

MEET... SIAN BOISSEAU



ALTHOUGH she has ridden for 30 years, Sian Boisseau (left) only started to compete three seasons ago. The London-based amateur eventer works full time in healthcare communications and owns one horse, the 17hh German Warmblood Pinatubo Truffie (Joe). The pair competes at BE100 level and recently finished 18th on their first attempt at novice. Sian's aim is to contest a CIC.

"Joe is six and he's not very established on the flat. Show jumping is a problem area for us too because the canter is weak," says Sian. "I know that if we can improve the dressage the rest will come. Joe tends to get hollow and quite long in his outline but he's got a good head on him and he likes to learn."



Building on the

basics

In the final part of our training series with flatwork guru Andrew Gould, the dressage maestro helps to ensure that two event horses competing at different levels find that necessary extra sparkle when it matters. **AIMI CLARK** reports

SIAN Boisseau's six-year-old Pinatubo Truffie ('Joe') had no flatwork experience when she bought him 18 months ago and when the pair

arrives at leading dressage rider and trainer Andrew Gould's yard for this lesson the gelding is still very much a work in progress. The warmblood is a big horse — 17hh — and is

MEET... ANDREW GOULD



MOST commonly associated with pure dressage, Andrew Gould (left), 29, boasts a tally of impressive results at national and international level and in 2007 he was ranked fifth in the British

Dressage small tour rankings. He recently sprung into the media spotlight as the dressage trainer of Katie Price but outside the glare of the press he has also begun to train a host of eventers, including Emily Baldwin, Sienna Myson-Davies and Emily Llewelyn, all of whom have turned to him for the assistance that will give them the edge in the first phase. This year Jonathan Clarke's intermediate eventer Loughnatousa Iceman also joined Andrew's string at his yard in Bolney, West Sussex, and the pair has completed nine BE100Open classes together.

still learning to carry himself properly rather than rely on his rider, as Andrew explains after the pair has warmed up.

"In trot he needs more bend and flexion. Think of it like using your legs to push his body through more," he says. "At the moment the horse hollows his back and then he drops the contact and brings his neck back. Once he does that there's no power coming from behind and he pulls into the rein, making it uncomfortable for the rider (inset above)."

To overcome this Sian needs to drive Joe up to the contact more and do exercises that will encourage him to use his back in order to build his strength. To begin with Sian trots the gelding on a 20m circle.

"Use your inside leg to push his back end out more so that the circle is a better shape," advises Andrew.

Sian does this and it instantly has an effect on how the horse is going (right, middle). She changes the rein and asks for leg yielding.

"Keep the bend so that you really feel the horse stepping across himself. Then he has to



left Joe tends to stretch Sian so that her reins get too long and she leans forward (below left). By sitting up and driving Joe forward into the contact (main picture) he starts to engage his hind quarters and the movement improves (below). Now that Sian is aware of this she can work on it and in time the canter work (bottom) will improve



work harder in his back," says Andrew. "The trick is to push him away from your leg but keep riding forward as well."

Next Sian asks Joe to canter. At first he is quite sluggish and Sian has to work hard to keep him going forward, which results in her body moving a lot in the saddle (right).

"Don't swing so much that you throw yourself forward. Keep your shoulders back more," says Andrew. "The strength in the canter comes from your lower back too."

To increase the activeness of the canter and make Joe sharper off Sian's leg the pair performs a number of trot-canter and walk-canter transitions. At first the gelding hollows when Sian applies the aids.

"If the first pace is more active the change up will be far easier," explains Andrew.

Another exercise is to get the horse to leg yield for several strides before asking for canter. This is particularly useful for horses who don't always strike off on the correct leg. For example, if you want left canter, leg yield to the right — ie push the horse away from your left leg.

"The rider's job is to recondition what's in front of them," adds Andrew.

Get a grip

As Andrew watches Sian and Joe work he notices that her reins gradually get longer and the contact becomes loose (top). This means that she is not in a position to push Joe forward into the contact and at times he breaks the pace when she doesn't want him to.

