The Intelligent Horsemanship Magazine – Spotlight on an IH RT Zoe Chipman

How long have you been involved with horses, and how did you get involved with them?

I first got involved with horses at the age of seven. I was a typical horse-mad child, and I think my parents thought that I would get it out of my system if they found someone willing to help me "scratch the itch". I am forever indebted to the lovely local lady who let me ride her ponies and taught me so much. I carried on riding her ponies for years, even when I was working with horses for a living. I never have grown out of the "Hippopause" as my father calls it!

Why did you decide to qualify as a Recommended Trainer?

Having worked in Showing Yards, and passing my BHS Stage III, I had become very disillusioned with the way most people appeared to treat not only horses, but the other people involved with horses. I couldn't buy in to the "shout a bit louder, smack a bit harder" line of training. I knew there was a better way, but hadn't had the room to find it, so I got out of the industry, and decided to focus on working with cattle and sheep instead. Horses were still part of my life, but purely for pleasure.

In 1998, a friend bought me for Christmas, a copy of "The Man Who Listens to Horses" by Monty Roberts – purely because it had a horse on the front. I read the book with tears streaming down my face. THIS was what I had been looking for! I liken Monty Roberts to the picture on the lid of a jigsaw box. I always knew I had all the pieces to the jigsaw; I just had no clue how to put them together until I read Monty's book and saw the picture. Having discovered that there was a person called Kelly Marks in the UK, and that her Intelligent Horsemanship ran courses, I booked in for them all. By the end of the first day of the first course I knew I wanted to make this my life. I knew I would be able to help horses and their owners to live more fulfilling lives together. I qualified as an IH RT in 2003.

What's important to you when you see an owner and their horse for the first time?
Safety. Both for the horse, the owner, and me. If the area isn't safe to work in, I won't work in it.

What are the common challenges you face in your work as an RT?
I think the biggest challenge, and sadly quite a common one, is probably having to point out to an owner that the yard that the horse is on is either causing or exacerbating the issues that I have been asked to help with. Actually, the bigger challenge is having to point out that both the owner and the horse could be happier if they parted company, but thankfully, that's not too common. Getting to the very bottom of an issue can be tricky, too. So many factors can be involved, and the manifested behaviours are frequently a symptom of an underlying cause – be that pain, or an emotional block in either the horse or the owner.

If you could change one thing in the world of horses, what would it be, and why?
Oh, a VERY big can of worms! The one thing I would change is to ask that horses would never again be bred to make mega money for humans. I know this is going to be a massively unpopular answer in many quarters, but if horses were not bred to go on to make big money, so much of the cruelty, neglect, and exploitation would eventually die out. I know this could never happen overnight, and I know it could come with it's own problems, but many horses suffer greatly in the pursuit of money.

What would be the first piece of advice you would give someone looking at buying/loaning their first horse?
Spend as much time around horses as possible beforehand. Get your hands and boots filthy with poo-picking, brushing, tack cleaning, etc. Book some lessons on an Equine Simulator. Go on all the IH Courses. Read up on horse care and psychology until your eyeballs ache. Ask a trusted, knowledgeable person to go with you when you try out the horses that you think may potentially become your responsibility.

What is the most common issue you have to deal with when working with horses?
The most common work I have is helping owners with reluctant loaders. It's literally my bread and butter. I absolutely LOVE teaching the horses how to feel confident loading and teaching the owners how to work with their horses if the horse has a little wobbly moment at the bottom of the ramp in the future.

What are your plans for the future?
I shall continue as an IH RT as long as I'm physically able. Without horses in my life, I am nothing.

What three things should everyone practice with their horses?
Patience, consistency, and empathy. Don't expect miracles when working with your horse – nobody ever learned everything they need to know in half an hour. Be VERY consistent and clear in your requests – if you ask in a different way each time, you will never achieve a consistent result. And look at everything from the horse's perspective at every move – how can you make it easier for the horse to see what you are asking as a good idea?

Do you have any memorable or funny stories of working with Kelly/Monty?
First rule of IH Course or Tours: What happens on Courses or Tours stays on Courses or Tours lol 😊

What's the best bit of advice you've ever been given?
"Work with the horse in front of you". Ian said this on the Psychology Course that I attended in 2001. Also, "Never ask an animal to do something that you know they can't

or won't do". This was said to me by the very wise old chap who taught me shepherding many years ago.

What has been the proudest moment/biggest achievement in your career?
This may sound glib, but I can honestly say that I regard every single success that I have with a horse and owner to be a huge achievement. And becoming an IH RT was probably one of the happiest days of my life. Giving other people the opportunity to expand their love of horses in every way is a massive buzz. IH Courses are, literally, life changing. The learning is transferable to absolutely any walk of life where one is interacting with another sentient being.

What would your advice be to someone hoping to become a Recommended Trainer?
If you want to do it enough, you will find a way to do it. A word of warning though, it is a good idea to have more than one occupation to fall back on in leaner times. Unless you have a yard and take in horses for training, the work can be very seasonal.

Please share some of the horses you have worked with that have gone on to competition success in dressage, showing etc:
I have worked with many competition horses who have gone on to compete successfully. Mostly because they had never been taught to load happily before, or because they were being asked to do too much too soon. However, I think the horse and owner who I was most happy for was Stephanie Morland and her horse Panni. I first met Steph because she was having problems mounting her horse, Panni. We sorted the problem, and Steph and Panni went on to compete very successfully in Para Dressage.

Zoe is based in Farnham, Surrey. To find out more visit her website www.equinemediator.co.uk