

## **Spotlight on Leanne Roger**

*"Oh, but you're SO SMALL..."*

### **How long have you been involved with horses? And how did you get involved with them?**

I grew up in a non-horsey family, and only became involved with horses by accident?! (Looking back, maybe it was fate?!). I wasn't a horsey child; I've never read Black Beauty and never owned a Barbie pony! I first sat on a pony when I was about 10 years old. I was totally spellbound by being around these magnificent creatures and wanted to learn as much as I could, so I regularly went to help at riding stables and get my hands dirty as much as possible. I finished my GCSEs and despite getting good results, I decided to do an NVQ on a competition yard, which didn't please my school careers advisor! I wanted to work my way through the industry from the ground up, and during the year of working on a yard I learnt so much. I begged my Dad for a pony when I first discovered riding, but he wisely declined, I bought my first horse at the age of 20 whilst studying for a FdSc in Equine Sports Performance and Coaching at Duchy College. Following my FdSc I continued with education and graduated with BSc (Hons) Rural Business Management a year later.

### **Why did you decide to qualify as a Recommended Trainer?**

As much as I loved riding, I have always felt more of a connection to horses when I've been on the ground. I only discovered IH when I started backing my first horse. It was 2008 and I was finishing my foundation degree, but having seen Kelly and Monty at a demo I fell in love with the concept that you could be kind to horses AND get them to want to work together as a partnership, with no violence, pain or bribery – things that aren't taught in traditional horsemanship. I spoke to Kelly at a demo and got given Kelly's books and DVDs as a gift from a friend soon after. I remember that it felt like a lightbulb had been illuminated in my head watching Kelly work with horses. Seeing how Kelly and Monty worked gave me hope that (maybe) I could learn to do it too! Watching the demos over the next few years was magical for me, and I knew I had to pursue that feeling. Money has always been an obstacle, but I decided to save up to do the IH courses. As a birthday present, a friend kindly bought me the first two IH courses in November 2011. By the time I did the 5 Day foundation course in 2012, I decided that I wanted to be an IHRT. A lot of work later, and I took the Stage 2 Exam in September 2014 and qualified as an IHRT in March 2017.

### **What's important to you when you see an owner and their horse for the first time?**

Before the first session, I ask horse owners to complete a questionnaire so that I have some background information on the partnership problems before we meet. During the first session, I spend a lot of time listening to the human, and watching the horse and human interact. I want to understand the problem from both perspectives and work out how to make horse and human connect as a partnership and overcome problems together.

### **What are the common challenges you face in your work as an RT?**

So many people are looking for a 'magic fix'. The problem could have existed for years, but some people think that it can all be fixed in one session. Although miracles do happen, they are rare! It's also common for humans to think that it is only the horse that needs to change their behaviour, whereas in reality, horse and human BOTH need to change in order to move forwards with their relationship.

### **What is the best thing about being an IHRT?**

For me, the best feeling is when horse and human have their own 'lightbulb' moments and feel that they are partners rather than feeling like two separate entities. When horse and human are willing to have a go at the challenges that I set them during our sessions, I know that I have done my job in setting the foundations for their relationship to develop from. Seeing the bond between horse and human grow is the magic that I feel when a bond is forming.

### **What is the funniest thing a client has ever said when meeting you for the first time?**

"Oh, but you're SO SMALL..." a new client exclaimed when I arrived at her yard for the first time. After our initial session, the client understood that being only 5ft tall and female isn't necessarily a barrier to effectively training horses!

## **If you could change one thing in the world of horses what would it be, and why?**

I think many people are so focussed on riding their horse, that they do not consider how beneficial it can be to do groundwork exercises and obstacle training as well. Not only can you form a strong connection with your horse from the ground, but you can both enjoy being active and having fun together.

## **What advice would you give someone looking at buying/loaning their first horse?**

Make sure you have the support network and finances required to deal with the unexpected. You won't always know the solution to a problem but having the right advisors around you can help to work it out. Just make sure you have the finances to pay for the right advice. Also, please do not buy without viewing! I have worked with several horses that people did not physically view before they bought them, and the buyer relied on the honesty of the seller, and a few photos or videos to show the horse being ridden or competed. Although some 'blind sales' have worked out well, I have personally worked with several that haven't, and if the human had viewed the horse, they would not have bought him/her.

## **What are your plans for the future?**

I am currently studying for an Equine Nutrition Diploma because I want to incorporate nutritional advice into my behaviour work. The link between nutrition and behaviour is often misunderstood, so I want to help horse owners understand it more clearly. The course also covers grassland management and equine husbandry as this is another area, I want to expand my business into. I am also looking into organising a local Demo with Kelly in 2021.

## **What three things should everyone practice with their horses?**

Leave your problems at the yard gate – time with your horse should be enjoyable for you both without human distractions getting in the way!

Have fun with your horse – It might be grooming your horse, it might be playing with some obstacles in the arena, it might be going for a nice walk... find something that you both enjoy, and spend time doing that!

When you think you might need assistance, do not wait years to ask for help. There is no shame in admitting that you don't know how to

overcome a problem with your horse and asking for an IH RT to help you. The longer a problem exists, the trickier it may be to overcome.

### **What's the best bit of advice you've ever been given?**

"Make it easy for the horse to do the right thing" – I think it's one of Kelly's words of wisdom!

### **What would your advice be to someone hoping to become a Recommended Trainer?**

Much like learning to drive a car, you can only learn so much when you are supervised. Its only when you start doing the case studies without the supervision of tutors that you will find out how little you know and how much you still need to learn! Conscious incompetence I believe it is called?! Working with the horses is only half of the job. I have found that working with the human counterpart is often the most challenging aspect of being a trainer, but it can also be the most rewarding. You need to develop your human communication skills as much as your equine communication skills.

### **What is the best method to contact you?**

Email me at [Leanne.roger@gmail.com](mailto:Leanne.roger@gmail.com) or message me through my facebook page 'L R Equine'. Mobile phone signal is not always reliable in Cornwall, so answering calls or voicemail is not always a reliable option either!