

**WIN THE
ULTIMATE
YEAR
WITH YOUR
HORSE**

**your
horse**



It's all in the mind

Our 'ultimate year' winner Abigail Allis is losing confidence in her relationship with youngster Darcy so top sports psychologist Jo Cooper shows her how to overcome her demons with a positive mental attitude

Horse ownership is always full of highs and lows but when you take on a young horse the path can be particularly challenging.

The winner of our 'ultimate year' competition, Abigail Allis, knows this only too well. When Abi brought Darcy 15 months ago as a recently-backed three-year-old, she knew she was taking on a project but, as time ticks by, she has become increasingly frustrated with their lack of progress.

To help her to develop the tools to cope with this, we arranged for Abi to have a 'mind coaching' session with Jo Cooper.

Jo has worked with hundreds of riders, helping them overcome their fears and achieve their goals. She uses a unique combination of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Thought Field Therapy (TFT) to equip riders with the right mindset to succeed. (See panel on page 42 for an explanation of NLP and TFT).

To begin the session, Jo asked Abi to tell her about Darcy and the issues she would like to work through.

"Abi was very honest with me," Jo says. "She explained she's a very competitive person and has found Darcy's slow progress frustrating, particularly as she's surrounded by friends who are competing successfully."

"Abi also told me she gets very anxious when she's jumping Darcy – so we decided to concentrate on these issues."

"I always begin by getting my clients to talk at length about their relationship with their horse and the issues they want to address. I not only listen to what they say, but how they say it – this reveals an

awful lot to me about how they see the situation. When I spoke to Abi, it quickly became apparent she puts an awful lot of pressure on herself and Darcy, and this has got worse since Darcy turned four.

"When Darcy was three, Abi very much saw her as a baby and only expected her to take baby steps. But as soon as Darcy turned four, Abi's

'Abi has found Darcy's slow progress frustrating, as her friends are competing successfully' mindset began to change. Although Darcy has, of course, come a long way since Abi first got her, she's still very much a youngster and I felt Abi needed to be

reminded of this. It's very easy when you're surrounded by people with older horses to expect to be achieving the same or similar goals – but this just isn't realistic.

"Simply through talking, I encouraged Abi to step outside her mind's eye and take a fresh look at the situation – this is the basis of NLP. Through our five senses of smell, touch, sight, sound and taste, we process the world around us and build up a picture of it inside our head. This picture influences every aspect of how we behave, but it is a subjective picture based on our personal experiences – positive or negative.

"Simply raising awareness of this picture and any possible inaccuracies can help us to start to change it, and re-build our model of the world."

"When I bought Darcy I didn't want a ready-made competition horse, I wanted a project," Abi says. "But that doesn't mean it's been easy watching friends go off and win rosettes while we're still struggling with the basics. Jo helped me to realise much of my frustration is actually related to Darcy having turned four. As a three-year-old, I was

happy to accept her as a baby and take things slowly, but since she's turned four, my expectations have changed, subconsciously.

"I found it really helpful to talk to someone who could offer an objective opinion about me and Darcy – someone who isn't too close and has no agenda. Sometimes you know you're being unrealistic, but you just need to hear it from someone else.

"Jo asked me about the last few dressage tests I've done with Darcy," Abi says. "As I told her our experiences, it dawned on me just how far we've come.

"A couple of months ago, I took Darcy to do a Prelim test and, when we were doing our free walk on a long rein, she suddenly took off at a gallop. She charged out of the arena towards the nearest piece of grass, where she skidded to a halt and started munching!

"The last couple of times we've been out to do a test away from home, she's behaved impeccably. We may not have come home with a rosette, but Jo has helped me to realise completing the test is a big enough achievement in itself at this stage.

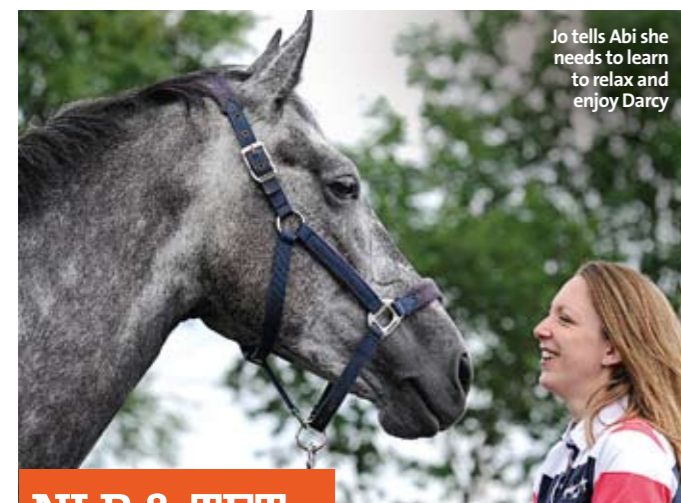
"Jo suggested I try to find some horsey pals who have youngsters and are in a similar situation to me and Darcy. She told me I need to stop comparing myself to friends who are competing on established 10 and 11-year-olds, and I completely agree!"

