

IH RT Jenny Major Spotlight for Spring 2021

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

After much dreaming, begging and badgering, I finally began riding lessons at the age of 12 at a local riding school, and was instantly hooked. I became the 'Weekend Girl' and would get up early, cycle to the yard and work the whole day in return for a riding lesson.

Why did you decide to qualify as a Recommended Trainer?

I worked in varying spheres of the equine industry after completing a HND Equine Studies and BSc Equine and Human Sports Science. Some of these were practical roles such as riding instructor and international groom for a dressage yard. I had also experienced more office-based roles including helping set up an equine feed company. I knew my passion was hands on work, and whilst working as Manager at The Exmoor Pony Centre I met Sarah Weston, whom I watched work with the semi-feral foals. As I observed her calm, logical approach it was as if a switch flicked and I knew I had found the missing piece of the puzzle. I couldn't believe I'd worked in so many yards, riding and training horses without this knowledge. I enrolled on the Five-Day Foundation course with aspiration to one day qualify as a Recommended Trainer.

What is a typical day for you?

My workdays have evolved since having my boys (now 4 & 6 years). I work part time, 2-3 days a week, and restrict visits to within 45 mins drive of my home in Culmstock, Devon. I get up early, attend my small holding (poultry, pigs, sheep, horses), and get the boys ready before dropping them off at school/ pre-school. I then visit between 2 and 5 clients, many of them regulars.

What is important for you when you see an owner and their horse for the first time?

I always try and find out as much information as possible before I make a visit, but it can be surprising what you miss without observing in person. I like to see horse and owner doing what they normally do in their ordinary environment. This often gives me a good grounding of what stage they are at and where our training should begin.

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

It's a sad fact that many areas of modern horse training are rushed. Many people are reluctant to accept that good results take time, patience and technique, and expect me to turn up with a magic wand! Another challenge is a lack of understanding about what IH actually is. People seem to assume it's some kind of airy fairy 'natural horsemanship', whatever that actually means!

What would be the first piece of advice you would give to someone looking to loan/buy their first horse?

Be realistic. Consider finances, facilities, time and help available, the type of breed/temperament that might suit your set up and abilities and what you want to ultimately achieve from owning a horse. My dream horse is a Spanish, but at this point in my life while my children are young, and I cannot commit to what this would involve. I have a lovely Dales mare to ride out with the children and their pony, which we are all enjoying.

What is the most common issue you have to deal with when working with horses?

Largely due to my work at The Exmoor Pony Centre, and with Sarah Weston, I am often asked to work with semi-feral which I find immensely rewarding. The special feeling of that first connection never fades, and teaching owners to achieve that can be extremely emotional and powerful.

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

Definitely more kindness! Sometimes I feel that everywhere I look, people are being judgemental and unkind to other people, and to themselves. I think we would all be a lot happier if there was more kindness, empathy, and compassion.

What three things should everyone practice with their horse?

Standing still. This is so important both on the ground and under saddle, both as a safety issue in case you ever *need* to stop, (and also for grooming, tacking up, mounting,) but also because if a horse can't stand still then it may be a sign that it is anxious and in flight mode.

Yielding to pressure. Your horse should move away from pressure by coming forwards, backing up or going sideways, on the ground and under saddle (if it is a ridden horse). Again, this makes for basic manners and is essential to safety.

Being in the moment. It is really important to leave all your emotional baggage at the gate when you come to see your horse. Whether intentional or not, every moment spent with your horse is training time and this will be much more positive for you both without distraction. You will come away feeling refreshed too if you can forget about other stuff for a while.

Do you have any funny/memorable stories of working with Kelly or Monty?

I was extremely nervous on the morning of my presentation for the stage two exams, which had been heightened by the fact that Monty was sitting in to observe us. My glasses had conveniently snapped in two right across the bridge, so I was feeling a little self-conscious with them taped together with Sellotape. I handed out the graphs I had configured to illustrate my data. Monty glanced at his copy and with a disparaging 'Pha' tossed his across the table he was sitting at with Kelly. I glanced at Kelly to gauge how serious the problem was, wondering if I had perhaps instantly failed. Kelly whispered in Monty's ear and turned back to the class saying 'Well, she didn't know you were colour blind Monty'. I was mortified but remedied the situation

by writing the colour of each section of the graph next to it, and thankfully I passed with flying colours, phew!

What are your plans for the future?

I completed my level one Enlightened Equitation Coach training with Heather Moffett in 2019, so I am keen to continue developing this side of my work. I am really enjoying doing the staff training at Horseworld, Bristol as we have plans to develop and expand this. I am also talking to a couple of close friends about the possibility running some equine facilitated therapy. We have got lots going on at home; we are currently converting a barn to live in, as well as building some shepherds huts. I hope to set up a barefoot track system and riding arena- so plenty to keep us busy!

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