

THAT

'Aha!'

FEELING

Sometimes it's the tiniest tweaks that make the biggest difference. From rein length to stirrup adjustments, the right details can unlock your confidence, improve your position and help you feel truly in sync with your horse, finds **Catherine Welton**

HAVING A 'LIGHTBULB' moment in your riding can be transformative. With one small adjustment, things just seem to click into place as you master a movement or clear a fence in a newly confident way. These small tweaks can seem obvious when you know what they are, but they're also easily overlooked. So, paying attention to the little things can add up to big successes in your schooling.

Devon-based Andrew Lovell is a BHSI who trains riders of all abilities and ages across a multitude of disciplines including dressage, jumping and showing.

He says: "A lot of it is about getting the horse to be comfortable and secure, then about making the rider comfortable so they can focus on riding."

Sitting comfortably

One of the first things we think about is the saddle fit on the horse. However, the rider's saddle fit is sometimes overlooked — and that can have a big impact on rider position and performance.

"I think some people do ride in saddles that are too big for them," says Andrew. "That can make you more insecure in the saddle and when you're insecure, the first thing you do is grip."

When the saddle is a good fit, you let go and become much more independent."

Alaina Webster, a BHSAI and dressage judge, agrees. She highlights one saddle adjustment for the rider that's often overlooked.

"Many riders don't realise their knee rolls move or how much it can help them just to have a bit more support in the right place," she explains. "For example, if you're trying to do flatwork in a GP, you can put the knee roll down a bit to have a more dressage-y leg — and that's a really practical solution."

Say no to seat savers

Andrew also advises against using seat savers for schooling.

"It changes the balance of the saddle, which has been designed to give you the best opportunity to stay in the middle and be secure. The seat saver fills the space, changing the balance of the saddle."

Another seemingly small detail is the stirrup irons. "Some riders struggle with the ones that have rubber insets on the side as the tread moves. They can find it an unstable base and the rider ends up gripping with their calf to keep their leg still," states Andrew. "On the flip side, some people don't like the ones with the 'cheese grater' [these have a textured, metal tread with sharp, raised edges and are designed to maximise grip], because their foot can't move. They feel a bit too held. Find out what works best for you."



When a saddle fits the rider as well as the horse, both are able to perform at their best