

TRAINING

Masterclass with **PAUL TAPNER**



Badminton
2010 victor
Paul Tapner
explains why a
controlled cross-
country round is
the key to finishing
in a faster time

OUR EXPERT

Event rider Paul Tapner grew up in Sydney before relocating to the UK in 1999. He was the winner of the Mitsubishi Motors Badminton CCI**** in 2010, and represented Australia at the World Equestrian Games in Kentucky. He is based at Wickstead Farm in Wiltshire, where he holds training sessions for riders of all levels.

OUR RIDER

Emma Marsden, 39, lives in Buckinghamshire. She takes part in riding club activities with her 12-year-old Irish gelding Paddy's Promise. In 2008 Paddy suffered a hairline fracture of the cannon bone as well as a chipped bone in his knee. This season he returned to competition and evented at BE100 level.

Words: Victoria Spicer; Photography: David Miller



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1 ESTABLISHING AN EVEN RHYTHM

KEEP HIM RELAXED

While her horse Paddy is a reliable jumper, Emma has a problem incurring time penalties across country. "I find it hard to ride in a rhythm – I always seem to have the handbrake half on and I constantly chop and change the pace," she explains. "This means I'm interfering with him and not riding confidently enough, and we clock up lots of time penalties. I would love Paul to share his knowledge on how to ride smoothly and positively."

Before they begin, Paul reminds Emma that it's important to set off across country in a positive mindset. "Don't go out thinking 'I mustn't go slow', instead think 'I will go more forwards'. A slight change in attitude can make a big difference," he says.

● Paul asks Emma to warm up on the side of a slope in trot and canter, sticking to certain boundaries. "If a horse can't canter up, down or across a hill in balance, then he's not going to be able to jump," explains Paul.

He notices that Paddy is getting faster up and down the hills, before regaining a better rhythm on the flat (above). "He's looking

like he's getting stronger and heavier. It pays to do some nice relaxed work at the start to make sure he doesn't start to tank off just because he's on the cross-country course," he adds.



TIP from the TOP

Some horses find it difficult to trot and canter downhill. Set aside time to do some flatwork on different terrain, so they get used to staying in balance going up and down hills.

2 BE EFFECTIVE ON YOUR APPROACH

DON'T GET INTO AN ARGUMENT



Starting with a small white fence, Paddy approaches keenly although 'balloons' slightly as he goes over it (left). Afterwards, he immediately puts his head down between his knees and bucks, but Emma sits tight. "That was a fantastic defensive position – you kept your lower leg forward and your upper body back," says Paul.

● Paul notes that Paddy is getting too fast on the approach. "You're pulling him up on the approach, but that's just making him panic that he doesn't have enough speed to get over the fence," he says. "The slower you try to make him go, the more he will end up fighting to go. It's becoming an argument, which is why you're both finishing cross-country exhausted with lots of time penalties."

Paddy is wearing a three-ring gag with roundings, and Paul feels that this isn't allowing Emma much leverage, so he adjusts her tack so that the rein is attached to the second ring only.

● This time, Paul tells Emma to approach the fence and, if Paddy gets strong, to take one firm pull on the reins to prevent him from getting away from her, and then to maintain soft hands. "When he's at the speed you want, keep your hands light and still. When he suddenly goes faster, slow him down," he reminds her.

The next attempt is much more controlled, so Paul tells Emma to gradually come back to a walk and give Paddy a pat.

H11

3 KEEP CONTROL

ONLY REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Now that Paddy is jumping in a more controlled fashion, they head over to a series of three small steps. To start with, Emma is asked to canter up the hill and up the steps. "Be careful as it's quite narrow, so the horse might try to duck left or right," warns Paul.

- On the first attempt Paddy tries to run out (below inset). Emma keeps him straight and they go up the steps, but they've lost impulsion and he stumbles a little. "I don't want him to go slow as you approach – I just want you to prevent him from taking off," says Paul. The next attempt is better (right).

As they come back down the steps, Paul tells Emma to sit upright and keep her arms straighter through the elbows, opening the fingers a little bit so that Paddy can take as much rein as he needs. "If you allow too much rein, you won't be able to steer to the next fence."

- Paddy pops down nicely but as Emma pulls him up, it looks like he might buck again. "Next time, keep cantering until you've got more control. Don't automatically pull him up as it rewards him for bucking by allowing him to rest," says Paul. Emma continues in canter, and is told to pat him while she is cantering along, to reward him for good behaviour.



SPOTLIGHT ON

Emma's elbows should be straighter to allow Paddy more freedom in his head and neck going up and down steps



4 OVERCOMING NAPPING

SOFTEN HANDS BUT MORE LEG

As they head over to a combination of a step up and a log, Paul warns Emma that the problem with this fence lies in its positioning. "You've just been cantering around an open grassy field and you're suddenly asking the horse to come into a dark corner and yet maintain impulsion and a balanced canter. Make sure you keep the energy as you come downhill on the approach, but collect the canter a little, otherwise you'll find it hard to make the step up."

- Emma rides towards the step, but Paddy begins to back off and drift to the left. "Keep your hands soft, and ride him forwards," Paul says. Despite the hesitation, Paddy trots up the bank then pops nicely over the log (left, inset). They come round again, this time in a very sedate canter. Paul reminds Emma to use her legs as well as her reins for steering, and to allow with her hands to keep him going forwards.

