

Q&A

VICTORIA HESFORD



VICTORIA is one of the most successful young producers of show horses in the country. She was dual champion at Horse of the Year Show in 2015 with hack Whalton Forgery and cob Randalstown Musketeer, both owned by the late Clare Twiston-Davies.

This year has seen stellar performances with Tracey Veale's lightweight coloured cob Red Rock III, who has stood champion at Great Yorkshire and Devon County. She is based in South Wales with her partner, international showjumper Andrew Davies, and their son Archie.

TRAINING THE STARS

THE hack Whalton Forgery found it hard to maintain a steady, balanced canter at first. Hacks are required to perform with a high level of collection. These exercises helped him become a star.

How do I improve the quality of my horse's canter?

The showing producer explains how she trains her horses to produce an uphill and balanced show ring canter



'Hacks are required to perform with a high level of collection'

Victoria Hesford aboard multi-garlanded hack Whalton Forgery, who benefitted from canter exercises to learn how to balance and collect

MANY horses find it difficult to remain balanced when asked to canter in an outline. Either the canter stride lengthens or, when you ask for a slower, shorter stride, the horse falls back into trot because he is not able to carry himself correctly.

It is possible, and indeed relatively easy, to correct these problems by encouraging the

horse to work into your hand to create an uphill, balanced canter. In canter, the horse should be above the ground and not ploughing into it.

TACKLING THE ISSUE

1 When starting to develop the canter, I use the whole arena. When riding down the long side, I push the canter forward

and engage the horse's engine.

Three-quarters of the way down the side of the arena, I ask the horse to collect his canter. To do this, I close my thigh as an indicator to the horse that I want him to slow down, at the same time using my seat and upper body to sit deeper and shorten the canter. I also use my lower leg to maintain the canter and ride forward into a stronger contact.

This encourages the horse to sit up and engage the hindquarters, so giving a more uphill, lighter canter.

2 Using the whole arena and practising on both reins, I would take this exercise further by asking for collection on the short side and lengthened strides down the long side.

3 As the horse progresses and begins to understand what is being asked, I introduce 10-metre canter circles at different points around the arena.

4 I also ask for five lengthened canter strides followed by five shortened ones until the horse is comfortable moving up and down the pace.

5 The final exercise is to canter a 20-metre square. When confidently riding the square in canter, attempt to change the length of the canter stride on each side. **H&H**

NEXT WEEK

Joe Stockdale on riding the perfect line to a fence

Consider this...

On the show circuit and in training sessions, I often see riders experiencing problems lengthening and shortening the canter stride. Falling in on corners, incorrect canter lead and a horse that is disunited behind are all indicators the canter is not balanced and through from behind. Spending time improving the quality of the canter at home will result in a more polished performance at competitions.