

Two-way trust

In his new training series, top event rider Warren Lamperd starts off by explaining how to build up a trusting partnership with your horse and offers some effective exercises to help put the rider in better balance.

Photos: Julia Nest Photography



Our trainer

Warren Lamperd is an Australian international event rider based in Berkshire. He is a British Equestrian Federation UKCC Level 4 coach for British Showjumping and British Eventing Master Coach with a masters degree in coaching science. Warren runs White Hart Stables near Newbury with his wife Susie, who has also ridden internationally for Italy, in dressage.

Our equine model

Peanut is a 15.3hh, seven year old Belgian-bred mare, who Warren describes as a real jumping machine, despite her size. Peanut's father was an Olympic show jumper, and Peanut is currently Warren's fun jumping horse.



Warren's philosophy on how he rides and trains his horses is referred to by the rider as 'The Lamperd Method', a system he has developed with his wife Susie. Warren says: "Put simply, it's all about the horse being confident in the bridle and willing to step up into the contact. The horse has to trust the bridle and in turn, the rider."



Warren trains his horses to step up to the bridle from the hindleg



Riding with the stirrup on your toe (above left) will put you out of balance and you'll find it hard to stand up in the stirrups



Here, Warren demonstrates how riding with the stirrup on the ball of your foot puts you in much better balance



"Put the stirrup on your toes (pictured top left), then try to stand up out of the saddle into a jumping position. You'll notice how much effort it takes to stand up and find your balance. Your weight goes into your heel and the foot shoots forward. When you're making the effort to stand up, you'll have to bring your shoulders forward to release the seat and find your balance point."

"Now try the same exercise with the stirrups resting on the ball of your feet (pictured bottom left), with a soft knee and your hips forward. As your hips are now over your feet, you'll find it easier to stand up and stay balanced. Once you find your balance point, ride around the arena holding this position - grab a piece of mane if necessary. Have your hip toward or over the pommel with a relaxed thigh and let the weight into your foot. It's the balance over the foot that is the basis of work out of the saddle, the same as standing or running on the ground."

Correct jumping position

Warren sees a lot of riders with a 'holding' hand and a heavy seat approaching fences. He says this encourages the horse to take a hold and run, often taking out a stride or chipping, which affects a rider's balance. The long term result is a loss of confidence, as well as the physical strain it puts on the horse's limbs and back. "Your balance point has to be your foot with an independent seat," he says.

"A good rider balances on their foot and brings the seat into play when needed. A rider that relies on their seat for stability will get stuck in it and affect the way the horse goes, often compromising the jump," he says. "If I'm in a balanced position with good posture over my feet on the approach then all I have to concentrate on is a good canter and let him find the fence. Rather than thinking about folding over the fence, the horse comes up through the shoulder, creating

"If the horse doesn't trust the bridle he might try to sit off it or run through it," says Warren. "Some riders then use bigger spurs of stronger bits. Stronger bits require a delicate hand to be used correctly. Stronger aids make the horse numb as we're 'shouting' at them. Underlying it all is a lack of confidence and possibly understanding, be it horse and/or rider. I like to see riders with good posture, a closed hand and a soft elbow that follows the horse's mouth and allows the horse to step up to the bridle and work to it."

If the rider draws the hand back, this affects the horse's way of going by restricting the front and compromises their own technique and

balance. They will lock the hip backwards to make room for the hand and consequently this will put the rider behind the balance point making them heavier in the seat.

A horse that doesn't trust the bridle will hold the hind leg and not step into the bridle properly, keeping its body straight to manage the bit. On the circle or a turn - and at the higher levels, everything is done on a circle or turn, dressage, cross country and show jumping - this affects the power and balance. Trust in the bridle gives quality of connection that allows the rider to then start developing activity so the horse learns to activate the leg rather than increase the speed.

People think eventing is all about speed but if you watch good riders show jumping you'll see they concentrate on rhythm and balance, increasing the tempo (activity) as the horse strengthens and learns. Mentally, this gives a horse time to learn and understand. The horse has to learn to problem solve when challenged, so you must develop their brain as well as their body.

Foot perfect

Warren stresses the value of having your stirrups positioned on the ball of your foot. "I see a lot of people riding their horses with the stirrup on their toe. You have to be really strong in the leg to ride well like this. Try this exercise and you will soon start to feel why this is so important."

Feature

a fold in the rider. If the horse needs more support then I can bring my seat into play, but it is a balanced, independent seat.

“Again, by riding around the arena up out of the saddle with the hip over the wither and a soft thigh and knee the rider can feel this for themselves. The weight goes straight down into your foot which gives you a balance over your foot, similar to snow skiing.

“The less of a hinderance you can be to your horse, the less energy, mentally and physically, he will require. Long term, you give him a better chance of staying sound and you have more chance of achieving your ambitions. Let the horse do his job.”

Heel up, leg back

Another common issue Warren sees is riders lifting the heel to ask the horse to go forwards. Correspondingly, the rider's shoulders will weaken and the seat will get heavier.

“You're basically saying 'come with me please' and while the horse will go forward, it will be behind the leg. The horse can't bend around your inside leg as it's back, which means there will be a temptation to cross the inside rein over the neck and support the shoulder to keep the horse from falling in.

“Keeping the inside leg at the girth opens the posture putting the horse in front of the leg, asking it to take you forwards. However, I see a lot of horses that won't go for these aids and will only go when the rider commits with their heel coming up and their upper body forward. Equines are good psychologists! By doing this, you won't be able to get the horse to work up into bridle and his hindlegs will trail out behind him.



Try not to draw the leg back when riding



'Flat hands' can break lots of bad habits

Riding with 'flat hands'

Often when coaching, Warren asks riders to hold the reins the wrong way round (he calls it flat hands) as it breaks lots of bad habits.

“The main habits I see are riders with their knuckles turned over which blocks the horse's front end, or they wiggle the bit to get the horse's head down. With the reins the wrong way round, the rider has to allow the horse to work forward into the bridle and it helps the rider keep a good posture and soft elbows. If you get the rider's body positioned correctly then everything else falls into place.

“I get riders to jump like this, too, which freaks some out a bit!

“Try it yourself by riding for the first 10 minutes with flat hands and you will feel your horse start to work forward correctly into the bridle. It does force a rider to have to start to trust their horse rather than take control.”



Riding with 'flat hands' allows the horse to work forward into the bridle without the rider blocking the front end

WARREN'S TOP TIP

You owe it to your horse to be an easy rider to carry, so spend a lot of time assessing your own riding, investing in some lessons and carrying out exercises to put you in a better balance.

NEXT MONTH:

Warren shares his clever polework exercises