

## **Spotlight on Recommended Trainer Stephanie Heeran**

### **IH Recommended Trainer Stephanie Heeran is based in Tipperary, Southern Ireland, covering both Northern and Southern Ireland.**

*She says, "I wanted to find better approaches that were in line with my values of non-violence, or even non-harshness when training and dealing with horses. I travelled back and forth to the UK to complete my training with Kelly and the IH Team to become a Recommended Trainer".*

### **How long have you been involved with horses?**

All of my life. When I was child my grandfather bought me a young Connemara pony and we 'grew up' together. I always then had one or two of my own sport horses, plus I worked in a livery and competition training yard for three years after I had left my first career as a technical draughtsperson.

### **Why did you decide to qualify as a Recommended Trainer?**

I had a lovely mare called Saoicha but she was complicated and challenging. Although we built a good relationship and she went on to be a great competition horse, I always felt I could have worked with her in the early days in a better way. I wanted to find better approaches that were in line with my values of non-violence, or even non-harshness when training and dealing with horses. I started out on the Foundation course and really loved every minute of it, so spent the next two years travelling back and forth to the UK to complete my training and become a Recommended Trainer. Shortly afterwards, I started working in Newtown Stud.

### **What is a typical day for you?**

I manage a large stud so there is no typical day. We have just under 100 horses on site at any one time, plus I am overseeing mares to be covered and foaled, horses going in and out of training, plus obviously weaning and working with all the young horses. I also start as many of the horses as I can myself. Any day will involve a mix of hands on skills with a range of horses, and lots of phone calls, driving, loading and unloading, liaising with the vet and farrier teams and discussing issues with the Stud owner. I also liaise with the trainers about injuries, fitness, training and race decisions.

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

I don't get to do much work outside of the Stud, so the most important thing for me is that every horse that leaves the stud is confident and

mannered and knows their job – this gives the best possibility of succeeding in racing or breeding.

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

I work in a fairly traditional equine industry. A lot of people don't understand what I do and why, but they do notice how relaxed, well-mannered and prepared to perform the horses are that I work with.

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

I hate to see any type of violence, abuse or harshness directed at horses. Sometimes this can be overt, other times it is subtler. I don't think we have systems that respond very well to the different types of abuse that go on against horses.

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

Always get the best coaching and guidance you can. This is much more important than having all the gear or the fanciest horse. Always go for horse that you know will look out for you.

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

The most common issue people come to me about outside of my Stud work is loading and leading – I always find that although someone will say 'he is great at everything but....' Then when I meet them I find the horse has taken charge of the situation and the loading is never the real issue!

**Fascinating fact about Fascinating Rock?**

He was bred here, he is the highest rated horse to retire to stud this year in Ireland and I believe was no 1 middle distance horse in the world for a time. I think that he still ranked about 13th in the world over all distances and age.

**What are your plans for the future?**

I just love what I am doing – for me, achievement is watching the horses I have worked with reach their full potential.

**Is there a little something our readers may not know about you?**

I got into Olympic weightlifting a little bit by accident in the gym that I go to. I liked the 2 movements in Olympic lifting, snatch and clean & jerk and just wanted to improve my technique with them, but I never had any intention of competing at it.

About 2 months in there was a small in-house competition. As they say you should do something that scares you every day. I felt if I didn't do my first comp in my own gym I'd never do one.

It was terrifying, but I did it and another and so on. The successful competing is the icing on the cake for me. The real benefits are something else entirely, they are mental and physical.

I have badly damaged shoulders. I had practically zero movement in my right shoulder after an accident. It took great determination and a lot of physiotherapy to get it back, but I still had constant low-grade pain in it. Since I've started my lifting the muscles are so strong my shoulders are now very stable, and I have no pain. My fitness makes my everyday day job so much easier.

Also, it's very important for women to lift heavy weights in order to maintain bone density.

The mental benefits are immeasurable. I train 4/5 days a week and it gives me totally mental space away from work and life. I've also met fabulous people in the gym and competing, all on their own journey that I would never have met.

I never thought I'd be doing something like this let alone be completing at it. I recently completed at the master's nationals and am considering competing at the masters Europeans in June.