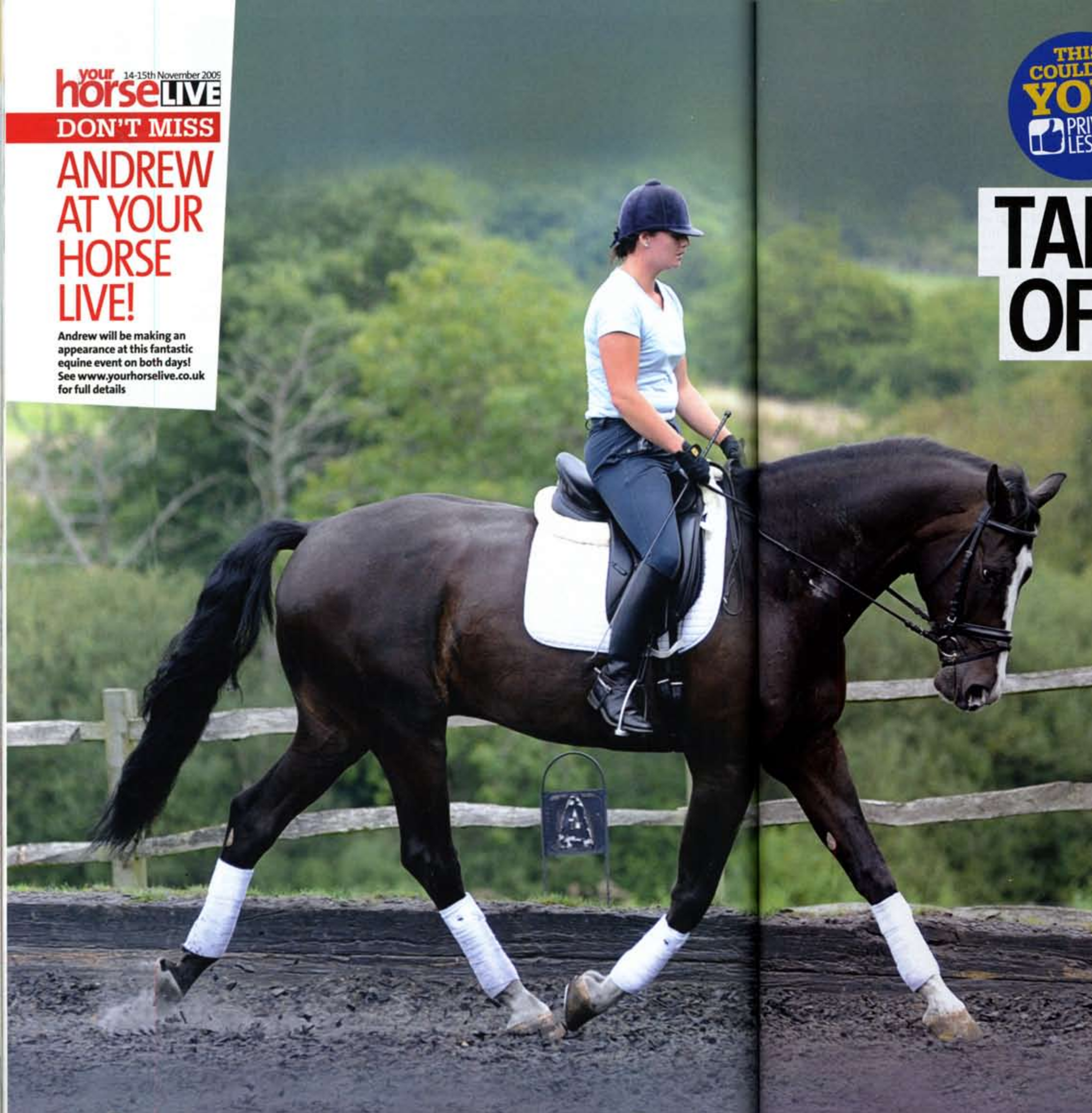


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Riding Private Lessons

HELP ME TAKE CHARGE OF MY GIANT HORSE

> Your problems solved with our one-to-one training sessions

Words Rebecca Gibson

The trainer



> **Name Andrew Gould**
> **Experience** Andrew is one of the country's most promising dressage riders. He's competed on five consecutive Young Rider European Championship teams and been part of the World Class Potential Squad for the last three years. He's hit the headlines for training model Katie Price, but is also dressage trainer to eventers Emily Llewellyn, Sienna Myson-Davies and Sharon Hunt.

