

Are you frustrated that your horse performs better at home than he does at a competition? In the first part of our flatwork series, trainer to the stars Andrew Gould demonstrates how a finely tuned warm-up can get those crucial extra marks. **AIMI CLARK** reports

Why homework will get you in the judge's good books

It doesn't matter if your horse consistently jumps double clears at affiliated horse trials, the sport has become so competitive that if your dressage mark has put you well down the order to start with you are unlikely to be at the top of the leaderboard at the end of the day.

Nowadays you and your horse need to be finely tuned in all three phases, which means that doing your homework and warming up your horse so that he will perform at his best

ALL ABOUT... LOUGHNATOUSA ICEMAN

The 17.1hh grey gelding Loughnatousa Iceman ('Ice') was previously evented at novice level by his owner, Jonathan Clarke, and produced to two-star level by Vicky Brake. Andrew taught Jonathan and 'Ice' for a year before he took on the ride himself in April this year.

"We were already on the same wavelength and I knew his strengths and weaknesses," says Andrew. "His straightness in the canter was an issue so I've really worked on that and by doing a lot of transitions in his work Ice has become physically stronger."

Andrew and the 11-year-old Ice (left) have completed eight events at BE100/novice level, their best placing being a second at Hambleden.

"It's taken a few events for us to get to know each other," adds Andrew. "He's not the best horse on the flat but he is very genuine. You have to produce the action from him as it doesn't tend to come naturally."



top left to right regular halt-trot and trot-halt transitions are used to warm up Ice until he shows no resistance and accepts the contact right the gelding falls behind the vertical but the outline isn't a concern until Ice engages his hindquarters



ANDREW ON... PRACTISING YOUR TEST

ANDREW doesn't ride through the whole dressage test until the day of the competition and is a great believer that the best way to practise is by riding sections or particular movements at home.

"You can't practise a test at home as you would at a competition because you can't ride with the same mental pressure you get in that atmosphere," says Andrew. "That's not to say you shouldn't ride through the whole thing but personally that approach doesn't work for me."

main picture Ice leg yields to the right. Andrew has spent a lot of time working on the basics when training Ice to develop his lateral work and get the best movement from him

in the dressage arena is essential for success – whether you're competing at BE80(T) level or advanced.

Andrew Gould and Loughnatousa Iceman ('Ice') have successfully completed a number of BE100 and novice tracks recently on marks that many riders would love to emulate.

So what is Andrew's secret?

He says it is all down to consistent training and a tried and tested competition warm up.

A regular regime

Andrew has a simple warm up regime in place that he uses with all of his horses when he is working them at home. This is tweaked slightly to suit each one and the same approach is used when working in at a competition.

"Find out what works for your horse and then ride at events the same as you do at home," says Andrew. "A lot of event riders change their system and back off too much when they're competing when they should be doing the opposite."

For this training session Andrew begins by working Ice in trot, incorporating regular halt-trot and trot-halt transitions (top left to right).

"They aren't slow or progressive transitions and I want to feel Ice give in the contact and learn to let go before he moves

MEET... ANDREW GOULD

MOST commonly associated with pure dressage, Andrew Gould, 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, not least Emily Baldwin, Sienna Myson-Davies and Emily Llewellyn, all of whom have turned to him for the assistance that will give them the edge in the first phase.

This year, too, the intermediate eventer Loughnatousa Iceman ('Ice') (see box, opposite page) joined Andrew's string at his yard in Bolney, West Sussex, and the pair has completed six BE100 Open classes together.

"I hadn't previously had a jumping lesson since I was about 13," says Andrew (above), who has been training over the coloured poles with show jumper Duncan Ingles and Mark Corbett for cross-country. "I'm learning something new every time out but I still make mistakes so I need to do more BE100s."



off," explains Andrew. "I'll keep doing transitions until I feel him working through his body more."

Once this is established Andrew asks Ice to canter on both reins.

"At this stage the horse needs to be thinking forward and then I'll start to ask him to shorten and lengthen his stride."

While he is warming up it appears that Andrew isn't worried about the position of his horse's head (above left).

"At the moment Ice is slightly behind the vertical but that means I can ride him forward and up to the bridle when he goes

into the test or later on in the training session," explains Andrew.

