

# Q&A

**KIRSTINE DOUGLAS**



KIRSTINE is an international judge, elite accredited trainer and a top showing producer with wins and championships at Royal Windsor, Horse of the Year Show (HOYS) and the Royal International. She has been producing show horses from her base near Dumfries in Scotland for 30 years.

## TRAINING THE STARS

UP to now, I have been lucky with my horses in that none have had major issues with competing indoors. I give them plenty of variety, such as hacking and popping a fence, and being turned out helps keep them sane.

One of my top horses, middleweight hunter District Court, was a real "big ring" performer who finished third at HOYS three times. Because I knew he would cope with the atmosphere, I didn't feel it was necessary to do much indoor practice beforehand. It is about knowing your individual horse and its needs.

MANY people try too hard to replicate the atmosphere of an indoor championship, filling the indoor arena with loud music and huge floral displays, but I find this can do more harm than good and cause tension. Instead, start your preparations early so you can

# How should I prepare for an indoor championship?

The showing producer shares her tips on getting your horse ready for a big, indoor show-ring occasion



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accustom the horse to working in an indoor environment gradually.

## TACKLING THE ISSUE

**1** We take our horses to different indoor schools and ride them around without pressure. Once I feel the horse is

happy and relaxed, I start to add a little music, turning up the volume gradually. Do not be tempted to blast the horse with loud volume from the get-go.

**2** Ensure your horse is correctly schooled and can bend and move away from the leg into the corners. This will help to counterbalance any tendency to spook at things on the outside of the arena.

**3** Many venues run indoor shows in the autumn, with music and floral displays. This can be useful for a pre-HOYS trial run. Pick your show carefully, avoiding those where the atmosphere is over the top.

**4** When you arrive at the championship show, make use of any opportunities to ride in the arena in which you will be competing while it is relatively quiet. Most showing societies offer evening and early morning slots which can be useful to help the horse settle.

**5** If your horse has had a scare at an indoor show, take it back to basics and gradually rebuild his confidence. Don't be tempted to throw him back in at the deep end as this will exacerbate the situation. **H&H**

## Consider this...

- It is virtually impossible to replicate the atmosphere of the big shows, such as HOYS, and often it is the rider, rather than the horse, who is anxious. Again, when at a show make use of the evening and morning exercise slots so you can both soak up the atmosphere.
- I find letting the horse stand quietly in the centre of the arena during the warm-up can be beneficial. Some horses positively thrive on the atmosphere and come alive at a big indoor event. Most riders know how their horses will react, and can plan accordingly.

**NEXT WEEK** Dressage rider Maria Eilberg on improving flexion