

Spotlight on IH Recommended Trainer Bridget Colston

“Understand that Behaviour is Communication”

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

I started nagging my parents for riding lessons at age 3. No-one knew where this desire came from as my family aren't horsey and we lived in London. The only horse I saw was the rag and bone man! They gave in when I was 6 years old and by 8 years old I was helping out at a riding school every weekend and school holidays!

Why did you decide to qualify as a Recommended Trainer?

Because I met Sandra Williams! I had always wanted to work with horses but having worked in riding schools, livery yards, for a showjumper etc I just didn't feel I fit in to the conventional horsey world so I went off and got a 'proper job' and kept horses as a hobby. However, in 2006 I went out and bought a 'project pony' a rising 7-year-old Welsh Section D named Rebel. Having got Rebel home I realised that he was a little bit more of a project than I had bargained on! I sought help and met IHRT Sandra Williams. It might sound clichéd, but I literally realised that day, that this is what I am supposed to do with my life! I resigned from my job a month later and set about re-training.

What is a typical day for you?

The day starts and ends with my own horses, and any training liveries I have in at home. I'm very lucky as I live in a mobile home on the yard that I rent so it's a very short commute to work! Sometimes I may have lessons, clinics or courses at my yard but more usually I'm out on the road. I cover a huge area and it's a rare day that I haven't travelled at least 100 miles in a day. Depending on the time of year and how far I am travelling I can see anything between 2 and 8 clients in a day but 3 or 4 is fairly average. Once I'm back at home and my own horses are sorted out once more then I head straight to the laptop as I find I need to do an average of 2 hours 'admin' a day to keep up with calls, e-mails and messages arranging appointments etc. I work 6 days a week so it's a fairly busy lifestyle! I'm an Enlightened Equitation Teacher as well as an IHRT so this might be a mix of ridden and horsemanship lessons.

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

I want to leave with both the owner and their horse feeling that I have 'listened' to them and what they need. I also hope to have explained a little of my philosophy and some of the psychology behind the way we work in IH. I want a first session to be a positive experience for everyone and so I tend to be quite conservative with what I

might try and achieve. For instance, I try and encourage owners of horses who have problems with loading to book a pure groundwork session with me before we go ahead and attempt to work with loading problems.

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

I find that a lot of the horses that people contact me about who have perceived behavioural problems often have pain or discomfort problems. That can be a difficult thing for an owner to hear and I feel one of my key roles is supporting and guiding owners through the challenge of getting to the bottom of what their horses issues really are and navigating the confusing world of how best to deal with those issues.

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

I would love it to be common knowledge that horses ARE NOT NAUGHTY! I wish that the horse world at large understood that 'behaviour' is communication and I wish that everyone would automatically look to eliminate pain or physical problems as being a root cause of problem behaviour before assuming that it's a training issue or a 'bad' horse.

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

Moving home and changing owner can be a really traumatic time for a horse – so be prepared to put the time in to working on your relationship. Embrace the fact there may be some challenges and have a support network in place.

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

I think there is some fairly entrenched beliefs in the horse world along the lines of 'horses just do this stuff'. I think sometimes changing the owners mindset about the challenges they are facing with their horse is the biggest deciding factor in how things will turn out, and sometimes the most tricky!

What are your plans for the future?

For as long as I can I want to keep doing what I do! I want to keep learning and growing and evolving. Rebel and I want to keep doing a little bit of TREC when we can and in 2019 I bought an unhandled 2 year old so I am really excited to start his journey. He's got really big hooves to fill as Rebel and I have had so much fun together. I'd also really love to write a book or two!

What three things should everyone practice with their horses?

Practice being present! Horses live 'in the moment' Busy lives mean it's often hard for us humans to achieve this. But our horses will thank us for being present. Practice being kind. You can make an awful lot of mistakes – if your intentions are good your horse probably won't even notice. Practice listening – we are all pretty good at telling our horses what they should be doing but are we listening to what they think we should be doing?

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

For a couple of years, I helped Monty with starting the youngsters at Sandringham – one particular filly liked to go around the round pen like she was re-creating the Wall of Death. She leant in at such an angle that on more than one occasion the saddle slipped. I would want to stop and adjust it, but Monty kept saying – why are you worried, just keep yourself in the middle. Then a week or so later we were on Tour and I had warmed Kelly's horse Pie up for Monty to ride. When Monty mounted Pie's saddle slipped right off to one side... Monty gave me such a look, but I was so tempted to say "What are you worried about Monty? Just keep yourself in the middle!"

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

Gosh – I've had so much good advice over the years. But my Grandad had a saying – "Life is for the accumulation of happy memories" and I try to make that my motto.

What has been the proudest moment/biggest achievement in your career?

I'm not sure if this counts – but Rebel the 'project pony' who got me in to Intelligent Horsemanship in the first place, was really quite tricky, he reared A LOT and a lot of people thought I should give up on him. I bought him in 2006 and in 2009 we qualified for the GB TREC Championships. They were in Scotland that year and when I found myself at the top of a Scottish mountain on the pony that everyone had said would be the death of me – I had to pinch myself! He qualified for three years in a row before a change in my circumstances meant we retired from TREC for several years.

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

To work twice as hard on your people skills as you do on your horse skills!

Please share some of the horses you have started that have gone on to competition success.

I worked on loading with a horse last year who is tipped to be a Badminton prospect!

How you came to be involved with Monty and Kelly?

Well I met Kelly through the courses and although I had helped at several demos my first real encounter with Monty was when I was asked to take Rebel to Your Horse Live for a special demo there. Rebel had never been ridden indoors, to my knowledge, and I had to ride him in the main arena in front of a huge audience. Later I helped Monty at Sandringham and from there I became involved with the Tour. I was stand-in rider before becoming Kelly's Tour PA and later taking on the horse selecting role.

Have you taken IH to any other parts of the world?

Yes, I travelled to Kenya in 2019 to pass on the IH techniques. This was a wonderful experience.