

The Intelligent Horsemanship Magazine – Spotlight on an IHRT

IH RT Julia Fisher

How long have you been involved with horses? And how did you get involved with them? I have been riding since I was 7 years old. I got more involved with horses when my father died. My mum managed to buy and fund my first horse with my dad's life insurance money which was an incredible gift. This was the beginning of a relationship that shaped my future. She was called Tic Tac, and became my best friend, getting me through the next 6 years of my life. Later I went on to work at a showing yard here and in Canada, between the ages of 16-21. With a short art college break I resumed working with horses in my mid 20s where I found IH and have never looked back.

Why did you decide to qualify as a Recommended Trainer? I decided to qualify as an RT because it was absolutely the way forward, there was nothing else like it at the time. Being able to become part of an organisation with some of the most knowledgeable supportive and wonderful people I had ever met was a no brainer. In the showing world at that time poor treatment of horses was widespread and common place, the way people treated animals they supposedly loved was appalling. IH supported the horses and humans in a way that got results by working with the horse. It also meant that I got to work alongside some of the best horse women and horsemen in the world, quite an opportunity!!

How you came to be involved with Monty and Kelly? I saw Monty on News at 10 in 1995!! Like many horsey people I was transfixed, I then bought his book which had Kelly's number in the back, who in turn gave me Nicole Goldings number and it all began from there!

What is a typical day for you? I wake up and feed 'Chonc' the field cat, he won't let me get anything done otherwise! No two days are the same really, some days I see clients, other days I'm at Witney with the IH teaching team, or more recently with SLTHs (Strength and Learning through Horses) in Edgware or HMP Thameside, where I am one of their Equine specialist. This means it's my job to look after the horses and humans in therapy and equine assisted learning sessions. Safety is my main job, but I also get to interact with the magic of combining horses and young people!

Riding lessons would have been part of my day, but they have taken a back seat this last year and they haven't really got up and running yet this year. I'm looking forward to things returning to some kind of balance so they can resume safely. The youngsters at my yard are keeping me plenty busy, as are all my lovely OAPs! Managing a DIY livery is also part of my daily responsibility. This has been an enormous challenge but it has also kept me connected to the horse world in a way which has had many benefits. I have about 25 DIY liveries and most days I am navigating something on the bottom yard, whether it's getting a door fixed or negotiating communications! I am hoping to run ELA courses with my colleagues from SLTHS from the bottom yard as I have areas under cover there and toilets, which still feels luxurious as I've spent the best part of the last 20 years working out of field!

What's important to you when you see an owner and their horse for the first time? When I meet an Owner for the first time, I find a good starting point is to just take everything in, listen and ask questions, often things that have been explained on the phone or email present differently in person. Taking in the surroundings, field, stable, feed, daily routine etc helps to create a bigger picture, informing the way forward.

What are the common challenges you face in your work as an RT? My common challenges as an RT are the weather, vehicle modifications (there are so many lorry's and trailers out there that should not be on the road and have been modified in some way) and roadworks. I have spent too many hours on the M25!

The bit I most dislike in a day is admin, it is my nemesis! My New Year resolution is to improve this and embrace the computer even more so as I am now running 'The Living Theatre'. It has just got bonkers on the admin front. Until February 2020 I had daily help to get it all done, sadly the wonderful Ali Baxter moved on to new adventures so this last year has been a bit like I'm doing everything with one hand tied behind my back! I have received wonderful help from Emma, Seb, Daisy and Shabs, all helping to hold the fort in lockdown.

A large part of my day is spent training my Romanian Pup, well he is more like a teenager now! "Whenever you are with your dog you are training them", sound familiar? Freddie has turned out to be my biggest training challenge to date! I finish most days putting my horses to bed checking all legs are in the right place. I check the weather, rug and feed accordingly, the weather plays a big part in my daily routine! At present, my biggest daily challenge has been looking for someone to help me day to day around the yard.

If you could change one thing in the world of horses what would it be, and why? If I could change something for horses, I would like to give them more choice. As a rule, they have very little choice in their lives, I think this would improve horsemanship as a whole and get us considering the impact our choices have on them more fully, at the same time as improving quality of life.

What would be the first piece of advice you would give someone looking at buying/loaning their first horse? I would say to anyone loaning or buying a horse, look for a horse that is kept in a similar way to the way you are going to keep that horse. It is also helpful to buy from an owner that is of a similar ability or at least someone who is doing what you want to do with the horse and having success in that activity.

What is the most common issue you have to deal with when working with horses? Confidence is the most common issue I have to deal with in both horses and owners.

What are your plans for the future? My future plans are to spend more time riding my horse, finish building the theatre and to continue working with Seema and Holly towards developing programs for the living space. We are creating a space for people to come to rest and heal and have fun.

What three things should everyone practice with their horses? The three things I think would be useful for everyone to practice with their horses are, stopping (including queuing the stop), backing up and just hanging out with their horse even if it's only for five minutes.

Do you have any memorable or funny stories of working with Kelly/Monty? I have a couple of memorable stories that spring to mind. Being taught to gut a fish by Monty at midnight, in Addington equestrian centre whilst on tour. Followed by panel dancing to ABBA 🎶 with fellow trainers Dido and Nicole with Simon and Maya, both very memorable indeed.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given? The best piece of advice given to me was, "to sleep on it, it will look different in the morning" (my Mum).

What has been the proudest moment/biggest achievement in your career? One of the proudest moments of my career was taking one of my first clients and dear friend Catherine and her horse Hattie, to a Kelly demo to show off her progress. She was one of the toughest horses I have ever had the pleasure to work with, in the early days we recorded 62 seconds as the longest time anyone could stay on. She is now competing her side-saddle and astride, she is still competing into her 20s. One of my biggest achievements has been going into HMP Thameside during lockdown. It changed my life watching and facilitating the young men working with the horses, the connections they made with the horses were something to behold, the levels of horsemanship that they achieved was amazing.

Why do you so enjoying teaching on the courses' and 'why do you think students love the courses so much?' Teaching on the IH courses has been an honour, over the years I have worked with some incredible colleagues that I have just learnt so much from. I have met some wonderful people that have helped me develop both as trainer and a person, it's been an experience like no other. I think the students love the courses so much because they feel seen and heard, a rare thing these days. There's time for people to take stock and hang out with like-minded people, being supported and encouraged, what's not to love about that!

What would your advice be to someone hoping to become a Recommended Trainer? If you are thinking of becoming an RT you need to be into the humans as well as the horses 😊

We would love to hear about some of the horses you have worked with that have gone on to competition success in dressage, showing etc: Hattie - struggled ridden and hated travelling, her owner went on to successfully compete her at Windsor astride and side-saddle. Golly - a beautiful warmblood who struggled with loading, his owner went on to compete in dressage and do very well. Alfie - was a star who learnt to stay with his human and go on to have a successful showing career. Argie - found who he was and went on to be a stunt horse in The Game of Thrones trailers, I think you would agree he's very beautiful now he's stopped with the faces. Icarus - our fallen angel. He taught me, the trauma he endured as a young horse was awful, he also got to work with RT Dido Fisher who worked

wonders with him. Big man Sliver - got me collaborating with RT Dr Rosie Jones-McVey, something I've been trying to schedule for years and it was great, riding and working Silver was an experience I will never forget, quite a journey. Ollie eyeliner - my Antics baby who's grown into a handsome young man. He gave me flying lessons which culminated in him becoming a groundwork horse. Hoping to involve him with the prison work. My beautiful Panda – who had been a client's horse I bought as I fell in love. She made me up my game as a rider and trainer and at 29 she is still queen of the field.

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