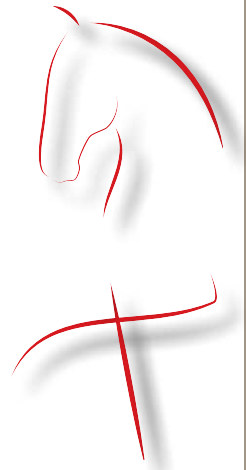




REBECCA HENRY

Stop and smell the roses...



Training our horses can become an overly focused affair: we live and breathe the issues we are having, both as riders and also of our horses. We obsess with our position, our timing, our softness and our understanding of the concepts our trainer is trying to convey. We obsess with how the horse looks, how the horse rides, how big the horse is jumping, how the horse is progressing. All too frequently we convince ourselves we are useless as riders, and/or the horse may not be good enough because we cannot conquer training technique or the horse has had a couple of fences down.

It is during these times we need to just take a moment and remind ourselves how lucky we actually are. So many people would love to be in our shoes: we ride, care for and manage our own horses.

Recently I travelled to China for business unrelated to horses. It was quite a surprise to me how many powerful businessmen in China respected my riding ability and dreamed of owning a horse themselves.

If that is the case in China where owning a horse is usually completely out-of-reach, imagine what it is like here in Australia. For many the dream of owning a horse is always so close, but often just out of reach due to work commitments, lack of agistment facilities, or just life in general not fitting with the time commitment required in owning a horse.

Sometimes we just need to stop and smell the roses...

Think back and dwell on how far you have come in your riding. How far have you advanced in the last month, in the last year, or in the last five years? The same goes for your horse.

The things we are struggling with, right at this very moment, tend to be things we were nowhere near being able to achieve in the past. Isn't it great being able to ride and share these memories with your horse?

This perspective has frequently helped with the training of my horses: I often sit back when assessing my training schedule on a horse and think about how far that horse has advanced. It makes me smile when I realise the problems he used to have are no longer there. Sure there is still a mountain of never-ending training to instill in the horse, but it is amazing how quickly horses will adapt themselves to want to please you.

It is also very important in a jumper to assess how fast he can process the information being given to him. Some horses need to be brought through their training slower than others. This is particularly true when it comes to introducing height advancement in a showjumper.

We talk about how important the flatwork is in a show jumper, well now it is time to talk about introducing height. Once you have that horse working confidently and on the aids over cross rails and small verticals, it is time to raise the height. The key to introducing height is to have some fences set higher than others: still have the odd cross rail and small vertical set-up, but have a few bigger jumps set up as well. The rider must continue to focus on the flatwork, whilst "picking-up" one or two bigger fences before returning to the smaller fences. You will feel the horse's reaction to the bigger fences underneath you. Don't concern yourself too much if the horse has one or two fences down, after all there could be many reasons why this has occurred (including rider error – so don't blame the horse!). Focus on getting your rhythm and tempo even; don't change your ride because the height has increased.

One of two things usually happen to the horse when you introduce the bigger fences; either he jumps them magnificently well, and you get extremely excited as it seems he is ready to continue jumping the bigger fences, or he may over-react to the bigger fence, by quickening his stride or slowing his stride. If this happens, just continue to work between the smaller

and the bigger fences until his confidence increases. You will find you need to continue over the smaller fences more than the larger ones. This does not mean your horse isn't a jumper, he just may take a little more time.

You want to make sure you don't over-face your showjumping horse; taking your time over the smaller fences, with the good flatwork incorporated will pay dividends in the future. Our aim is to produce a confident horse with a long career in the sport and

with. Too often riders are comparing themselves to other riders in the arena and yet showjumping is an individual sport. Keep focused on your own training regime, and stop to smell those roses sometimes... if you are competing in the sport of showjumping you have a lot to be thankful for. It is, after all, the greatest sport of all.

Image courtesy of Hannah Craven with Sugarbag Brandy



good management and training are responsible for a brilliant showjumping horse with a long career. Too often I have seen brilliant horses with short careers due to riders becoming too keen to jump their horses in big classes. The horses you remember are the ones with long careers, with riders who know how to manage their horses, both on the ground and mentally in their training. Please aim to be one of those riders. A blue ribbon today for over-facing your horse may be the only blue ribbon of his career if the horse is not ready for that height.

I do believe that if a rider takes the time to assess where they have come from, how far their riding has progressed and at the same time assess their horse's advancement, then the combination of rider and horse becomes a much stronger force to be reckoned

Bec Henry

Sugarbag Equestrian
e. sugarbagequest@outlook.com
fb. <https://www.facebook.com/sugarbagequestrian>
www.rebeccaHenry.com.au