

Jonathan Chapman gives a Coach's perspective on Jump Training competitions, how best to prepare and what the Judges are looking for

Tiny Attainable Tickable Targets!

I HAVE JUST had the pleasure of judging and coaching at the Baileys Jump Training Competition organised by BE at Berkshire College. I have been involved with this competition/training Event for about eight years now, going back to when it was called Grasshoppers and was the brainchild of Gill Watson. The competition is now run by a professional and fun team led by Fiona Saxby.

I started this column by saying "I had the pleasure of judging ..." In previous years I could not always have said that. Indeed, there were some years I found the whole experience a bit distressing with some very wayward riding and under-confident horses and riders. From a coaching perspective this was exacerbated by the (necessarily) short time allowed for giving tips. Sometimes I was scratching my head over where to start! Common faults included: tack that didn't fit; very strong bits in the hands of unbalanced riders (with consequentially rough hands); unschooled, unresponsive horses; riders with no speed and directional awareness ... I could go on!

I am delighted to say that over the past years I have seen a continual improvement, culminating at Berkshire College, where the standard was the highest I have ever seen, across the whole entry. Which I hope goes to show that the emphasis on training, and Events like these, is working!

I think Jump Training is a fabulous training initiative. Why does it work so well? To explain this I come back to the title for my column: Tiny Attainable Tickable Targets (TATTS)! I first heard this expression at a World Class Coaching day at Stoneleigh when John Eccles (father of Joanne Eccles, the multi-medal-winning vaulter) gave a presentation on how they coached their way to success. It was a fascinating insight into goal setting. They had the big goals that we all set ourselves, but then they gave themselves smaller goals, even daily ones that helped build the staircase to the big goal and eventual success. TATTS emphasise how important psychologically these were in maintaining progress. They were also important as a road map in case of getting lost en route, small

but significant things you remember on a journey so you can find your way back again.

How does this relate to Jump Training? The Coach only has two/three minutes to help the rider, so they are not going to be able to make wholesale changes. Whatever they say has to be simple, understandable, brief and pertinent to the combination, to make it attainable and enable the combination to jump an improved second round. With coaching, less is very often more and we can all be guilty of saying too much and muddying the waters. This competition format does not allow you to do this.

The other important parts to this competition are the coached warm-up and the course walk, both critical to success. Warm-up should be the time when horse and rider become one, when through transitions, changes of pace, changes of direction and actual jumping that rider and horse develop and fine tune an understanding of what each other is doing and what each is responsible for. It is a mental warm-up as well and as such should have structure. What needs to be done may vary from horse to horse and rider to rider, but by its nature needs to be consistent to build confidence and allow changes to be made should they be necessary.

The one common fault in show jump warm-ups is over jumping and leaving your clear round in the practice arena. The format in Jump Training only allows six minutes actual jumping time in the warm-up, so most combinations will only jump eight to 12 times.

The course walk should be simple. Too much information is confusing and, although I can't speak for the female mind, the male mind can only process two to three bits of information at a time! So for me, when jumping those things are: Am I going the right way on the right line (LOOK)? Am I going at the right speed for the jump, distance, etc. (SPEED)? And am I and the horse in balance (SELF CARRIAGE)?

As Coaches we focus our training on how a combination approaches a fence. This is vital, but having competed for many years and watched thousands of show jumping rounds we can see that the departure from the fence is the foundation for the approach to the next fence. During the show jump course walk I emphasise the importance of straightness after the fence, using the outside rein and inside leg. This straightening re-balances the horse and allows speed to be controlled (unbalanced you can't slow down, no matter how hard you pull). It also allows you to ride accurately and buys you thinking time.

The improvement that can be achieved in a very short time is sometimes nothing short of miraculous, but will only happen if we stick to our Tiny Attainable Tickable Targets. 🐾



Vaulting coach John Eccles (pictured lungeing) advocates the use of Tiny Attainable Tickable Targets as part of his coaching programme for multi-medal-winning daughter Joanne

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