

MEET THE EXPERT



SAM GRIFFITHS won Badminton in 2014 and led Australia to team bronze at the 2016 Rio Olympics, finishing fourth individually. The Dorset-based rider suffered a serious neck injury in 2017, but will be back in action this season.



Letting your horse enjoy a graze at the end of a training session helps him relax and accept you, says Sam Griffiths

SCHOOLING SOLUTIONS

Chill out!

Does your horse get a bit hot under the saddle? Follow **eventer Sam Griffiths'** tips to calm him down

WHEN YOUR HORSE is feeling well, you might expect him to be a bit of a handful. It's all fun and games to have him excitable for a gallop on a hack, but not so good when you're aiming for that perfect score at a competition.

It can be frustrating riding a hot horse when you're trying to focus, but getting angry at him won't calm

him down any quicker. If there's one person who knows how to stay as cool as a cucumber with horses that are full of energy it's Olympic eventer rider Sam Griffiths.

Hot – or tense?

Being a regular on the international eventing circuit, Sam understands that keeping your horse calm is the key to success.

"A horse's natural reaction is often

to flee from stressful situations," he says. "Hot horses are generally tense and they won't listen to you.

"You need to do a lot of calming work at home and eventually he'll relax with you. You can then try the same exercises when you're out competing to help him regain focus using something familiar."

Over the page, Sam explains the tips and tricks you can try to help your horse chill out.

TOP TIP

HELP HIM ACCEPT YOU

This might go against everything you know, but as Sam explains, it's a really simple way to get your horse to relax around you.

"I think the Pony Club would be horrified, but when I'm finished schooling, I like to walk out on a long rein and give my horse the opportunity to eat grass," he says. "It breaks with tradition, but it helps him to relax and learn to accept you."

TRY IT: At the end of your schooling session, have a wander off on a bridleway or around your horse's paddock on a long rein. Let him enjoy a sniff and a graze.

EXERCISE 1 Calm him down

Let's face it – if you have a whizzy warm up, you can say goodbye to any chance of a calm schooling session.

"The key is to get him to relax," says Sam. "If you can calm him in your warm up, he'll be more likely to listen to you for the rest of

your training session."

Once you've had a walk around for a few minutes, try the following exercise.

How to ride it

a) Go large around your paddock or

school in trot.

b) Ride around until your horse settles into an even rhythm.

c) Give the rein, encouraging him to stretch his neck.

d) Change the rein and repeat.

e) After five minutes of trotting, do the same in canter.

f) Change the rein and repeat.

THE NEXT LEVEL: After the canter, get him in a longer frame in counter-canter.

Have patience!

It'll take time for your horse to relax the first few times you try this, so bear in mind it may take a few sessions to get him feeling calm

