

THE CHANGE I DIDN'T EXPECT

I was inspired to write this article by a breakthrough I had during a clinic with Andrew Lovell. I lacked confidence on the approach to a fence and was 'taking the canter' away from my horse while I tried to over-organise him. One of the first things that Andrew noticed was my flexible stirrups, which he felt weren't helping with my lower-leg stability.

I changed the stirrups and noticed an immediate difference. I now feel more secure in my position, am able to keep my leg on, and as a result feel more confident riding a bigger, more forward canter on the way to the fence, which of course my horse is much happier with, too. Small changes, especially those you might not immediately think of being of great influence, really can — and do — work!



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"I think riders are particularly bad at looking after themselves," adds Andrew. "Make sure you've had enough fluids and something quick to eat before you train."

He also points out that it's useful to go back to basics on occasion.

"Sometimes when we've heard something a million times, it stops having a meaning," he says, giving 'looking up' as an example. "It's not about staring ahead — it's about planning ahead. If your body is balanced, it's much easier to keep your head up, but if your body's unbalanced, you immediately look down again."

Set smaller targets

Gemma Hallett is a UKCC level 3 coach and sports mindset coach. She says focusing on small steps can help hugely from a psychological and motivational point of view.

"I think a lot of the time riders don't realise how easy it is to make a simple, small change. Riders tend to look at the end goal, and that often seems so far away. It can be overwhelming and thus difficult to start."

Instead, she advises breaking the end goal down into smaller targets.

"These are far more attainable and with each target being met, the rider is encouraged by the success to continue to the next stage," she explains. "It feels great to achieve even something small."

TOP TIP

Aim to ride when you're feeling at your best. For some of us that's first thing in the morning, for others it's later in the day. Not feeling it? Consider whether it's better not to tack up at all. Both you and your horse will enjoy it more and get the most out of a session when you're feeling good.



The difference made by a bit being a hole higher or lower can be huge

The smallest detail that made the biggest difference

Small changes can have big benefits. These riders are reaping the rewards after re-evaluating their systems:

"For those of us who are maybe of an older age, years ago we were all taught to 'fold forward' when we jump, but the reality is that unless you're jumping over 100cm, you rarely need to 'fold'. My instructor said to think more about doing a star jump in the stirrups when going over the fence. It sounds crazy until you try it, but my position and lower-leg security improved massively."

Claire Vallis

"I was told to ride like I was on a big, bouncy ball and if at any time it was to be taken away from underneath me, I'd fall on my feet. If I was too far forward in my seat, I would face plant, and when too far behind, I would land on my bum. That has stuck with me and made a huge difference."

Kelly Butterfield

"My instructor told me to stick my feet out in front to stop the falling forward, collapsing and folding. It gave me an easy visual image."

Helen Brophy

"Coming back to riding after having my baby and not riding for 18 months, I would run up and down the yard a few times and touch my toes before getting on. Then I would stand up in my stirrups for the first 5-10 minutes to help with my balance and feel more secure in my position."

Rosie Keirle

"Turning my heels slightly outwards really helped engage my thighs without gripping. Sitting tall in the downward transitions has also made a big difference for me."

Aileen Field 🐾