

MEET... ROMILLY ELLIS



FOURTEEN-year-old Romilly Ellis (*left*) has been eventing for three seasons. She boards at Cranbrook School, where she is studying for GCSEs, and although she is there full time she is allowed home to Lamberhurst in Kent to ride.

For this lesson Romilly is riding Orient Des Touches, a seven-year-old son of Qualar De Plapear who was successful with Sacha Femble at BE100 level until April 2008.

"Tommy' loves jumping but he struggles with the dressage," says Romilly. "He's a long horse and he finds it hard to carry himself properly while I find it difficult to keep him together. He's a real trier, though, and wants to work for me so I just need to learn to engage him properly and maintain it."

The pair won on their first outing at Nurstead Court in the BE1000Open this season and have completed a number of novices but Romilly hopes to improve her dressage marks so that she is more competitive when she moves up a level.

# Forward riding equals better marks

In the second part of our training series with Andrew Gould, the flatwork guru demonstrates to 14-year-old Junior Romilly Ellis how more forward riding will help her to shine in the dressage arena. **AIMI CLARK** reports

**H**AVING a pair of eyes on the ground while you're working your horse can be invaluable, particularly if your dressage marks aren't improving and you can't understand why. This is the case for 14-year-old Romilly Ellis, who arrives at dressage guru Andrew Gould's yard in West Sussex and admits that it is the first phase mark she achieves with her seven-year-old French Warmblood Orient Des Touches ("Tommy") that needs to be better.

Andrew asks Romilly to warm up Tommy while he watches. Immediately it is clear that the gelding is laid back and tends to fall behind the leg, which means Romilly has to work hard to keep him going actively forward. As a result, Tommy's hind quarters are not always engaged (*right*).

"Particularly on the corners he drops his hind leg and loses the connection through his body," says Andrew. "He's a big horse to hold together and it's a case of you both needing to get together more so that the overall picture is correct. The horse's whole body should be working. It's not just a case of him holding his head in the correct position."

After warming up in walk and trot Andrew asks Romilly to move Tommy up to canter before incorporating several trot-canter/canter-trot and walk-canter/canter-walk



**main picture** canter is Tommy's weakest pace and Romilly must use a lot of leg to keep his hind quarters engaged **left** although the gelding works in an outline he has a tendency to fall behind his rider's leg **right** when Tommy resists Romilly's aids to go forward it is important to ride through the problem instead of pulling him back



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 joined Andrew's string at his yard in Bolney, West Sussex, and the pair has completed nine BE1000Open classes together.

transitions. At first Tommy resists and puts in a buck each time Romilly asks him to increase the pace.

"When he does that you need to ride through the problem," advises Andrew. "Keep pushing him forward and don't be tempted to react by pulling him back and slowing him down. That's the easy way out for him."

Tommy is still losing his balance around the corners and each time he drops behind the leg. More transitions are needed to encourage the gelding to engage his hind quarters and work from behind rather than falling onto the forehand (*left*).

"Make sure the pressure in your hands is even and don't stay on the same rein for too

long," says Andrew. "Wrap your lower leg around him and really keep the inside leg on through the corners."

**Canter conundrum**

As Andrew watches Romilly work Tommy in canter he notices that the gelding is the least established in this pace. Consequently Tommy finds it harder to work properly.

"The canter is his weakest link," says Andrew. "His quarters are too high and then he flattens because he loses the momentum and can't work properly."

Andrew advises Romilly to sit deep in the saddle and push the gelding forward even more (*main picture*). It would be easy for Romilly to back off with the leg because as



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Tommy finds cantering the most difficult (above right) so Romilly varies the pace (above left)



when Tommy falls on the forehand Romilly needs to avoid pulling him back and ride him forward

Tommy falls onto his forehand it feels as though she is being pulled along, but she should be doing the opposite (above). If she doesn't, Tommy will drop behind the leg.