To help reduce the anxiety Abi feels when she's jumping Darcy, Jo used a combination of NLP and TFT. "Abi has had some nasty falls recently and it was obvious these experiences were hindering her ability to ride Darcy to the fence in a positive way.

"I began by asking Abi to picture riding Darcy into a small cross-pole and rate her anxiety levels on a scale of one to 10 – one being low and 10



Some nasty falls and numerous near misses mean Abi sometimes finds it hard to ride Darcy positively into the fences



Jo tells Abi she needs to learn to relax and enjoy Darcy

NLP & TFT explained

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) NLP provides a model of how the human neurological system and the physiological system works to affect our thoughts. It offers a way to establish rapport quickly and easily, to understand how someone is processing information and to identify their thought patterns. It can also be used to help people to change their thought patterns.

Thought Field Therapy (TFT)

TFT is a new method for the rapid relief of all kinds of emotional and psychological distress. You can do TFT yourself by tapping with your fingertips on specific acupressure points in

a particular sequence. The points are located on the face, hands and upper body.

For more information about NLP and TFT visit www.jocooper.com



By the end of the session, Abi is able to picture herself soaring over the jumps on Darcy

being extreme anxiety. Abi rated her anxiety as a nine – indicating she experiences quite a debilitating level of fear. This is clearly going to be adversely affecting her ability to be an effective rider. Because her anxiety levels were so severe, I decided to use TFT to help Abi change the picture in her mind's eye.

"In its purist form, TFT is a technique that involves tapping on acupressure points to resolve psychological and emotional issues," Jo explains. "It's thought the tapping helps the brain to accept new information more readily.

"I've given Abi her own personalised tapping sequence and she'll be able to use this again and again whenever she feels herself getting anxious about jumping Darcy. She was very receptive to the TFT technique and when I asked her to rate her anxiety again, she rated it as three out of 10 – a significant improvement to be achieved in a single session."

"I was a bit sceptical about

the TFT at first," Abi says. "I couldn't see how tapping various points on my body could affect my thinking, but it worked! The second time I visualised riding Darcy into the fence, I could see us soaring over it, whereas the first time I'd just been panicking about falling off and hadn't even been able to make it to the take-off point. Jo has made me realise that, just because something has happened in the past, it doesn't mean it's going to happen again. I feel I've left a lot of baggage behind and am ready for my show jumping lessons with Billy Twomey."

"Both of the techniques I used with Abi influence how the human mind/body system process information," Jo says. "There's no magical healing, it's simply a case of understanding how the human thought process works and using this knowledge. Once you've trained yourself to think in this way, it can become second nature and can help in all aspects of your life."

SPONSORS

As well as the fantastic package of prizes Your Horse has put together, we've also got some amazing sponsors who are adding their products to the mix, making this truly a competition we can usually only dream of. Here's what's Abi will get:

➤ All the following is subject to normal policy terms and conditions and underwriting criteria

- Rambo Newmarket headcollar
- Rambo Flybuster rug

Baileys Horse Feeds

Feed company Baileys will give Abi a year's supply of FREE feed and expert nutritional support to suit the horse's type and workload.



Virbac

The worming company will offer advice throughout the year and vouchers for a full year's worth of worm control.



WOW saddles

WOW saddles have been developed using the latest technology to create maximum comfort for horse and rider. WOW will provide Abi with a WOW Competitor saddle. Also, to make sure the saddle is a good fit all year round, she will be invited on a saddle-fitting course – a unique prize.



Musto

Popular clothing company Musto has put together a number of outfits to make sure Abi is prepared for anything. She'll get:

- A summer outfit: Summer show jacket, Musto Team polo shirt, t-shirt and rugby shirt
 - A winter outfit: Combination jacket, Snug show jacket, fleece, turtleneck top and breeches
 - A competition outfit – jacket, breeches, stock shirt and stock
 - An assortment of accessories
- In addition, each of the 12 finalists invited to the assessment day will receive a Musto Team rugby shirt



Horseware Ireland

Horseware Ireland will give Abi and Darcy a selection of seasonal rugs and other products including:

- Rambo Duo with 100g, 200g and 300g liners
- Rhino Plus stable rug
- Rambo Newmarket fleece
- Rambo Newmarket travel boots



Petplan Equine

The insurance company will offer Abi a year-long rider policy including:

- Personal accident cover up to £20,000
- Public liability cover up to £3million
- Riding equipment cover up to £1,500
- Veterinary fees up to £1,500 per incident



NAF

NAF will provide Abi with all the supplements and advice she is likely to need throughout the year.



NEXT ISSUE

Abi and Darcy have their first show jumping lesson with international superstar Billy Twomey