

The Trials and Tribulations of a Novice Novice Wannabe Showjumper

Or a look at the life of Arnie (fat Coloured) and Kirsten (just Fat!)

Hi there,

I've been asked to write a wee tale of the traumas and trials I have faced in my attempt to be a showjumper. Its worth mentioning that my overall aim in this showjumping lark is 65 cm so the Whitaker family can rest easy knowing that's one less bit of competition they don't have to worry about. Very few folk these days are willing to admit that they are scared (almost shitless) about jumping so I was delighted to see that the club had organised a few novice novice lessons with Aileen Craig. The stipulation was that the lessons were for either young or inexperienced horses or nervous or novice riders. Lo and behold, it turned out I ticked ALL the boxes. I suppose that technically speaking I'm not a *novice* rider cos I've been doing this for the last 20 years (fast approaching 42). That must mean I'm just crap!! I certainly fitted the "nervous" bit. My little horse (and here lies the first problem – I am 5'9" and could kindly be described as "sturdy" – he is a full up 15 hands hhhmn – bought him as a foal and he just didn't grow as big as I had hoped –still he's only 4 so I'm sure he'll grow another hand yet – ha ha) is very inexperienced, only 4 and a bit excitable.

The morning of the first lesson arrived. After bathing and primping both of us (I have a long standing policy – look like a diddy, ride like a diddy and they *know* you're a diddy! Look the part and they think you're just having a bad day – this works as long as you keep changing venues!) and double dosing him with calmer, off we went to Braidfield for our lesson. He came out the trailer and stood like a wee lamb to get ready (Arnie looks like he should have a part time job on Blackpool Beach). I got on and wandered round the yard, reasonably happily. We headed into the school with 3 other like minded folks AND I FELL APART! After 10 minutes of shouting at me to "use your outside rein" and me shouting "no", Aileen eventually asked "why?" "I can't let go of the neckstrap" was my response. To be fair, she didn't laugh at me (at least not when I was watching!) and talked me through it. Remember that at this point I was only trying to walk round the arena (although that is one scary arena – banners are us!).

It's probably worth mentioning that I suffer from an unfortunate, little known, but extremely common condition called Equine Tourettes. This means that I start cursing like a trooper in direct relation to how scared I am. The air was blue. "Arnie, Arnie, ooh Arnie, ooh, oh shit, oh f***, ooh f***** h**". By this time, the audience were howling. I felt pretty much like howling myself mind you! Then we started trotting! Actually, I have to admit that Arnie actually enjoys jumping and when he realised that was what we were there for he settled right down and got on with it. I do not enjoy jumping until Arnie is securely packed up in the trailer. Then I find I had a ball!

This happens to me constantly and I blame this on the fact that I had an abrupt introduction to jumping many years ago. My first jump (yes I do mean my first ever) was over an old woman. I am willing to bet that no one else in Ayr Riding Club can say that. It's a long story which involved her falling asleep on a bus at Parkhead, ending up in Clydebank and getting lost on the moors at the back of Faifley. I was

heading home at dusk on a November night and as we cantered up the hill I jumped over her as she lay upside down in a ditch. You should have seen me at Clydebank Police Station reporting that one. “Yes officer, I did jump over her, no, she’s sitting in my car and can someone get her out quick before she pees my seats”. I probably wouldn’t have minded so much if she had put her legs up and at least I could have pretended she was a cross pole! (one day I too will be old and this will come back to haunt me!!). On the bright side, at least I saved her life!!

Anyway, back to novice novices. I have since persevered and despite several setbacks (on Sunday for example, I ended up in the middle of a dressage show at Sandyflats despite thinking I was there for 1’3” showjumping – incidentally they let me enter – I came last! Clearly 17 minutes isn’t enough time to get your horse out a trailer, tacked up, warmed up and test learnt. On a positive note, we only jumped out the arena once!) I think I might just be getting there. Arnie is still a wee rat bag warming up but when I get into a ring he actually goes quite nicely. He has met most of Rowallans fillers now and coped admirably with them. I just go really really early and warm up when there are only maybe one or two horses there (more than that and hysterics kick in). We are now capable of completing the Wobbly Expert course all on our own (for those of you who don’t know this category, it is just slightly lower than your average wellies!). I have also discovered the joys of Rescue Remedy and both myself and Arnold get suitably doped before we leave home – then again on arrival (oh my God, there goes my chances of becoming an Olympic Eventor – failed the dope test).

Hopefully I am not the only one who feels like this and roll on the lessons restarting. You’ll know me, I’m the big bird on the wee coloured who’s probably swearing like a f***** trooper! Just think, next year I get to try cross country – aaaargh!