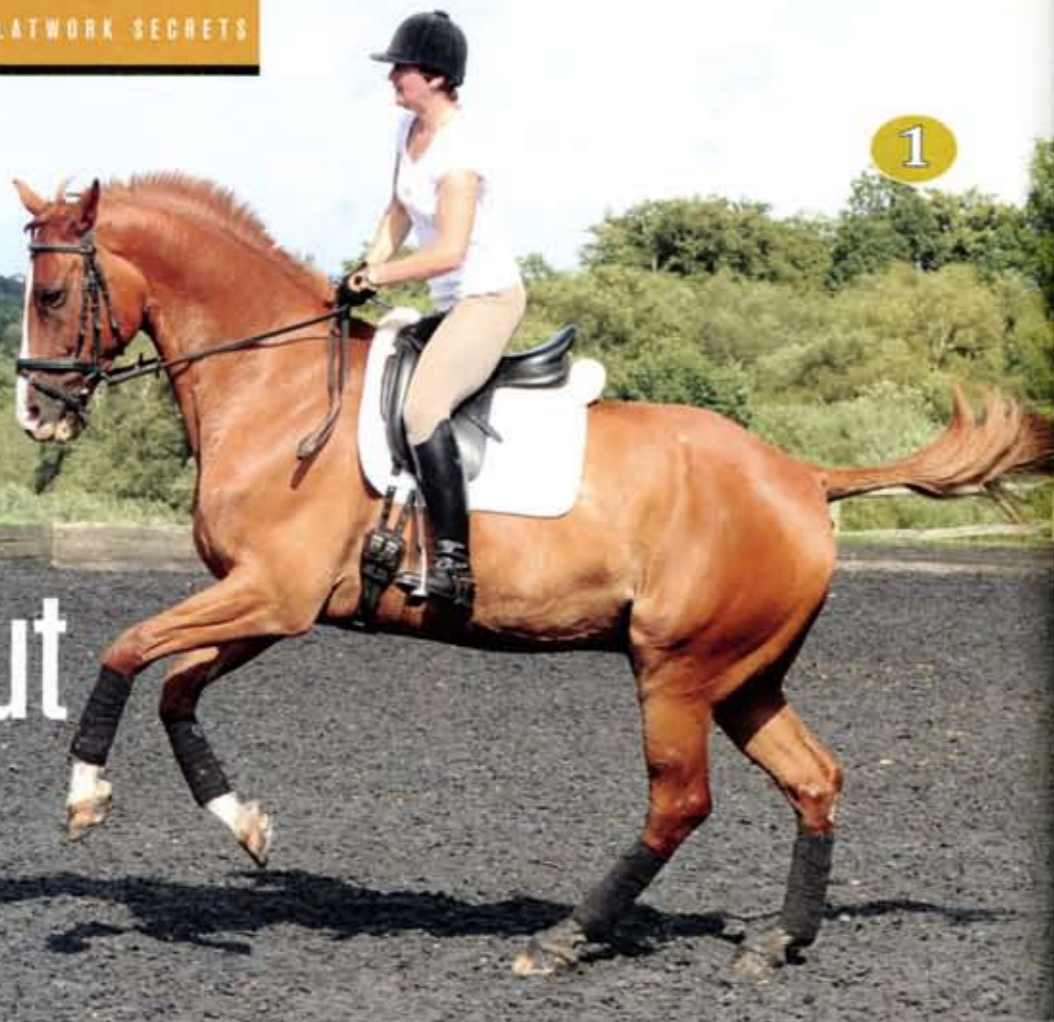


"When the reins are too long and you want to make a change or do a half-halt you end up having to lean back and you lose your own balance, which is off putting for the horse," explains Andrew.

Sian mentions that Joe has started to feel heavy in her hand.

