

Spotlight on Recommended Trainer Demelza Franssen, County Kerry, Ireland

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How long have you been involved with horses?

I was given a horsey book by a relative when I was about 7 or 8 years old, the rest as they say, is history! From helping out at local stables in exchange for rides (the good old system!), to riding owners horses, often the 'problem' horses or youngsters, to eventually getting my own horse in my 20s, in the same year that I started the first of my IH courses.

Why did you decide to qualify as a Recommended Trainer?

I really wanted to work with the misunderstood equines in a compassionate way and make it my career, and at the time, there was only one RT in Ireland and he was at the other end of the west coast to me. It seemed to me that there would be plenty of work to keep me busy.

What is a typical day for you?

Up to 6 years ago I was working full time with my close friend Sheila Charlesworth, together at her yard in Killarney, Co.Kerry we took in youngsters for starting, 'wild' ponies from charities, and horses with various issues. We also ran a few small demo's. Then my first baby was born, followed by another two spread out over 6 years, so I have had to take a step back.

I have two horses of my own, one of which I ride and try to do some endurance with, Hasan is a 13 year old chestnut Arab and the love of my life. I didn't have time for that when I was working other people's horses so I am concentrating on keeping him fit and having fun taking him out and about.

A typical day nowadays is home schooling my three children, aged 6, 3 and 2, mostly out and about. Organising a minder for them and heading out to my horses and once in a while to a call out, which are nearly always non loaders it seems!

Because I am a physically active person who needs to expend energy, I have taken up pole dancing/pole fitness in the last year and am loving it! It has made me stronger and much more flexible which has been a big bonus for my riding as well. Dancing raises awareness of our body movements, proprioception I think it's called, and it carries over into other sports with a positive impact. And I can dance at home with the kids!

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

I always want to see them with their horse and just observe their interaction together so that I can get a feel and understanding of their relationship.

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

Lack of about what IH is and stands for. Quite a few people, especially friends of the owner and other yard members, really expect just a 'quick fix' and seem genuinely surprised that there isn't a set prescription for each problem! The owner is always prepared to put in the homework but I often have to also help and support them with the discouragement and negativity they hear from others.

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

Without a doubt I would change people's attitudes, to horses, to each other, to opinions that differ from their own. There is 'old school', 'natural horsemanship', science and everything in between but none of those are all right nor all wrong, each horse/owner situation is so different that there really is no one way fits all scenario. It's not even about being 'open-minded', I feel, but more about being fair, fair to the horse and the owner. Fair would be to come up with reasonable solutions to problems rather than throwing everything out the door for an ideal, however beautiful that ideal may be.

What would be the first piece of advice you would give someone looking at buying/loaning their first horse?

I am in danger of being a complete hypocrite here, but, I would have to say don't let your heart rule your head, much easier said than done though, I know! A longish term trial period would be the best way of knowing if your potential dream horse will actually be just that, or not.

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

Loading issues, hands down by far the most common issue I get contacted about, followed by mounting and farrier issues.

What are your plans for the future?

My partner and I are hoping to purchase a small holding of our own this year, fingers crossed! A small yard with a bit of land would allow me to take in a few horses again, and I would dearly love to help out equine charities with the really hard to handle cases, the untouched and the mis-treated.

I would love to become a fully operational RT again!