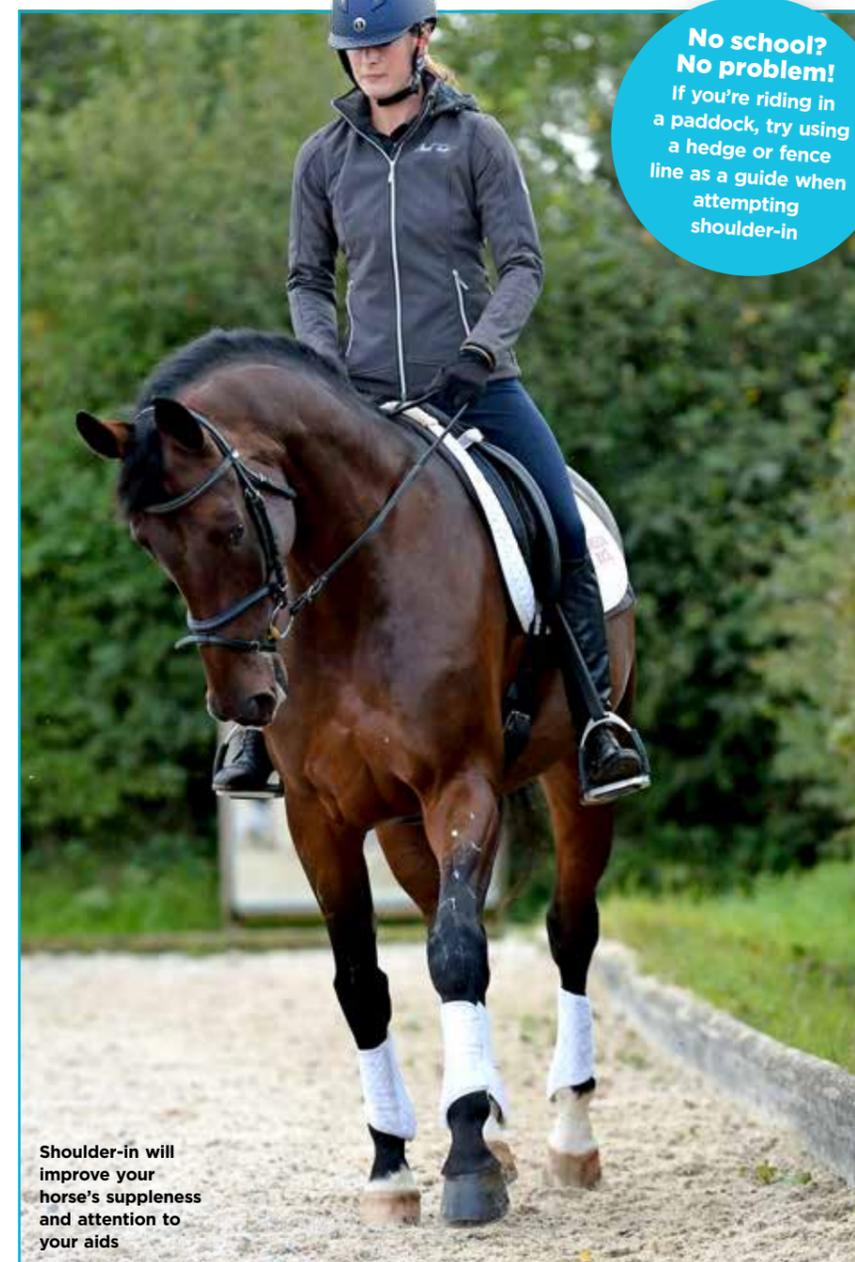
Keep your warm up relaxed and aim to ride in a slightly longer contact



Shoulder-in will improve your horse's suppleness and attention to your aids

No school? No problem!

If you're riding in a paddock, try using a hedge or fence line as a guide when attempting shoulder-in



EXERCISE 2 Help him focus

After a quiet warm up, the next step is to get your horse focussing on your aids.

"Riding shoulder-in in a slightly longer frame keeps him relaxed but gets him to think," says Sam. "You have to use your inside leg, which encourages your horse to accept you as a rider. You'll also need to be able to bend his neck – doing this encourages him to relax and focus on you.

"Even if you're inexperienced, give it a try. It's a good way to get him to accept your leg." Shoulder-in brings his shoulders in off the track while his quarters stay where they are.

How to ride it

a) Go large in trot, maintaining an even rhythm as you did before in

your warm up.

b) Keep your horse in a slightly longer frame.

c) Down one side of your school or paddock, ask for shoulder-in.

d) Your inside rein creates flexion and controls the angle of the shoulder-in, while your outside rein controls the pace.

e) Use your outside leg to keep his hindquarters straight and your inside leg to keep him moving.

f) Ride for a few paces and then go straight, riding large around the school.

g) Change the rein and repeat.

EXERCISE 3

Boost your connection

Once you have the hang of shoulder-in in trot, you can take things up a gear and try shoulder-fore in canter.

"This is a more advanced move and how well you do it comes down to horsemanship," says Sam. "It's a good one to practise because your horse has to really listen to what you're asking for."

Shoulder-fore is roughly about half the angle of shoulder-in, but doing it in canter makes it harder. Follow the steps below to give it a try.

How to ride it

- a) Go large around the school in an even canter.
- b) Down the long side, put a little more weight into your inside leg. Keep your outside leg on the girth to control his quarters.
- c) Keep your horse soft through his neck and ask for a small amount of inside flexion.
- d) Keep your shoulders in line with your horse's.
- e) After a few steps, straighten up and continue to canter around the arena.
- f) Change the rein and repeat.

Shoulder-fore is more subtle than shoulder-in and means your horse brings his inside shoulder slightly in off the outside track



Sam says...

> Calm from the off

"It's a horse's natural reaction to run, but if he's in flight mode, he's going to be tense and won't listen to you. Try to get him as relaxed as possible during the warm up so that he's happy to do what you ask for in the rest of the session."

> Get him listening

"Exercises like shoulder-in get your horse thinking. Bending his neck also encourages him to relax and focus on you."

> Let him chill out

"Take time after your schooling session to let him wander around his paddock and eat grass. It helps him to accept you and calm down." 🐾