

SPOTLIGHT ON IH TRAINER Jo Powell

Jo grew up around horses and they have been a major part of her life ever since. Her desire to connect with them on a deeper level was inspired by attending the Monty Roberts demonstrations when he first came to the UK. After a long career in teaching she found herself in a position where she was able to train with Kelly Marks and the team at Intelligent Horsemanship, which led to her becoming an IH Trainer. She also runs her own horse transport business called Equine Express.

“Life is too short not to take every opportunity that is offered to you.”



Jo competed Bella in the Ridden Hunter class at the Royal Windsor Horse Show

How long have you been involved with horses? And how did you get involved with them? I became involved with horses around the age of six, my mum used to take me for lessons at a riding school. However, that didn't satisfy me, and I soon took to riding a local family's ponies in the field with headcollars made from bailer twine. Fortunately, they found out and took me under their wing to do it in a safer more conventional way.

How you came to be involved with Kelly/Monty? I really was following Monty and then Kelly from his early demos when he first came to the UK. I loved all I saw and the books I read and wanted to know and learn more. I still suffer a bit of imposter syndrome now when I go out representing the whole Intelligent Horsemanship organisation. I look back at where it started and how I craved being able to do that and now I am doing it, and I can't quite believe it!

Why did you decide to qualify as an IH Trainer? Having started a business as an equine transporter, I was looking to add more variety to my toolbox. Having sourced some initial training from Jim Goddard (IH Trainer) I was able to attend the two-day IH Leading and Loading course. This course led me to want to understand and learn more and more, I was hooked.

What is a typical day for you? Gosh, this is a tough one as I wear so many hats. Days always start at 6 am with dogs to walk and my own horses to organise. Then I will be out on the road, this could be transporting or training or both! I generally see as many clients as I can in a similar location. If I can drop back home part way through the day, then I do, just to touch base or even ride my mare, Bella. Then on to more training in the afternoon. Three days a week I have tuition clients as I keep my hand in teaching Maths, English and Science. The days finish as they start with my own dogs and horses.

What's important to you when you see an owner and their horse for the first time? Honesty, openness, and trust. To understand what it is the owner wants to achieve I need to know what's gone before, warts and all. It's so important for the owner and horse to feel listened to and trusted and that's a two-way street.

What is the most common issue you are called to look at when working with horses?

By the nature of my transporting hat, the most common issue I come across is non-loaders. However, this also cross references to my point about truly leading a horse. I have now gained quite a reputation locally on the loading front, which is lovely, but not so lovely when I am having a rare day off and out-competing myself. I often offer a prayer to the loading gods that no one has issues as I know too many people who will say 'Oh it's ok Jo's here, I will go and get her to load him.'

What are the common challenges you face in your work as an IH Trainer? Mostly the crux of it all stems from horses not being able to be truly led. I am only 5'3 and I seem to attract the majority of 17hh horses. I have to make very sure that a horse can lead well otherwise they walk all over me (literally). However, I also fairly frequently spend time with owners helping them to give themselves permission to slow down. I used to be that person, but I now am able to allow myself to enjoy life in the slow lane and not feel I have to do everything at 100 miles an hour.

If you could change one thing in the world of horses, what would it be, and why? This is a strange answer as I compete in British Dressage and Showing. However, my answer is competition. In the main, it can be healthy but there are so many dark sides to it. From forcing horses into outlines that are not natural, riding horses that are not sound, instilling fear in horses, and even to the pressure on parents to get the latest bit of kit however expensive just because someone else on the yard has it.

What would be the first piece of advice you would give someone looking at buying/loaning their first horse?

Choose a horse fit for purpose and the level that you are currently at. By human nature we quite often choose the most visually appealing or going back to my previous answer the one that will out horse everyone on the yard. But it needs to be a horse that will do the job you would like to do.

Also, carry out an honest spare time analysis, there is no point getting a horse if you truly don't have the time to give to one. They then just become a wasted costly field ornament.

What three things should everyone practise with their horses? Leading, being present with your horse at that moment and truly listening to what they are trying to tell us.

What would your advice be to someone hoping to become an IH Trainer? Do it. Life is too short not to take every opportunity that is offered to you. Say 'Yes' and work out the 'how' later!!

What's the best bit of advice you've ever been given? Slow down and enjoy life. It's not a race it's a once in a lifetime opportunity.

What has been the proudest moment / biggest achievement in your career?

To be honest I have to say every non-loader that I teach to load. The owners are so grateful and quite often emotional which is born of frustration and feelings of a lost cause. It always gives me a really lovely inner glow and immense feeling of pride and satisfaction.

Please share some of the horses you have worked with that have gone on to competition success in dressage and showing. Bella, although strictly started by IH Trainer Jim Goddard, has been trained using IH principles from a six-month-old feral foal. Now she is a beautiful equine inside and out, she has competed at Royal Windsor and is currently competing at BD Elementary level I am hoping we achieve Medium, but I haven't had that conversation with her yet! Gracie, a beautiful Morgan mare who we took to her showing debut aged three at the end of last season. She won her class and was the Reserve Champion, naturally. Faustine, who was a non-loading British Dressage horse owned by the mum of one of my first transport clients. She went on to be highlighted in the BD Magazine for her successes at the Nationals.

What are your plans for the future? Well, excitingly this year I am hoping to start breeding a baby Bella. I have chosen to go the embryo transfer route, which is not easy or cheap, but I don't want her to have it and I need a plan as neither she nor I are getting any younger!

On the IH Trainer front, I want to continue to build the number of Connection clinics I run which are just amazing things to do. I'll be continuing to spread the word and already have a Riding Club morning booked in and the local Pony Club wants me to work with their members too. 🐾

.....
 “Slow down and enjoy life...it's a once in a lifetime opportunity.”



Top: Jo's day can be a mixture of training and transporting. Bottom: When seeing a horse and owner for the first time Jo says: "It's so important for the owner and horse to feel listened to and trusted"

TO FIND OUT MORE

You can visit Jo's website at: jpequineconnection.co.uk and follow her on Facebook & Instagram: @jpequineconnection or TikTok @jorutpyd5nq