

"One of the joys of training horses is learning their individual likes and dislikes. Some horses thrive on simple routines, while some love to be challenged. Ridden routines will evolve as the horse matures, becomes stronger and gains confidence," says Danny.

This is where it helps to have a good trainer who can give the rider that

"eyes on the ground" perspective. Danny, meanwhile, is often asked if horses get bored with a routine.

"It's the riders who get bored," he notes. "Remember that nature designed the horse to eat grass for almost the entire day, so the work that we impose on him must be pretty entertaining."

DANNY ANHOLT'S TRIED AND TESTED WARM-UP ROUTINE

How to ride it

- 1 Walk on a long rein (not loose) for 5-10 minutes minimum. The horse must be in a low, round frame.
- 2 Leg yield in walk three or four times each way, with a stretch between each one.
- 3 Trot with frequent changes of rein (each long diagonal). Walk for three or four strides while changing the bend (at X).
- 4 Progress to a three-loop serpentine with walk steps over the centre line.
- 5 Walk and stretch briefly.
- 6 Perform a four-loop serpentine. The 'S' shape of the loop is important to enhance lateral suppleness in the change of bend.
- 7 Walk and stretch.
- 8 Canter large in a light seat with neck flexions to the inside and outside.
- 9 Walk and stretch to change the rein.
- 10 Lengthen and shorten the canter.

11 Perform a small circle at A and C to collect, then lengthen on the long side. Push the boundaries a bit, but with the lightest possible aids, especially the hands. Develop a strong upper body position to enable collection.

12 Walk and stretch when changing the rein.

13 Counter canter can be introduced at this stage when the canter is supple.

Remember...

- It's important to stretch in walk (briefly) between each exercise and when changing the rein.
- Don't expect significant results until the routine has been established for some time (weeks or even months).
- The movements aren't being judged, so leg yields and counter canter are employed as exercises and will develop over time.

The occasional curveball

There are proven benefits — both physical and mental — to keeping a horse in a routine, and while some anticipatory behaviour can be problematic, particularly around feeding time, for the most part it works to an equestrian's advantage. However, even when an owner tries their best to give their horse a routine, life inevitably sometimes gets in the way, but building in small, regular variations will help a horse to cope better when life throws a curveball.

HAVING A ROUTINE IS GOOD FOR PEOPLE TOO

Research has shown that a daily routine reduces stress and makes humans more productive. Doing things in the same order means that the human brain can go into 'autopilot', causing it to use less mental energy. This reduces decision fatigue and leaves a person with more 'head space' for other things.

Routines have also been shown to help people feel more in control, thus boosting self-esteem. Therefore, mucking out the stable in the same way every day or making up feeds in the same order could actually have a positive effect on mental wellbeing.

CASE STUDY



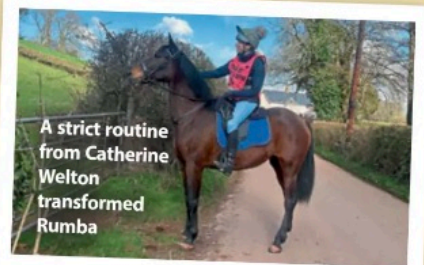
Rumba once ran along the fence line when turned out — but this no longer happens

'Within a week or so Rumba's box-walking had stopped'

Rumba, a seven-year-old PRE mare, was very anxious after her arrival from Spain. She had been bought to produce and sell on, but after a few weeks she was still too unsettled to move on. She box walked in her stable and if she was turned out she would run along the fence line, writes Catherine Welton.

I offered to look after Rumba while her owner worked out what to do with her. I integrated her into my own horse's routine, with regular feeding times and turnout, ensuring that she always went out and came in at the same time as my gelding, Moriarty. Within a week or so Rumba's box-walking had stopped, and she could be turned out for hours at a time without showing any signs of stress.

I am lucky to have a brilliant vet, Ashley Stewart of Evolution Equine in Somerset, who is always on hand with advice alongside practical vet duties.



A strict routine from Catherine Welton transformed Rumba

Ashley told me: "When a horse has experienced a big upheaval like Rumba had, creating a routine that they can rely on is really helpful. With a routine, the horse has confidence that her needs will be met. She knows when she will be fed, when she will be turned out and that she will have company. That takes away a lot of the stress."

As for what happened to Rumba — well, you can probably guess. I ended up buying her myself! 🐾