

# RIDER 1



# HIGH SCORE



# LEVEL

They say growth begins at the edge of your comfort zone, but how can riders successfully move up the levels without overstretching themselves or their horses?



## CREDIT 01

**W**HEN amateur eventer Gemma Atkin returned to riding after an 18-year break, she found 60cm showjumping courses terrifying. But, over five seasons, she moved up the levels and last year completed her first four-star.

"I was nervous at every level but crossing the finish line at Scone Palace, clear with only a handful of time-faults, was a moment I'll never forget," she says.

Her advice? "I believe in pushing slightly beyond your comfort zone but

there is a balance to be had."

Finding this balance is key to successfully moving up the levels, as Leonie Lightfoot, a sport psychologist for the British Equestrian World Class Programme, explains: "There needs to be a match of what you're doing and the skill set required. It needs to be just challenging enough but not too far, because then you



tip into the fear and anxiety zone."

Leonie encourages riders to plan their progression based on facts rather than emotions.

"With our brain, there are two systems, one of which operates with feelings and emotions," she says. "The problem with that is the emotional thinking system is not very reliable. Its job is to keep you safe, so it will never feel ready to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable."

"With dressage, there can be a reticence not to go until it's perfect but you'd be potentially waiting forever. With eventing, if the rider starts thinking too much about