The rider and horse



> **Name Anna Ryland**
> **Experience** Anna brought Dutch warmblood Arnie as a 17hh five-year-old and planned to event him. In the three years she's owned Arnie, he's grown to a shocking 18.2hh. He's now too much horse for Anna to jump so she's been focusing on dressage with him. Anna has done a few Prelim and Novice tests on Arnie, but finds he can be quite obstinate and difficult to manage.



Andrew watches Anna work Arnie in

1 ANDREW'S ASSESSMENT

Andrew asks Anna to warm Arnie up as she normally would at home so he can get an idea of what they need to work on.

After watching for a few minutes, Andrew has a good idea of what's going wrong and calls Anna into the centre of the school so that he can explain.

'Arnie is a huge horse – he seems quite tense and opinionated'

"Arnie is a huge horse and you're only small so it's vital you have him listening and attentive," Andrew tells Anna.

"He seems quite tense and opinionated, so we need to work on getting him to relax and encourage him to work with you, rather than against you."

2 PUSHING THROUGH THE RESISTANCE

Andrew notices Anna has a tendency to hold Arnie back. "It looks like you're working quite hard to contain Arnie," he says. "Although it may feel too fast and out of control when you ride him forwards, that's just because his natural stride is quite big. From the ground his trot actually looks quite stilted and lacking in energy, so push him on a bit."

As Anna pushes Arnie forwards he gets very strong and starts to lean on the reins. Anna responds by taking her leg off. "Essentially you just rewarded him for getting heavy in your hands," Andrew explains. "He's just testing you, and by backing off you failed the test. Now he knows all he has to do is lean on your hand to get out of working properly."

"Push him on again in the trot and, if he gets strong and starts to lean on your hand, ride him forwards through it. You need to keep your leg on and push him through his resistance until he learns to let go of the rein."

"If you feel he's getting really strong and you're struggling to hold him, ride a transition or even come back to halt so that he learns that you dictate what happens, not him."



When Anna pushes the trot on, Arnie starts to lean on the reins



Anna rides some halt transitions to lift Arnie off his forehead



At the beginning of the lesson, Arnie hollows through every walk-trot transition

3 TAKING CHARGE

Next, Andrew wants to work on getting Arnie to work through his back properly.

"He's hollowing every time you change the pace," says Andrew. "Keep your hands a little wider and make sure you have him connected on your outside rein before you ask him to come back to walk."

As Anna asks Arnie to come back, he resists and instead leans into the rein. Anna backs off and Arnie shoots his head in the air before finally coming back to walk.

"That was a really half-hearted effort," says Andrew. "You have to have him between your hand and your leg, even when you're making a downward transition."

Anna makes a good upwards transition to trot and rides a 20m circle before asking for walk again. Arnie leans into the rein a little, but Anna keeps her legs on his sides and manages to keep him connected on the rein.

"That was much better," says Andrew, "but make sure you keep

an even feel down both reins, he wasn't quite straight there."

"I think you need to take control in this relationship and show Arnie who's boss."

"I don't mean you have to be heavy handed with him – just feel what Arnie wants to do and make him do the opposite."

"If he wants to slow down, make him go faster and if he wants to speed up, make him wait. Equally, if he wants to stick his head in the air, make him drop it lower."

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4 LOOSENING UP

Arnie is very tight through his body and is carrying a lot of tension in his neck, so Andrew suggests some exercises to help make him more supple. "Let's start with a bit of leg-yield," he says.

Anna starts on the left rein and brings Arnie up the three-quarter line in trot. She asks Arnie to move away from her inside leg, back towards the track.