- Paddy again jumps well, but on landing he puts his head down and tries to buck, so Emma is told to keep cantering on a straight line until he settles. The next time, Paddy is napping badly on the approach, jinking left and right (left, main photo). "Don't circle away – use your outside rein to keep him straight, then allow with the hand and send him forwards."

They clear the combination then head down to a jump shaped like a blue house. Paddy is again being hesitant, so Emma aims for the smaller of the fences.



5 TACKLING WATER

CORRECT POSITION

Before they jump through the water, Paul tells Emma to walk in, circle, and then come out the same way she went in, to ensure that Paddy is happy with it. When that goes smoothly, she can do the same thing in trot. "Try to use all the available space, without accidentally jumping out of the water," he says. "Aim to sustain a steady relaxed trot, and don't let the pace get faster or slower."

● Paddy trots in well (right), but on the turn he loses impulsion and steadies to a walk – so Emma will have to ride more positively as Paul tells them to introduce a step out of the water.

They do a quiet canter through the water, but again lose impulsion on the turn and Paddy breaks into trot. However, he steps up easily (far right) then pops over the log in five strides. "If the step up was bigger, or the log afterwards was closer, you might have struggled to get out over it," says Paul.

● Once he is jumping more confidently, Emma takes Paddy the other way through the water, popping over the log, down the step, up the ramp and over a small ditch. However, on landing Paddy starts bucking again, and as they cross an uneven bit of ground Emma tips out of the saddle and Paddy shoots off (below).



6 STOP THE BUCKING

SEND HIM FORWARDS

Paul assures Emma she did nothing wrong. "You've done well to stay on all session when he's been bucking," he says. With Emma back in the saddle, it's time to have another go at jumping the water complex. "The fences weren't a problem, and you've done such a good job of telling him he's not to misbehave after each jump, so we just have to continue that," says Paul. "Make sure this time you get him going forward after the ditch. Establish a canter circle round the first fence and keep him cantering until he settles into a good rhythm."

● Paddy jumps tidily again and flies over the ditch, but then starts to think about bucking. However, Emma manages to send him forwards on the circle. "Come round and do it again, and be ready to get his head up after the ditch by using a half-halt, and growl at him – he needs a lot of voice when he does that," says Paul.

Having stopped him from throwing one of his tantrums, Emma is told to walk Paddy on a long rein and give him a pat to finish the session.

TIP from the **TOP**
Remember you cannot teach a horse just by reprimanding him when it goes wrong. You also have to regularly reward him when he gets it right.

H11



MASTERCLASS CONCLUSIONS

Paul

"Emma is doing a good job with Paddy, but he is being quite rude to her. She has to be consistent with him, so that when he misbehaves she gets after him, but when he's good she responds by being kind to him.

"By pulling him up each time, she's been teaching him that if he's naughty he gets to stop and have a rest, so she should work on sending him forwards until he settles."

Emma

"The lesson has really taught me that I have to be more disciplined with Paddy.

"Paul has given me the confidence to ride in a more forward rhythm and to make sure I keep control after each fence, as well as on the approach.

"I've got lots to practise over the winter now, and I'm looking forward to putting it all in place when we get out eventing next season."



**Paul on...
CROSS-COUNTRY
CONTROL**

To remain safe on the cross-country course, you need to have established control, but that doesn't mean simply slowing down – you must still be travelling forwards.

You need to know that when you ask your horse to slow down before a fence he will react, and that it's not going to become a fight between you both.

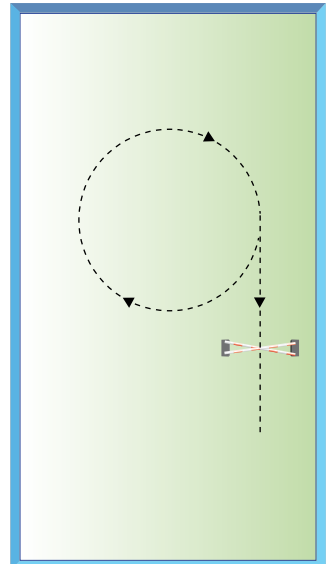
The key is to work on being able to stop your horse when he begins to rush, but when he is maintaining a good pace and rhythm, to sit quietly. This way, it should become much easier to finish within the time.

EXERCISE 1

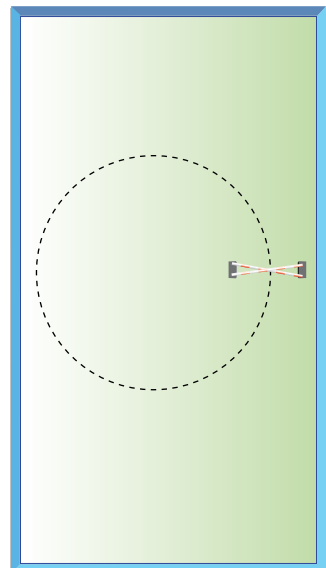
Set up one straightforward fence along the long side of the arena. Establish a 15m circle in canter, right in front of the fence. After two or three circles, only once you've established the rhythm, go over the fence.

EXERCISE 2

With the fence in the same position, set up a small cross-pole and ride over it on a small circle (15-20m) so that you're constantly turning. This exercise is useful for convincing the horse that he can jump out of a slower pace.



Exercise 1: Circle in front of a fence to establish a rhythm before jumping it



Exercise 2: Ride over a small fence on a circle to keep your horse steady.

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