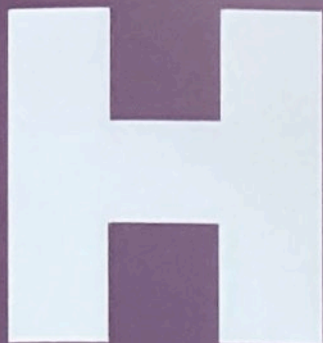


Autumn 2021



Plus much
more inside...

**“Remember we’re
doing this for fun”**

.....
EXTRAORDINARY MOMENTS
with LUCINDA GREEN
.....

**Is ‘SOUND’ necessary?
Will ‘COMFORTABLE’ do?**

IH DEBATE

**Don’t throw
the baby
out with the
bathwater!**

**RECIPES
FOR**
.....
Success!
.....





Welcome to THE AUTUMN TRAINING SECTION

In this month's Training Section, IH Trainer and ACPAT Chartered Physiotherapist Sue Palmer considers when it's **the right time to stop riding your veteran horse** (p22), IH Trainer Nicole Golding shares her **secrets for incorporating positive habits into daily life** (p24), and our editor Zoë Smith (that's me!) offers advice for **learning to ride as an adult** (p26). Plus, there's a new **horsemanship recipe** from IH Trainer Sandra Williams (p34) and **what you really need to know about feeding your horse** from equine nutritionist Clare MacLeod (p30).

By Sue Palmer



Photo © Sue Palmer

Sue Palmer MCSP is an author, an ACPAT and RAMP registered Chartered Physiotherapist, an IH Trainer, and a British Horse Society Stage 3 Coach in Complete Horsemanship.

• You can find out more at www.thehorsephysio.co.uk

PULL OUT & KEEP IH Training Section

SOUND OR COMFORTABLE: WHICH MEASURE DO YOU USE?

IH Trainer and ACPAT Chartered Physiotherapist Sue Palmer considers when the right time is to stop riding your veteran horse, and how to make that assessment.

They'd shared so many happy times. At 23 years old, Polly's coat still shone, but her joints grumbled. Jane agonised over the decision – should she keep riding?

As a Chartered Physiotherapist I treat horses from all walks of life, including older horses. A question I hear on the regular basis is "Do you think I'm okay to keep riding him/her?". I feel really strongly about this, and so I wanted to take this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

Each horse is an individual, and should be treated as such. Safety is always the number one priority. That's safety for you, as well as safety for your horse. I always stress that if your horse shows a change in his behaviour, and equally importantly, if he starts to trip regularly, then you may need to rethink your options.

“...if he seems keen to do what you're asking of him, then is the soundness actually an issue?”



SOUND OR COMFORTABLE: WHICH MEASURE DO YOU USE?

The thoughts I'm expressing here are in relation to older horses. It's a very different situation with a younger horse or a competition horse. Perhaps it might help to consider what you would ask of a person at different ages. What would you expect of an 8-year-old, a 28-year-old, a 48-year-old, a 68-year-old, or an 88-year-old? Where does your horse fit into this equivalent timeframe?

The clients asking these questions are usually asking them in relation to soundness. The conversation might go something like:

- "I'm not sure if I should keep riding him, what do you think?"
- "What is making you unsure? What are you worried about?"
- "I'm not sure if he's sound."

This leads to a discussion around soundness, and how we look at whether our horses are sound as a measure of whether or not we should be doing what we're doing with them.

So what's more important, that your horse is sound, or that he is comfortable? Could he be unsound, and yet comfortable? Or could he be sound, yet uncomfortable?

My thoughts at this time (and I'm always open to new learning) are based on current research. This seems to be demonstrating more and more that actually, there probably is no such thing as a 'sound' horse. They all have asymmetries (differences between left and right). That might be differences in muscle bulk, muscle tone, or movement, for example. Most horses use their left fore differently to their right fore, their left hind differently to their right hind.

To be honest, we've all got asymmetries. And actually, that's normal. The difficulty is in knowing whether or not that asymmetry is pain related.

I wonder whether rather than thinking about whether or not your horse is sound, could you instead think about whether or not your horse is comfortable? Are they the same thing? However, I'm not sure whether these are easier questions to answer, or harder?!

I think at the moment, the best piece of research that we've got around this is the Ridden Horse Pain Ethogram from Dr. Sue Dyson and her team. This research suggests that if your horse shows eight or more out of the 24 listed behaviours that indicates that there's likely to be musculoskeletal pain. (For more on this, check out Sue Palmer's review of Dr. Sue Dyson's Ethogram in our Spring '21 issue).

What is clear to me is that a lame horse, one that is clearly limping, won't necessarily show eight or more of these 24 behaviours. And it's perfectly possible for an apparently sound horse, where there is no sign of limping, to clearly demonstrate musculoskeletal pain.



It's possible for an apparently sound horse to clearly demonstrate musculoskeletal pain

Again, you can relate this to people. Some people will stop working at the slightest ache, others will keep going with a broken arm or leg. We all have different sensitivities to pain, and different attitudes to work and to discomfort. The same applies to our horses.

What you're asking of your horse is very relevant here. As I said earlier, safety is paramount, and I am discussing the older horse here, not the young horse or the competition horse. If your horse is sore in front, for example, then he might not be safe to be ridden downhill, or over poles. If he is more sound on one rein than the other, then asking him to work evenly on both reins might be too much. It's likely that jumping will put too much strain on the older body, with too great a risk of injury, but again this is an individual decision, and I recommend that you are guided by the team that you have around you and your horse.

In general, if it's safe to do so and you both enjoy it, I think that gentle hacking is a great form of exercise, even if your horse is slightly unsound. If it stimulates his mind and mobilises his body, then in my opinion, there are clear benefits to keeping the older horse in work.

Depending on the strength and condition of the horse, this may be hacking in walk only, or it may include walk, trot, and canter. You might need to stay on the flat, or you might be able to include hill work. It might be that riding every day suits you and your horse, or perhaps once or twice a week would be better. Avoid him getting tired where possible, because this is likely to lead to discomfort.

If pain relief has been recommended by your vet, then have a chat with them about how you could best use this to support keeping your horse in ridden work. Watch your horse closely to figure out whether he is sore after you've worked him, or whether he feels more comfortable having loosened any aches and pains. For example, does he move more freely at the beginning of the ride, or at the end? How is he to catch, to tack up, to mount? Watch closely for changes in his behaviour over time, and do your best to listen to what he is telling you through his behaviour.

Just to be clear, I'm not talking about hopping lame horses. If your horse is hopping lame, then absolutely soundness is the most relevant issue. But if your older horse is maybe one or two tenths lame, or unsound, or unlevel, or uneven, or asymmetrical, but he seems keen to do what you're asking of him, then is the soundness actually an issue?

I think, like everything, it depends on the individual, on the relationship between you and your horse, and on what you are asking of your horse.

Watch IH webinars with both Sue Palmer and Dr Sue Dyson in the members' section of the IH website, or get in touch with Sue Palmer, ACPAT Chartered Physiotherapist:

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TIP✓

Watch closely for changes in your horse's behaviour over time, and do your best to listen to what he is telling you through his behaviour