

A winning formula

In her final feature of this series, *Sue Mart* from Bennington Carriages discusses all the successful ingredients you need in order to perform at your best

If you talk to any top competitor, they'll all tell you that success doesn't happen without a lot of hard work and preparation, and with the end of year championships approaching, there's no better time to make sure everything's in order. From fine-tuning your performance to making check lists to monitor your progress, read on to discover how to be the best you can be and finish off the season buzzing.

Put in the practice

If you arrive at a competition knowing you've put in all the hard work at home, you'll feel a lot more confident and have a greater chance of success. Practice, therefore, is key, but it's essential your homework is structured and that you have a plan in place. Here are some ideas...

- Know exactly what is required of you at the competition and work on the weaker areas at home until they too become your strengths.
- Have regular sessions with a knowledgeable coach who will constructively critique your performance to help you get the best out of your horse or pony.
- Watch online videos of drivers you admire, as visualisation is a powerful tool and could help you to emulate their skills.
- Keep your own and your horse's confidence levels high by developing the building blocks in your training, making sure you're both comfortable with one thing before moving onto the next.
- Set up competition situations at home with your friends. This will make event days feel less daunting, helping you to stay mentally focused when it matters.
- Ensure your horse's routine health checks are up to date and check his harness is comfortable and fits him well. If he's happy and healthy he'll find it easier to give his best.
- Set yourself goals and write them down. You can break your goals down into smaller ones, so they are more achievable and then you'll feel like you're making constant steady progress.

Daily life

It's a good idea to write down – and keep to hand – a list of all the things that contribute towards a winning combination. That way you can regularly check you are staying on track. Surprisingly, a lot of these things come down to how you manage your daily life, as well as training your horse. These ideas will help you stay ahead of the game.

- Practice a healthy lifestyle through eating well, getting enough sleep, staying well hydrated and looking after your general wellbeing and fitness.
- Stick to a solid routine and good time-keeping. This will keep your life and training progress structured, helping you to use the same skills on competition days.



Competition Success Checklist



 COMPETITION NAME & DATE

 KIT TO PACK / NOTES

 SCHEDULE FOR DAY
(use white board for detailed plan)

TIME	ACTIVITY
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

 3 GOALS FOR TODAY

1
2
3

DREAM BIG, KEEP FOCUSED, ONE STEP AT A TIME

 5 POSITIVES FROM TODAY - (how did it feel)

1
2
3
4
5

 3 THINGS LEARNT FROM TODAY

1
2
3

 ACTIONS TO TAKE HOME TO IMPROVE FOR NEXT TIME
(PUT AS 3 GOALS ON NEXT COMPETITION CHECKLIST)

1
2
3

DREAM BIG, KEEP FOCUSED, ONE STEP AT A TIME

- Learn from mistakes and accept they will happen. When they do, put them behind you and allow them to help you strive for better – avoid dwelling on what went wrong.
- Always be kind to your horse and work on building a partnership based on trust.
- Have a mindset that is open to trying new ideas and training techniques.
- Be patient with yourself and your horse – good results take time and a lot of hard work to achieve.
- Get the right support team in place – people who genuinely have your best interests at heart.

The right mindset

Being a successful competitor doesn't just come down to your physical ability to carry out the required tasks, but also your mental state of mind. How many times have you driven a great dressage test at home only for it all to go wrong in front of the judge? This is something most of us can relate to at one time or another. So how can you stay in the right mindset when

nerves kick in due to the added pressure at a competition?

- Stay focused on what you are doing, rather than comparing yourself to other competitors. Only compete against yourself.
- If something goes wrong, for example you make a mistake in your dressage test, put it behind you. It's only one movement and there are plenty more marks to be gained during the rest of your performance. Stay in the moment.
- Remember to breathe during your warm-up and when competing. By breathing slower and more deeply from your stomach you

tell your nervous system to calm down. This is something you can practise at home.

- Read up on the four Cs of psychology – concentration, control, confidence and commitment.
- Going back to practice, the more solid your performance at home, the better your self-belief will be at a competition. But, most importantly have fun and smile.
- *To find out more about how to maintain your carriage visit: www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk or call us on 01400 281280.*

Join in with the fun

Keep an eye on the Bennington website for dates of training days run by the Bennington Carriage Driving Academy. Or why not make a stay of it and come for the weekend? We offer a range of experiences, from our 'Try Carriage Driving' days for those new to the sport, to 1-1 bespoke training for more experienced drivers and their turnouts.

- Visit: www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk/driving-academy for more details.