"That's always my basic warm-up. Ice is working through his body now and there's more flexion which tells me he is engaging with the contact."

A work in progress

How you work your horse at a competition is often affected by their temperament. Ice is a very calm horse and the fact that he doesn't get excited works in Andrew's favour.

"It means that I can really put pressure on him when we're working and the advantage is that I can warm him up at a competition in the exact same way that I work him at home. I like Ice to be sharper in the jumping phases but for the dressage I can be on at him as much as I need to be," says Andrew. "That's what most event horses need to get the better marks but riders are worried that they might explode. If they're doing it right at home then use that formula at an event."

Andrew brings Ice back to a walk and incorporates some shoulder-ins to keep the horse's concentration (*far right*). For less experienced horses asking for more inside bend will have the same effect.

"If a horse gets tight through his body some lateral work can help him to loosen up. It doesn't matter what level he's at, the horse must accept the contact and rider's leg at the same time," explains Andrew.

Ice's weakest gait is the walk. When Andrew allows him to relax and stretch his neck on a long rein his first reaction is to hollow (*top right*). However, this doesn't mean Andrew will spend lots of time practising Ice's walk.

"The fact that he's not taking the rein tells me there's a problem somewhere," he says. "Ice isn't working through his body and into the contact so that is what needs to be improved, not the walk. You've got to fix the problem before it can be practised."

To overcome this, trot-halt-trot transitions have proved beneficial. Over time they can improve a horse's strength through his back as he works through his body and accepts the contact.

"When I first started riding Ice he was physically quite weak and the problem in loose walk was a major sign of that but over time he's got better as his strength increases."

Thinking laterally

Now that Ice is listening and working well, Andrew moves him up to trot.

"We're not doing anything too strenuous. I'm just looking for a consistent rhythm, balance and the horse to be thinking forward," explains Andrew.

He asks for some shortened and lengthened strides (*above right*) before several trot-halt-trot transitions and Ice responds straight away.

"I do this regularly when I'm schooling so Ice knows the drill. He's already thinking forward and working well," says Andrew.

When Ice is established in trot Andrew asks for some leg yielding (*main photo, page 14*). The gelding immediately responds to his



Clockwise from top left walk is Ice's weakest gait; Andrew avoids doing the same thing for too long and incorporates some shoulder-in in the walk to keep Ice interested in his work; lengthening and shortening the stride encourages Ice to work through his body

jockey's aids and moves sideways, away from the leg. Ice's lateral work wasn't established when Andrew took him on, though, so this is something he's had to develop. But, he says, with all horses if you get the basics right in their training lateral movements shouldn't be an issue.

"If your horse is supple and moves away from the leg when you ask there should be no resistance," explains Andrew. "The test is when you put your leg on to ask them to move sideways. If they don't then you know the basics still need some work."

Next Andrew asks for canter and rides the full length of the arena and a 20m circle before crossing the diagonal and changing the leg through trot.

"I never do the same thing at the same pace and in the same area of the school for too long," adds Andrew. "A horse should enjoy his work and you get that by keeping him interested."

With the pace established Andrew collects the canter and asks Ice to hold it for four to five seconds before letting him extend again. He repeats this several times around the arena.

"This is a good way to make a horse stronger in self carriage and it helps to keep the energy in the canter," explains Andrew.

Finishing off

Ice has been working hard for the last 30 minutes and Andrew stresses the importance of letting your horse cool down gradually. He trots the gelding around the arena in rising trot and on a long rein before walking.

"It's important not to let the rein get too long, though, or you will lose the balance," says Andrew. "If Ice has worked particularly hard I often take him for a hack afterwards to let him relax and completely unwind." ■

■ *Next month: Andrew helps a young rider who is struggling with her large eventer on the flat.*

ACCURACY REAPS REWARDS



ANDREW stresses that when you're at a competition riding every part of your test accurately is vital, especially at grassroots level.

"The judge sees so many types of horses and they all move differently so how you present your test is the key to getting good marks," he says. "Some riders are very good at paying attention to detail but others aren't. I'd be very cross with myself if my sheet said a circle was too big — you really can't afford to throw marks away."