



**Jonathan Chapman** is the Chairman of the British Eventing Safety committee

# A NEW YEAR WISH

## Jonathan Chapman talks relationships in Eventing, both human and animal

**OUR SPORT** is made up of a large eclectic group of people. Riders, Owners, grooms, parents, partners, Organisers, officials – the list goes on. Some are paid, some are Volunteers, some are involved as part of a business, while some do it just for the love of the sport. If we're honest, we all do it for the love of the sport – none of us will get super rich in Eventing, but if we end up poorer in money terms, our lives are so much richer for being a part of this sport. We meet inspiring people, visit beautiful venues, and enjoy the close association with God's most noble creature: the horse.

In our world achievement is commonly measured in medals and notoriety – there is only one winner. But if that was the only motivation, how would the other 39 riders in a section feel at the end of the day? And if it was really all about winning, those without a likely chance surely wouldn't put in the money and the time to turn up. So what is it about?

I believe for riders and their connections it's about the emotional journey and the satisfaction of a job well done.

Horses are not machines. Talented, well trained, perfectly ridden horses can appear machine-like in their consistency, but they are just animals and we are just human. It is the life in the horse that creates the expression and elegance a machine could never achieve, but likewise what creates the fallibility.

"To err is human" and we all make mistakes. Riders do things they wish they hadn't, Coaches forget to say things they wish they had, and parents and Owners say things they would like to take back! Even officials and Organisers might regret a certain decision. That is part of a living, breathing sport and it is part of how we learn. But I have had the misfortune to witness some very unsavoury exchanges in 2014. Our sport is at its best when its famous camaraderie is on show. When people work together through good moments and bad and support each other. This is one of the things that sets Eventing apart, even from other equestrian sports. So my New Year wish is for a tolerant and understanding attitude from all of us to each other and our steeds.

We all make sacrifices for the love of the sport and the horses we partner. Being involved with horses is an emotional roller coaster and we can get frustrated with each other and ourselves.

Sometimes we need to be more understanding with ourselves. We compete because we are competitors, we want to do well. No groom means to make a mistake, no parent means to say something daft, and no steward means to end up with 20 horses waiting to jump. Sometimes we don't do as well as we would like because we are still learning. Every time we raise the bar and move up a level, we feel insecure again. This is something we need to accept.

Sometimes we also need to be more understanding with each other. I find the NLP principle that "behind every action there is a positive intent" quite useful.

One tool that is under rated in managing yourself and your relationships is planning – "Fail to plan and you plan to



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fail". One relationship that really benefits from planning is that between rider and Owner. It is vital for the long term success and enjoyment of the partnership that the terms are laid down in writing early on. British Eventing and the British Equestrian Federation publish guidance on this subject – it forms a framework around which the relationship can develop and misunderstanding can be avoided.

My final comment is that patience is a virtue when producing young horses. So this is a plea to all of Eventing's Owners and riders: please continue to support and enjoy our incomparable sport, but please don't pressure your horses. Owners, let your riders do their professional best and develop the horses to the best that they can be. If you want your investment to last and take you to the big Events, go a bit easier on the horses, and have a safer, happier journey. 🐾

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