



Beating the FEAR

Kicking off a new series on improving your confidence, “terrified” rider Jo Roberts hopes to conquer her fears and put the fun back into riding

OUR RIDER

Jo Roberts, from Bournemouth, Dorset, lost her confidence after the death of a much-loved loan horse, George. Jo bought her first horse, Arty, soon after, but became increasingly nervous. Before working with Jo Cooper, Jo says she was “terrified” of the thought of riding out alone.

OUR EXPERT

Specialising in helping riders overcome confidence problems, Jo Cooper is a master trainer of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) as well as a diagnostic practitioner of Thought Field Therapy (TFT). She works with individuals as well as groups and teaches both NLP and TFT. Jo is also a keen horse rider.

THE TECHNIQUES

- NLP: this helps you to gain a better awareness of yourself and of other people, and to improve communication skills.
- TFT: involves tapping with the fingertips on acupressure points around the hands, face and body to help overcome and deal with negative emotions.

Whether you have always lacked a bit of confidence around horses or developed a fear of jumping or hacking out following an incident such as a fall, it can be soul-destroying. A pastime that you love suddenly becomes the last thing you want to spend time doing.

The good news is there is an increasing number of confidence-boosting methods available that offer to help. But how do you discover which one could work for you?

Horse has enlisted the help of riders with confidence issues to put a variety of options to the test. We will be revealing the results over the next few months.

Our first rider is Jo Roberts, who worked with confidence coach Jo Cooper.

Jo's story

“I rode as a child and after a seven-year gap I decided to take a horse on loan. I found George in February 2007, and he was perfect for me. Aged 15, he had ‘been there and done that’ and nothing fazed him. I loved hacking and taking him to local shows. George was amazing.

“But our time together was to be brief. Just 10 months later, on 5 December, I found George in the field with a broken leg. It was a horrific injury which, combined with a long wait for the vet to arrive and watching the horse being put down, left me very traumatised.

“After George’s death there was a huge hole in my life, and I started to think about buying a horse. I went to see quite a few, and eventually decided on Arty, a six-year-old French Trotter. He



Jo's confidence issues become so bad she was considering selling Arty.

seemed quite sweet, so I said I’d buy him – I realise now that I was still grieving for George and so wasn’t in the right mind to make a sensible decision.”

Confidence crisis

“When Arty arrived at his new home (with emotions still quite raw, I decided not to go back to the yard where George had died), I freaked out. I couldn’t even bring myself to touch Arty and there was no way I could contemplate riding him. I shed lots of tears in those weeks.

“Although everyone at the new yard was great, I decided to go back to my former yard where I had friends who could help me out.

“Eventually, three weeks after buying him, I rode Arty – I was absolutely terrified and just panicked. At the time it didn’t make sense as I was an experienced rider and had always been happy to sit on difficult horses.

“Arty was green and a bit cheeky, but that was all. He was also much more forward-going than George had been, and he can trot faster than most horses can canter. It took me seven months to even get into trot, and then I would tense up and tip forward, which made him go even faster.

“I would only ride in the school by myself and tentatively ride out on the road if I had



Jo now hopes to compete in dressage to music with Arty.

someone with me. We’ve got a heath nearby which is amazing for hacking, but I would become a shivering wreck if anyone suggested going there.

“A back injury added to my fears as I was terrified I would fall off and hurt myself again.

“No longer enjoying horses and riding, I was desperate to calm my nerves. Hypnotherapy didn’t work for me, so I turned to Bach flower remedies. But rather than just taking a few drops of Rescue Remedy, I would drink the whole bottle, and then chain smoke cigarettes.

“My instructors, Amanda Watson and Jaïne Slade, have been brilliant, giving me lots of advice, helping me to do groundwork with Arty and accompanying me on hacks.

“But although both Arty and I were benefiting from their time, I was still terrified and not always in control in trot. Every week I would say I was putting Arty up for sale.”

Thinking differently

“I really didn’t know where to turn next when I saw that *Horse* magazine was looking for riders to test ways of restoring their confidence. The magazine put me in touch with performance

coach Jo Cooper, who practises NLP and TFT.

“I spoke to Jo on the phone, for two sessions of around an hour and a half. She asked all about my experiences, and then told me to think of various situations which worried me. She asked how I was thinking of them. For example, did I see images or just have feelings. As I was doing this, Jo got me to tap, using my fingertips, on areas of my face and body until the images and feelings changed.”