"Don't use too much inside bend," Andrew warns. "If he's bending too much through his neck, he'll fall out through his outside shoulder. Try again, but this time I want you to turn up the half way line and hit the track at F."

Anna rides a good leg-yield but reaches the track well before F.

"You got back to the track far too early there," says Andrew. "You want to be able to ride forwards as well as sideways in the leg-yield. It's not about how quickly you can get back to the track. Arnie must learn to wait for your aid, not run away from your

leg to the track. As the rider you need to be able to say where and when the movement will finish."

'Ride forwards as well as sideways in the leg-yield'



At first Arnie has a little too much inside flexion



Riding leg-yield helps Anna to get Arnie moving away from her leg

Riding leg-yield on a circle helps get Arnie bending through his body



5 MAKING HIM LET GO

Andrew asks Anna to bring Arnie onto a 15m circle in the middle of the school.

"He's really holding on to his outside shoulder while you're trying to get him to bend to the inside," says Andrew. "Push him away from your inside leg so that he learns to respect your leg aids and move away."

"Really bend him to the inside and push his quarters out. It's a bit like car drifting," Andrew tells Anna. "Let the back end swing out and control the front end."

"Now move him back in by asking him to move away from your outside leg. That's it, keep the flexion to the inside and, if he tries to lift his head, ride him forwards through it. Now push him back out again."

Once Arnie starts to release the tension through his body, Andrew tells Anna to take him large.

"Keep your leg on," says Andrew. "Excellent, the trot is much better now he's started to bend through his body."

"Leg-yield and working on a circle like this are great exercises to help get a big strong horse like Arnie listening."

"His immediate response at the moment is to push against you, but riding movements like these will help teach him to work with you."

turn the page

to find out Andrew's verdict

Riding Private Lessons

6 ASKING FOR STRETCH

"Before you come back to walk just see if you can get Arnie to have a stretch," Andrew tells Anna. As Anna trots round the outside of the school she asks Arnie to take the rein down, but it's clear he doesn't really know what's being asked of him.

"He's always carrying so much tension in his neck," Andrew says. "Bring him back to walk and see if he finds it any easier."

"Keep the contact on the rein, but try to encourage him down by gently massaging the rein. I don't want a perfect stretch at this stage, I just want to see him soften forwards to the bit."

Anna is still struggling to get Arnie to respond so Andrew tells her to give him a loose rein. Immediately Arnie's walk lengthens and he relaxes through his neck and body.

"You're going to need to do a lot of work on the walk without much of a feel on the rein. He really needs to learn to walk freely – as soon as you touch the rein he starts backpedalling and the walk becomes stifled."



Arnie stretches forwards but can't get the idea of reaching downwards

Once Anna drops the contact completely, Arnie starts to drop his head

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The verdict

THE TRAINER

Anna needs to work hard on freeing up Arnie's paces. Arnie is a big horse with paces to match and Anna needs to be brave enough to allow him to move forwards freely.

Anna has fallen into a common trap and has been stilted the natural flow of Arnie's paces because the movement feels so big. This is a common mistake and one that's easy to rectify with a bit of work.

Arnie has a tendency to avoid the contact by carrying his head quite high, so I would advise Anna to do lots of work encouraging him to carry his

head lower. At this stage I wouldn't worry too much about him carrying himself in the correct position, I would just want to see him working with a relaxed neck to a soft contact. Anna can then work on picking him up by riding lots of transitions.

I would also advise Anna to do lots of lateral work with Arnie to teach him to respect her leg and move away when she asks.

THE RIDER

It's so easy to slip into bad habits when you have no one on the ground watching. It's been a real revelation to hear that I actually need to be pushing Arnie on when he resists, in the past I've always thought I must be putting too much pressure on him and have backed off – clearly he's learnt this is a great way to get out of doing any work. I also thought Arnie's canter was pretty fast and free, so it was interesting to hear that it looks too short and stilted from the ground. The things I've learnt today will definitely change the way I ride in the future.