"That heaviness is always an indication of something but don't panic about it," advises

Ironing out the weak links



WHEN it comes to warming up a horse at the beginning of a schooling session Andrew Gould is not a great believer in working in a long and low contact. As he watches Clair Jeffreys warm up her 12-year-old gelding Great Idea ('Parker') he

says: "It should be an easy trot without any pressure. Have a contact, though, don't let him get so strung out that it takes another 20 minutes to get the horse together." In canter Clair applies the same strategy. "There's no need for too much bend at this stage but the canter should be active."

Clair soon has Parker working in an outline and Andrew notices that although the gelding is balanced and the presentation looks good, he is not working through his whole body. "The problem lies in not having enough strength in his back," says Andrew. "He's got



clockwise from main picture Parker knows how to do flying changes, half passes, extended and working trot, he just needs to perfect his technique to get better marks at advanced level

Andrew. "Think about why it's happening in the first place. If he's tired you could end up getting into a fight about who's carrying his head so let him stretch. Until he goes forward and is more active he won't be able to hold the contact for too long." The pair picks up canter again and at each corner Sian lets the gelding get away from her without realising it because he hollows and her reins lengthen. "You've got to be quick and plan ahead so that he doesn't change you," advises Andrew.

"Think through the corner before you get to it and keep your leg on to maintain the canter." Sian does this but she finds it difficult. "It needs practice so get into the habit of thinking about it every time you're schooling," says Andrew. Sian makes the transition to trot for several strides before asking for canter again. "Did you feel him drop down as he went into canter?" asks Andrew. "Keep your back straight and the reins short so that when he ducks down you're ready."

Sian tries the transition again and the result is a sharper change and more active canter. "It will take time to perfect but it will come," adds Andrew. Next Sian rides a 20m circle and then changes the rein to ask Joe for counter canter. "The aim is to keep the same quality in the canter but remember that he's going to try to stretch you," says Andrew. "Keep the horse's neck slightly straight otherwise he can escape through the shoulder and is more likely to change leg."

MEET... CLAIR JEFFREYS



MARRIED mother of one Clair Jeffreys (left) juggles eventing her horse Great Idea ('Parker') around a full-time job as head of equestrian at Coverwood Premier Property Agents. The 41-year-old has been riding all her life and got her first pony aged six. She bought Parker, a 12-year-old Irish Sport Horse, from Donal Barnwell as a just-broken five-year-old and has taken him through the grades. The pair has had some good results and made their two-star debut at Hartpury this year where they finished 41st. "I like to think of myself as a professional amateur because of all the time, effort and money I put into it," says Reigate-based Clair. "With work and family commitments I only have time for one horse and we're mostly up against the real professionals so Parker needs to be finely tuned on the flat to be more competitive. He's not the biggest moving horse and we need more 'wow' factor."

a good brain and really knows his jobs so it's something that can be worked on." Although he does everything that Clair asks, at times Parker is not completely straight through his body and neck even though he does appear to be working in a nice outline. So although it may look and feel good to the untrained eye, this will lose the pair crucial marks in the dressage arena. Clair trots Parker across the diagonal of the arena. "Ride straight and don't allow the horse to put his bum up against you," advises Andrew. "Don't restrict the trot. If anything it needs to be more active."

Andrew instructs Clair to incorporate some halt-trot and trot-halt transitions as well as change the length of trot strides around the arena. "Shorten the trot for eight strides or so and then push him on a bit," says Andrew. "It will encourage him to work through his whole body." Clair does this and Parker responds well, although when asked to increase the stride he lacks momentum. "You need to be more positive when riding him out of the transition," explains Andrew. "The pace shouldn't speed up; there just needs to be more drive. When you shorten

The gelding isn't always truly engaged but when Sian taps him with her whip he really starts to use his hind legs. "His quarters fall in slightly so use the outside rein and inside leg to bring the hind leg back under his body," explains Andrew. "Fundamentally you need balance, energy and to use the transitions to engage a horse." **What did we learn?** Andrew thinks that when Joe is stronger in his body he will produce a competitive test.

the stride you're compressing the energy and when you go forward you're releasing it so at no point should you take it away (picture 3)."

