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RIDER 2



UP!



BY CATHERINE WELTON

the risk then the emotional system kicks in, which can be fear or excitement.”

So Leonie encourages riders to use the other thinking system, which is based on evidence and operates logically, rather than relying on emotions.

“To compete at that level, what are the facts?” she asks. “Which movements are you able to perform competently, or what heights are you comfortably jumping at home?”

British Horse Society Fellow Danny Anholt has a few rules of thumb to help assess when the time is right to move up.

“Consistent plus-65% scores in pure

dressage,” he says. “In jumping, you’re looking for consistent double clears at the current level – not rosettes, that’s determined by the opposition.

“It should also be consistent with your long-term planning. Slow, steady steps are needed to achieve both the technical skills and the confidence.”

THE right partnership of horse and rider is fundamental and, as someone who coaches a lot of younger riders, Danny always advises

gaining mileage on a horse that’s not only experienced but also happy being ridden by a less experienced rider.



“If the horse has been accustomed to clear signals and a confident approach, when he finds himself under the guidance of an inexperienced jockey, the pin can very quickly drop out,” he warns.

An amateur rider who has produced their own horse may fall into a slightly different trap.

“There’s a real danger of a ‘blind leading the blind’ scenario,” says Danny. “An objective view at this stage is essential. The best decisions are made through a collaboration between the rider, the coach and the horse himself.”

Leonie says this is another area where thinking logically is important.

“Riders will be emotionally attached to their horse, so it’s harder to look at the situation objectively,” she says. “Get someone you trust, with knowledge about what the horse needs to compete at that level, to give you honest feedback.”

When Alice Pullem thought she might have an unlikely grand prix dressage horse on her hands, she asked her trainer Eilidh Grant for a second opinion.

“Cheeky Wee Red is a barely-15hh former racehorse I bought as a project,” says Alice. “After a month I took her to her first competition at novice level and she scored 68%.”

As “Rosie” continued to progress in training, Alice continued to move her up the levels.

“We had a leg-yield so we went off and tried elementary. We mastered shoulder-in and half-pass so we tried medium. I asked Eilidh if she was up for the challenge of taking us to grand prix, and she took us seriously. In March 2023 we cantered down the centre line in our first one and scored just under 63%.”

ONCE the decision has been made to step up, Leonie explains how the right mindset can help the transition go smoothly.

“Look at the things you can control and identify the ‘key processes’, some of which will be the same, which is quite comforting,” she advises.

“For example, the jump might be higher but your position is pretty much the same.”

She also says to be prepared for some discomfort.

“That’s just your body getting ready to meet a new challenge. It’s a positive thing, you’re going to jump those higher fences, let’s get some blood to the muscles – you’re not nervous, you’re ready.”

There’s a lot of practical preparation a rider can do too.



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