

Q&A

AMY SMITH



AMY is one of the most successful working hunter competitors in the country. Specialising in mountain and moorland ponies, she works full time as a hairdresser, while training and producing horses and riders with her sister Vikki at her base in Burnley, Lancashire. Amy has ridden Horse of the Year Show and Royal International Horse Show winners, and represented England at the International Connemara Performance Hunter Competition in Dublin in 2015.

TRAINING THE STARS

MY best pony, Laburnum Richard, wasn't confident over bullfinches when he began his career, so I spent time practising these exercises to build up his confidence. He is such a natural, careful jumper, so he felt he needed to clear the top. Now, however, he'll jump a bullfinch like any other fence.

BULLFINCHES are often more frightening for the rider than for the horse. I think mistakes tend to happen because riders approach them in the wrong manner, thinking that they need to gallop at the fence to get through it, which

How can I teach my horse to jump bullfinches?

The champion working hunter rider shares her tips for introducing the fence successfully



Once lacking in confidence over bullfinches, Laburnum Richard now jumps them like any other fence, thanks to Amy Smith's patient training

'Exercises to help your horse understand what the bullfinch is asking are essential'

Consider this...

- It's power rather than speed that gets you over a bullfinch. Keep the same forward, controlled rhythm you have as when jumping a normal fence.
- Course-builders are introducing more bullfinches into doubles and trebles, so practice makes perfect.
- Do your homework by going to watch other riders compete or ask about the course at shows you're attending. If they have a bullfinch, make sure you're well prepared before you go.

is not the correct approach.

Careful horses usually want to jump the top of the bullfinch to avoid touching it, therefore exercises to improve confidence and help your horse understand what the bullfinch is asking are essential.

TACKLING THE ISSUE

1 Build a simple fence on the long side of your arena and, at an appropriate distance away, set a pair of empty bullfinch boxes between a set of wings.

With someone on the ground, build the bullfinch up from the sides, gradually making it thicker towards the middle, jumping as you go.

2 The simple fence before the bullfinch makes you and your horse think about the striding and riding an even rhythm, instead of just focusing on the bullfinch.

Repeat until your horse is popping the bullfinch confidently and in an even rhythm.

3 Take the first fence away and repeat the bullfinch, trying to keep the same rhythm and confidence. Gradually increase the height and thickness of the bullfinch, being careful not to overface him before he's ready.

4 Avoid over-riding and keep your hands wide and soft to encourage him to go forward over the fence. Allow him to see the bottom of the bullfinch as well as the top.

You can place V-poles on either side to help guide your horse if he is still a little uncertain. **H&H**

NEXT WEEK

Dressage rider Alice Peternell on transitions