues with our horses we generally go back home and break it down into simple steps, practising at home until we feel prepared enough that we can execute the necessary issue under competition conditions.

However, what happens when it's our own mind that's causing the performance issues?

When it's our nerves, lack of focus or a mental block that start affecting our performance we rarely considering taking a step back and applying techniques into training that will help us overcome the issue on competition day.

Instead we simply torture ourselves by going to shows again and again hoping it will improve.

Just like we jump the water tray 100 times at home with a horse that doesn't like water, we must also train ourselves consistently at home to not let pressure affect our performance.

When we first began to ride, mastering the rising trot seemed like a lot of effort and coordination. However, as you practice more the movement becomes

automatic, to a point where you don't have to think about the up and down movement any longer, your body has learnt and memorised this skill so that you can move on and add additional skills.

This is called muscle memory, the ability of our body to perform skills without us having to give them any conscious effort. Much like our muscle memory in our body, it's possible to teach our brains to behave and react in certain ways to certain situations.

This however is not possible without dedicating the same time and effort we gave to mastering the rising trot as a child, as we do to teaching ourselves to control our minds in certain conditions. Thinking you can go to a competition and implement certain mental strategies for the first time will result in a similar situation to a dressage horse in a puissance competition.

The key to preparing for competition physically and mentally is practice.

If you would like any more help on these matters please contact poppyblandford@gmail.com
Web: poppyblandford.com



Anki Bengtsson

Oliver McCarthy and McLain Ward discussing the course for the Young Rider Nations Cup

POPPY'S TRAINING TIPS

Here are a couple of things you can start to build into your routine at home if you find your mind is beginning to affect you:

1. Mind set: We generally only become aware of our mind-set at competition when we find ourselves thinking the competition is either going to go very well or very badly. Achieving anything starts with self-belief. If we don't have a positive mind-set about what we want to achieve and believe it is going to, we generally don't get very far. It's a simple habit to get into at home, taking a moment every time you get on your horse to check your mind-set. What is it you want to achieve today and how do you feel it's going to go? This will invariably help you be more effective and focused in your riding but it will also become a routine for you so on show day you know what you want to achieve and can push your mind set into a more focused place.

2. Visualisation: Visualisation is a technique which most top sports

people use. It's a method of rehearsing in your mind what you are about to perform. At the show here in Florida it's very popular and you often see riders like McLain Ward taking some time to themselves after the course walk. The basis of visualisation is to close your eyes and mentally run through the exact process of what you are going to do. You should be able to visualise in great specifics, be able to sense you have the right pace, the right tension on the reins and the right rhythm. At home you should be visualising the specific exercise you want to achieve, whether it's a bending line or a combination. Finish the visualisation right down to the point of patting your horse, this will mentally set the end point. At competition this should be completed over the whole course, until you walk out of the in gate. Much like the muscle memory we talked about before, this is a method of practising in your mind so that the process becomes somewhat automatic. This takes practice to master so taking the time to do it at home is vital.



What Weatherbys Bank can do for you

FOLLOWING last month's feature on the UK Racehorse Owners VAT Scheme, this month sees us exploring Weatherbys Bank Racing arm as the only Racing Bank in the UK and even globally for that matter, truly unique in their field.

What does this exactly mean? What is a Racing Bank and where does Weatherbys Bank sit within the wider racing and bloodstock industry?

As you all know Weatherbys Bank are very well connected to the Racing and Bloodstock industry and its Racing Bank department is truly at the heart of this. In 1994, due to their stakeholder role and the significant level of prize moneys held, they took the decision to obtain their banking licence from the Bank of England. Then called Weatherbys & Co they later relaunched as Weatherbys Bank in 1998 and since then have launched a full range of top quality banking led services with many of their clients still coming to them from the world of racing.

