

# Q&A

LOUISE LYONS



LOUISE LYONS is a former Irish international event rider, who represented her country at the Pratoni European Championships in 2007 and the Beijing Olympics in 2008. She is based at the Bluegate Stud in Kilmanagh, Ireland. In 2018, Louise won champion working hunter horse at Dublin and Royal International (RIHS), and was second at Horse of the Year Show.

## TRAINING THE STARS

MURPHYS MIRACLE was a four-star horse who went clear at Badminton and Burghley. He was a careful jumper and would dwell on take-off before jumping water trays, which would cause him to drop the back rail. I jumped him over small oxers built over water trays two or three times a week until he got bored of them and learnt to relax. I find a lot of careful horses can be like this, and the key is to keep them in front of your leg and be accurate on take-off.

THIS is a common problem as water trays can be rider frighteners. The rider may be subconsciously holding their horse back, either due to

# How can I improve my horse's confidence with water trays?

The former event rider and current working hunter specialist provides some advice on tackling this element

Louise Lyons, pictured riding M.J.M Lazole to victory at the RIHS, suggests removing rider influence when starting to tackle water trays



*'You want a careful horse, and it may take time to add courage to the mix'*

## Consider this...

- Turn your arena into a playground with lots of small, spooky jumps to help your horse become accustomed to jumping different fences.
- Remember that horses progress at different rates. You want a careful horse, and it may take time to add courage to the mix.
- Avoid tin trays as the sound of poles on metal can be frightening.
- Try to see a good stride into a water tray to build your horse's confidence. Avoid panicking and chasing your horse to a big fence.
- If you're jumping a water tray with a false ground line (where the water tray is set behind the front rail of an oxer or an upright), or which is set behind a front rail, imagine a good ground line in front of the fence and take off with extra room.

nerves or because they are not strong enough to give the horse confidence; therefore the horse learns that he can stop or run out. Uneducated and young horses, or

horses who have had a fright over bigger water trays, can also be problematic.

## TACKLING THE ISSUE

**1** Take the influence of the rider away and lunge or lead your horse over a small water tray — use a lead horse if necessary. Seeing your horse popping the obstacle will give you confidence and, similarly, it will reassure him through not having the rider hanging on to the reins.

I like to loose-jump young horses over water trays to give them confidence.

**2** Get back on with a neck strap, and ensure you have a correct lower leg position.

Sit with your upper body slightly behind the vertical, as being in front of the movement makes it easier for your horse to stop.

Approach the water tray in trot. Do not allow your horse to rush, but keep him straight and in front of your leg.

Remember to praise him, especially if he's nervous.

**3** Practise over lots of small water trays varying in colour and design, then gradually increase the degree of difficulty and approach in a bouncy, balanced canter. **H&H**

**NEXT WEEK** Eventer Alex Bragg on holding a line to a narrow fence