

Managing those first show jitters by Caroline Andrews – Horse Rider Confidence Specialist

This is it, you are about to go along to your first show. Something you have been preparing for and dreaming of. How do you feel? You may be excited or you may be feeling a little nervous, right? Would you like some simple tips to help you have the best time you possibly can? Great, I'll get started:

Allow plenty of time - have everything you need cleaned and ready to go for the big day as well as making sure you have more than enough time to load, travel and settle the other end before you go into the show ring. Leaving everything until the last minute will increase your stress levels; who needs to be rushing around looking for their clean jodhpurs at the last minute or filling haynets when the clock is ticking? Make life easy for yourself and be prepared.

Practice – your test or jumping ability, whatever you need to be able to perform your best as well as loading your horse into the lorry or trailer. Do you really want to spend all that time you allowed struggling to get your horse up a ramp?

Remember to breathe – this may sound ridiculous but breathing quickly and shallowly in the top of our chests stop the oxygen getting into our body and may induce an anxiety attack. Stop whatever you are doing, stand or sit square and breathe down into your diaphragm, pull the air slowly down towards your stomach, pushing your stomach out and exhale slowly emptying your lungs completely as your stomach goes in. It is impossible to stay in a heightened state of anxiety while breathing this way so keep doing it until you feel calmer.

Imagine it going well – so often we think about everything that could go wrong and work ourselves up into an anxious state. How about imagining it all going really well? Imagine yourself calmly loading your horse, arriving in plenty of time, getting ready at a leisurely pace and then imagine the show going just how you would like it to. The more often you have this daydream the more likely it is to become your reality as you are 'programming' your subconscious in advance by showing it what you want.

Talk about what you DO want to happen – that means talk about things like calm, confident, excited or perhaps enjoyment, fun, success and achievement. We attract what we talk and think about so make it all the good stuff!

Check your posture – it is easier to feel good about things when your head is up and your shoulders are back, with your chest wide; and before going in the show ring think about something that makes you smile....

Above all remember this is supposed to be FUN, go, do your best (even if that's just hanging out at the show ground), learn from it and soon you will be winning those rosettes!

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