To give you a flavour of their reach, 900 registered owners opened a Racing Bank account with Weatherbys Bank Limited in 2016. For those who don't know, the only other option for servicing racing related expenses available to new owners is a direct debit facility with the BHA. On average 60% of registered owners opt for a Weatherbys Racing account each month.

SERVICES

The Racing Bank arm of Weatherbys Bank is much more than just the holder of owner accounts. The bespoke title of Racing Bank underlies a variety of unique services which lie at the heart of the industry and keep it ticking on a day-to-day basis. In addition to accounts for owners they also provide the following:

- ✓ Jockey accounts, which act as a payroll service for jockeys, seeing their riding fees paid in monthly alongside the deduction of daily expenses which Weatherbys Bank have been authorised to make. These deductions generally include agent's fees, valet fees, equipment invoices and fuel payments.
- ✓ Gallops Accounts: An offering for privately owned gallops, whereby Weatherbys undertake the collection and distribution of gallop fees across both WBL and BHA account options.
- ✓ Foreign Prize Money: This enables Weatherbys to collect prize money from overseas for various turf authorities including France, Ireland, the US etc. These funds are then distributed alongside Weatherbys Foreign Exchange offering (discussed in further detail below.)
- ✓ Foreign Exchange: With the international element of the horse racing and bloodstock playing a pivotal role Weatherbys Foreign Exchange (FX) also provide a crucial service to clients. Once a client has a Racing Account (or current account) with Weatherbys Bank they are entitled to open a current account with the Bank at no extra cost enabling them to avail of competitive FX rates and the high level of customer service associated with all other areas of their business. So whether you're a jockey repatriating foreign prize money or a stud farm exchanging Euro for Sterling to pay for that elusive nomination at one of the UK's stud farms then it is always worth calling Weatherbys FX team for a competitive quote.

THE FUTURE

What lies ahead for Weatherbys Racing Bank? Similar

to all other profit driven enterprises growth remains one of their key goals albeit never at the risk of a reduction in the consistently high quality service provided.

Upcoming changes in the industry such as the New Racing Ownership structures due to be introduced will certainly provide both opportunities and challenges as the Racing Bank department continues to strive to be the account of choice for all owners and trainers. Significant technology led digital enhancements are also on the short term agenda and these will certainly assist in delivering the planned outcomes.

As we have seen in the media during week, the economic repercussions of Brexit continue to provide an uncertain outlook to the bloodstock and racing industry, especially on home shores. Uncertainty inevitably breeds volatility and this is where Weatherbys Racing Bank and in particular their Foreign Exchange department can be of particular support to clients. Whether it be to provide a simple Foreign Exchange quote for a transfer that day or discussing in more detail the complexities associated with locking in future rates in a bid to offset risks associated with fluctuating currency rates, Weatherbys Foreign Exchange will be delighted to speak to clients on this subject and discuss their various options. The one thing guaranteed in the racing world is that nothing is guaranteed. In Banking we hope this is quite the opposite Weatherbys Racing Bank are doing all they can to provide a secure and high quality banking service to the racing and bloodstock community.



Jonty Evans to speak at CAFRE training Conference

CAFRE will hold an equine technical conference on Wednesday the 1st of March at Greenmount Campus, Antrim. The theme of the conference is Equine Performance and Training.

The conference will include presentations on physiological adaptations to training from Dr Lisa Katz (University College Dublin), performance injuries, risk factors and prevention of injuries from Fran James (Newmarket Equine Hospital), and different training techniques and fitness from



Jonty Evans and Cooley Rorkes Drift

Irish Olympic event rider Jonty Evans and racehorse trainer Andy Oliver. The conference is aimed

at veterinary professionals (CPD event), managers, stable staff, riders of all levels, students and private owners with an interest in all aspects of equine performance.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This conference will be held on Wednesday the 1st of March, 2017 from 1.30pm until 7.30pm.

The cost of the conference is £45, which includes a light supper. Register online by February 22nd by visiting cafre.ac.uk