"Whether you're working at home or at a competition the trick is to ride strongly and positively. If you do this in the warm-up then he will stay in front of your leg in the test, which is when the better marks will come," explains Andrew.

Once again the corners are an issue and because Tommy finds the canter work more difficult he struggles to maintain his balance and backs off in front of each one. This is probably due to him lacking confidence and strength in his body, says Andrew.

"It means that you really need to set him up for the corners so that he doesn't lose momentum. He's a big horse and he needs a lot of leg to keep him going. Once the basics are right it will be a lot easier for both of you."

### Perfecting the aids

Because Tommy finds the canter work more difficult he has a tendency to break into trot or shorten his stride before Romilly wants him to (top right).

"If he shortens without your say so, push him on," says Andrew. "It should be your decision. Always think and ride forward."

The gelding is slightly lazy and Romilly uses her spurs to ask him to go forward but

Andrew emphasises that, as with the stick (see box, above right), the spurs should only be used as a back up to the leg aids.

"He should be sharp to your aids," says Andrew. "Turn your toes in and use your leg first to ask him to move away from it. If the horse ignores you then you can use the spurs."

The dappled grey gelding is working hard so Andrew advises Romilly to vary the pace. She lets Tommy trot but keeps her leg on to drive the gelding forward rather than let him drop behind the leg, which is easy to do when slowing the pace. She also asks him to lengthen and shorten his stride.

"As a horse gets stronger in his body he will think forward more," explains Andrew. "It takes time, though, and a time limit can't be put on it as it can't be rushed."

Andrew notices that as Tommy slows down Romilly tips forwards, especially at the corners of the arena.

"Keep your leg there to support him all the way through," says Andrew. "But when you're pushing forward don't let him fall out in front. You've put the energy into the pace and you don't want to lose it."

### ANDREW SAYS...

"If your horse isn't thinking forward at the warm-up stage of a competition then he won't be in the best either. The five minutes before you enter the arena you should be focusing on driving him forward."

## ANDREW ON...

### ... RIDING POSITIVELY

"At a dressage competition you've only got four minutes of riding to win the class so the warm-up is completely geared towards that. Eventers can still pull off a win by doing well in the other two phases but if a dressage rider turns up and backs off their horse they may as well not have turned up at all. Forward and positive riding is essential for good marks."

### ... USING A WHIP

"A whip is a useful aid when used properly. Always use a stick when you're going forward because then it will get a good reaction," explains Andrew. "If you use it when a horse is backing off it will kick out or throw the front end up and have a negative impact"

Next the pair slow down to walk and incorporate a number of walk-trot and trot-walk transitions in quick succession.

"Focus on them being short and sharp," says Andrew. "At this stage we're not looking at the quality of the walk, we just want the horse to be switched on and listening to you."

The effects of this are clearly visible as the gelding becomes more active in his paces (top left) before Romilly allows him to stretch on a long rein to end the session.

### Teacher and pupil's verdict

Romilly goes away from this lesson knowing that riding forward is the key to improving Tommy's marks in the dressage arena.

"My natural reaction is to pull him back to get him working from behind when I should actually be pushing him forward into the bridle," says Romilly. "During a test Tommy really backs off my leg because it's a shorter space so I've got to be really hard on myself and keep asking him to go forward. I think we'll get there eventually."

Andrew is confident that with work

Romilly will get the performance from Tommy that she wants in the dressage arena.

"Tommy is a nice horse and Romilly has a good understanding of riding — she just needs to work at putting it into practice.

Romilly isn't as strong as she

looks so she's got to really work hard to ride Tommy forward so that he can engage with the contact. Collecting him for the corners and then driving him forward will prevent the horse dropping behind her leg each time.

"When you're young a lot of information is thrown at you and it's hard to take it all in. You learn from mistakes, though, and Romilly just needs to allow time to get everything together."

Next month: Andrew helps a grassroots eventer with a young horse whose weak canter on the flat is causing problems in the show jumping.