Happier memories

“The most difficult image to replace was the one of George – I could only think of that awful morning. But eventually, after I followed Jo’s tapping sequences, when I thought of George the first image I came up with was a happy memory of winning a dressage competition at the yard. I also thought of a habit George had of sticking his tongue out to one side, which everyone found highly amusing.

“Although I’ll never forget having George put down, it’s no longer my overriding memory.

“One of my problems was always thinking ‘what if’. When I thought about riding on the heath, I would imagine my



Tapping on certain acupressure points can help deal with negative emotions.

horse spooking – Jo told me, as I did this, to tap in a specific sequence until I was able to think about enjoying a hack.

“Although she was at the other end of the phone, it was like she was there with me,

watching over me and seeing how I was reacting.”

The results

“Since having the telephone sessions with Jo, for the first time in over a year, I’ve enjoyed



Jo beams in delight as she rides out on her own for the first time.

owning Arty and riding him. I have achieved some major milestones – I've ridden out on the heath, with Amanda and her horse William, and I've left the yard on my own.

"When *Horse's* photographer Jem arrived to take some photos, the school was frozen but after a quick chat on the phone to Jo, I felt ready to hack along the lane – the beaming smile on my face says it all!

"I am much more relaxed and really feel that I want to go down to the yard and ride. Going forward, I've booked Arty and myself into a dressage clinic, which will be a big step for me but is something I'm really looking forward to.

"Arty is quite talented and I'd like to make the most of this and take him as far as I can. My ultimate goal is to design a dressage to music test, using *Is This The Way to Amarillo* in the competition – I've sung this song to myself countless times to help me breathe when fear has struck.

"Obviously, I need to take one day at a time, and I still have goals to aim for. After my first ride on the heath, the weather has prevented us going back, but I want to get out there again. I plan to perform some tapping before we leave the yard, and we'll stick to a short route first, and then build on it.

"I'm a million times better than I was before speaking to Jo. She has given me a huge confidence boost and after just two sessions, it was the first time I'd enjoyed riding for an awfully long time."

Do you need a confidence boost?

If you would like to tackle a confidence issue, we are looking for riders to test potential solutions. To apply, email: joanna_browne@ipcmedia.com or write to the address on page three, with information about yourself and your riding issues.

The expert view – Jo Cooper



Jo Cooper aims to help riders focus on the present.

"Everyone is aware that having a fall, or being taken off with, when riding can damage confidence. But a trauma, such as losing a much-loved horse, as Jo did, can also be a trigger. Buying a first horse is another event that can knock confidence – while it may have been someone's dream to have a horse of their own, they can often become overwhelmed by the responsibility of it all.

"Sometimes, the incident which has caused the problem has been forgotten and may have happened years previously.

During one of the sessions Jo suddenly remembered being bolted with as a child. When I'm helping someone, there's an element of 'co-operative detective work' involved to work out exactly how the problem is structured.

"Through my coaching, I help clients think about their riding in the present. There's no point dwelling on the past or thinking about what might happen – they should be enjoying their riding now.

Help is just a phone call away

"The first step when someone contacts me for help, is to work out whether it is a confidence or a competence issue.

"I will usually be able to tell if the problem stems from a lack of riding skills and I will advise them to have instruction from a trainer who focuses on rider biomechanics to make sure that they are secure in the saddle. Similarly, if you are scared because you have an unsafe horse, no amount of coaching will change the fact that he's not right for you.

"I do work with clients face-to-face, but much of my work is done over the phone. I ask the client to set aside an hour and a half for the first session, with follow-up sessions depending on the individual. Some need further in-depth sessions,

while others just require fine-tuning. With Jo, we had two sessions of an hour and a half, with a quick chat before she rode for the photographer.

"I have had a lot of success using NLP and TFT with clients. I'm very precise when listening – the words someone uses are very significant and I can detect a lot from what someone is saying and how they are describing what they're feeling.

"There's no need for a client to go into detail about traumatic events for me to be able to help – I know how painful it can be to have to discuss these and it can even make things worse.

"A crisis of confidence when riding can be caused by issues affecting other parts of your life. I've had people contact me for help with a riding problem, and they've told me that they've been stressed at work or at home. After dealing with the stress issue, they've come back to say they are now fine when riding."

Find out more

For more information on Jo Cooper, visit: www.jocooper.com; or call (0116) 299 1081. To find out more about the techniques Jo uses, check out the books *Get the Life You Want* by Richard Bandler and *Tapping the Healer Within* by Roger Callahan.