Stepping sideways

After spending time establishing the trot, Clair asks Parker for some half-passes. At first Clair is tipping forward, which makes it hard for the gelding to maintain his balance. "You're leaning forward with your elbows out so come again and think 'sit up, elbows in'," says Andrew. Clair replies that at their most recent competition the dressage judge commented that she rushed the half-pass. This is because Parker feels lazy and she is trying to drive him forward. "The size of the trot is good but you want him to think sharper," advises Andrew. "You mustn't get confused — the judge says you're rushing but if you slow down there won't be anything left. Think about putting him into the movement but keeping the same trot."

According to Andrew, Clair is having problems with the more advanced movements because the basic trot work needs to be improved (picture 2). "You can't make the basic trot better in the half-pass, though," explains Andrew. "Make the correction by asking for more trot when you're working on a circle or around the arena." Clair attempts the half-pass again and this time her position is more upright and Parker works well because the trot is more active (picture 4). "The angle of the rider's body must be at the same as the horse's," adds Andrew, prompting Clair to correct herself. "Because you weren't quite right you've lost some of the energy in the trot."

Cracking the canter

Next Clair asks Parker to canter. He is slow to react to her aids, though, and resists. "Don't expect a polite answer from him," says Andrew. "You've kicked on because you let him drop off your leg in trot. You're training so there's time to get it right by asking again and making sure he comes straight off your leg." Clair brings the gelding back to trot and then asks for canter again. She uses her legs more firmly and Parker rushes forward. Clair's reaction is to pull him back but Andrew says: "Go with it. You've asked him to go forward and that's what he's done so don't block him." The next upward transition is much cleaner and Clair asks for medium canter on

the long sides of the arena and working canter on the short sides. "Sit quietly and let him take you. You shouldn't have to keep pushing him forward," adds Andrew. After cantering a circle on the left rein Clair steers Parker across the arena. Instead of changing legs she asks the gelding for some counter canter and has to hold a strong bend through his neck to prevent him changing legs. "By holding on to the bend like that it blocks him and you lose the quality of the canter," explains Andrew. "It doesn't matter that it's happening here because you've got time to correct him. The problem needs to be ironed out rather than just stopping him doing it and losing the freedom in the canter." "Too many eventers just learn to deal with their horse's problem when it can be sorted out at home. A horse should be taught not to do it in the first place."

Defining the change

Clair rides a serpentine and asks Parker to change leg each time he crosses the centre line (picture 1). The same number of strides should be ridden between every flying change and the side of the arena. It is still possible to do the movement with a less established horse by changing legs through trot. Clair has been working on Parker's flying changes at home and each one is accurate. However, the gelding is clever and for the last couple he anticipates the change. Andrew's advice is to ride the serpentine as though the horse is turning back on himself, so ride a curve rather than a straight line to the centre. "The corner engages the horse and it gives the rider more time to get to the centre, plus it encourages the horse to stay straight," explains Andrew. "As the changes get more established the curve decreases."

Some fine tuning required

"It takes three years to train a horse to grand prix level and then another four to perfect it," says Andrew. "This horse is the equivalent to Clair's grand prix horse — he knows how to do everything, he just needs to perfect it. You can't change what he is but he can be competitive by perfecting his technique." Clair concludes: "Parker's movements need to be finely tuned in order to get the better marks. I've never had a horse at this level before so I need to train myself to do it as well."

ANDREW ON... THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

"ON a cross-country course eventers have to ride positively and the moment their horse backs off a fence they're on it to keep forward. For some reason, though, they tend not to apply the same approach in the dressage arena. Eventers need to bring some cross-country attitude into the first phase and push their horses forward into the movement rather than pulling them back."

Next time: show jumping with Mary King.