

YOUR LOCAL EQUESTRIAN MAGAZINE

Christmas gift

guide special

Scottish & Northern

Equestrian

December 2011/
January 2012
£3.50

EXCLUSIVE

RIDER PROFILE

Lucy
Guild



Lost your
confidence?

Overcome
your fears
with our
expert



Win!

A trick riding lesson with

Riders of the storm

and more . . .

GET READY
FOR 2012

EVENTS
9 & DATES

PAGE SPECIAL

Problem Solving
with your horse

With Balanced
Horsemanship

REPORTS

- SHOWING
- DRESSAGE
- WESTERN
- POLO
- RACING AND MORE . . .



Sue riding her own horse Belvedere, an 18-year-old Shire x TB mare, bareback and bridleless

Improve your horse's health, wellbeing and performance

Writes Sue Palmer, Holistic Horse Help Veterinary Physiotherapist and Equine Behavioural Consultant

All photos by Simon Palmer www.into-the-lens.com

It was my equine behaviour work as a BHSAI and Intelligent Horsemanship Recommended Associate that led me to train as a Chartered Veterinary Physiotherapist. I saw lots of horses whose behavioural problems seemed to be linked to a physical problem, and I would recommend that the owner have their horse seen by a physical therapist of some description before I could come back and work to resolve the behavioural problem.

Even horses who had no problem, for example, youngsters getting ready to be started, I would recommend they were checked out physically as a matter of course, to prevent problems from happening in the first place rather than fix them after the fact. But I found again and again that I'd go back to deal with the behaviour and it didn't seem to me as though there was any change in the physical problem. So I decided to go all the way and head back to university to qualify as a Chartered Animal Physiotherapist.

Three years at King's College London training to work with humans was followed by two years working in the NHS in the West Midlands. I loved working with people and the variety of work that physiotherapists are involved in, but I

didn't so much like being employed – having to arrange my holidays well in advance around everyone else, and starting and finishing at the same time every day just didn't suit me! The plan had always been to work with horses, and I'd continued my role as a behaviourist and instructor on weekends and evenings throughout university and my time in the NHS. I was lucky to be accepted on the MSc Veterinary Physiotherapy course at the Royal Veterinary College in London (this course is sadly no longer running), and two years later (seven years from when I started training) I qualified as a Chartered Veterinary Physiotherapist.

The combination of knowledge and skills that I now have gives me a unique approach to my working with horses, and I build on this with new experiences every day. People ask for behavioural help for a wide variety of reasons – it might be that they have recently started having problems with their horse or an ongoing issue, or they are looking for support with their young horse, or they just want to expand their knowledge. Sometimes, a one-off visit is all that's required, often a series

of sessions either bunched together or spread out over a year or two, and sometimes regular ongoing support sessions – it's very individual to the horse and his owner. If I had to pick a favourite issue to work with, it would probably be loading problems because the results can be so life changing for horse and owner, or working with youngsters (from foal upwards) to help them grow into well-mannered adults, or helping owners to overcome confidence issues. I see a wide



Sue massaging Belvedere

variety of horses and owners. Maybe the strangest case I've ever worked with was a horse that couldn't go out hacking because he wouldn't walk through the garage door to get out of his field!

Physio work is very different. I am generally called to help resolve a problem (for example, the horse has started bucking), to improve performance, to treat alongside veterinary intervention, or to provide a maintenance programme to help prevent problems from developing in the first place. Every Chartered Physiotherapist works differently, and again, treatment is very much tailored to the individual horse and their owner. Again, picking a favourite is difficult, but it would probably be helping to resolve a problem that has recently developed. Knowing that I have helped to take the pain away from that horse is truly rewarding. I also particularly enjoy developing a

Sue with Marlon, a client's horse who she enjoys riding and has recently started competing



relationship with horse and owner through a maintenance programme.

My speciality is addressing the problem that could be physical or could be behavioural, in particular recognising which it is, or whether it's a combination of both. I can also look at the rider to see whether their physical restrictions might be contributing to the problem. These problems are often ridden issues, including, for example, not standing still to be groomed, tacked up or mounted, bucking into canter, rushing, spooking, napping, laziness, stopping at fences, struggling to achieve the movements required for dressage, etc.

People often say that horse behaviour work is just common sense, and to their surprise I completely agree with them. The trouble is, as I explain, it's impossible to have 'common sense' if you've only owned or worked with one or two horses. No one can develop a well-rounded awareness of horse behaviour if they only have a few experiences to draw on. As Kelly Marks said in a recent article, sadly, common sense isn't so common! As an Intelligent Horsemanship Recommended Associate, I can use the knowledge that I have to explain to you why the things you are doing right are working so well, and to discuss what you could change so that the things that aren't working so well start to go better. You can find your local Intelligent Horsemanship Recommended Associate at

www.intelligenthorsemanship.co.uk.

To many people, the need to call a physio is

Teaching long-lining



"My speciality is addressing the problem that could be physical or could be behavioural, in particular recognising which it is, or whether it's a combination of both."

common sense as well, but the same rules apply; if you don't have the knowledge and experience to draw

upon then it's hard to know where to look for help. Horses can't verbalise their pain, they can only demonstrate it through their behaviour. So an unexpected change in behaviour, whether sudden or gradual, may well be pain related. It surprises me that so many people say, "well, he doesn't feel sore to me, so I don't think he's misbehaving because he's in pain." If a friend said they had backache, very few people would expect to be able to feel it with their hands if the person was unable to verbalise it. So why

would they expect to be able to feel the pain in their horse? This is one of the reasons that I produced the *Horse Massage for Horse Owners* DVD, teaching people how to massage their own horse (win your very own copy on the crossword page!). If you can massage your horse on a regular basis, not only will you improve his health and performance and give something back to him for all that he gives to you, but once you learn to feel what is 'normal' for your horse, it will be much easier to recognise what is not normal, and to know when you need to call a professional. You can find your local Chartered Veterinary or Animal Physiotherapist at www.acpat.co.uk.



Sue giving Jays Master Copy his regular physio session, at a recent Monty Roberts demonstration