

What is the horse's current physical capability? Where does it need to be?

It can be a shock for owners to see the horse they felt "wouldn't" perform in fact "couldn't", and was doing his very best! We go beyond the standard "back, teeth, tack" check list, as small irregularities such as incorrect muscle development limit progress. Working beyond the current strength causes the horse to use the wrong muscles groups to achieve our requests. We work with leading equine physiotherapist Jo Spear, as underlying poor movement patterns account for limited performance in a large number of cases, as well as causing physical problems later on in horses careers.

What is the horses current "comfort zone"? What needs to be added to it?

For all horses, the natural instinct of avoiding danger needs to be overcome. At a basic level, this is normally done quietly and sensibly, beginning with handling and grooming. As training progresses, instincts can be overridden using a variety of methods, some more effective than others. We prepare the horse slowly and thoroughly, assessing what concerns them and ensuring they are always physically capable of completing the task to avoid causing mental tension. The horse gains confidence, and enjoys his work by introducing challenges in a prepared manner, careful repetition and positive reinforcement.

Are the basics really in place?

Many horses are rushed in their development. Although appearing to go "correctly", the effect is often achieved in a way that limits long term progress to the next level. We all want to produce a horse that is able to fulfil it's role with physical and mental ease. Therefore we need to ensure our horse has been correctly established at a basic level. We look at what areas the horse actually understands and responds too. Does he walk forward from a light aid? Does he maintain a rhythm? Is he able to keep balance from one gait to the next, around turns and through changes of rein? Can he maintain self carriage when cantering a circle? Can we introduce more energy to the canter, without him falling onto his forehead? When the answer to each stage is yes, we can move on. If not, why not?