

NEW
SERIES
PART 2

Free *for all*

Does your horse sometimes clam up, drop behind the leg aids, canter rather than lengthen his trot stride? Then watch him open up with Michael Peace's great advice



It's our job as riders to convince the horse that doing the right thing is the best option



About Michael

Michael Peace uses his unique 'Think Equus' philosophy to help horses and riders of all levels to achieve their goals. He advises riders: "Forget about dressage and looking tidy on your horse to start with. You can refine your aids later once the basics are in place."

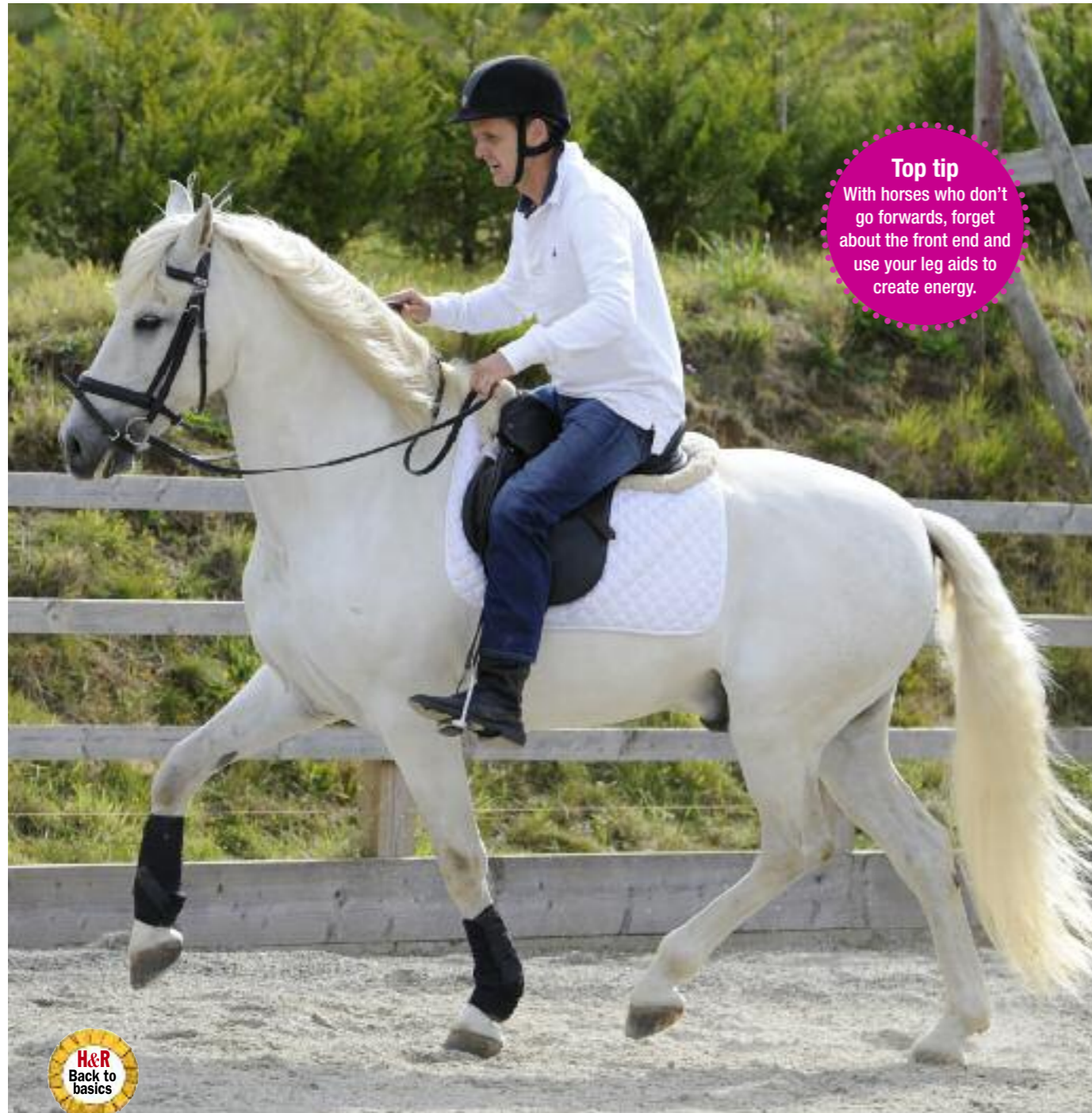
To book your horse in for training or a home visit with Michael, call ☎ 01865 842806 or visit his website www.michaelpeace.co.uk

Our models

Nicky rides Tensa, an 11-year-old Andalusian gelding.



Tensa has all the stunning looks that are typical of his breed, but Nicky finds his energy wants to go up and down rather than forward. "He can piaffe for Great Britain, but extended trot is much harder," she told Michael. Since our photoshoot Tensa has been sold to a new home.



Top tip
With horses who don't go forwards, forget about the front end and use your leg aids to create energy.



Horses are all different shapes and sizes and often just by looking at a horse's conformation you can get a good idea of what he'll find easy and not so easy. For example, it's logical that if your horse has long legs, a long body and a sloping shoulder, he'll probably move with a large stride and find extension easier than collection. On the other hand, short-backed, more compact horses generally find collection easier than the extended work.

Assessing your horse in this way can not only help you to understand how he goes on the flat, but it will help whatever you do with him. For example, if you're not quite on the

Short and compact horses like Tensa find collection easy

right stride coming into a fence, then knowing whether your horse will go for a long or a short stride will help you to stay with him.

Looking at Tensa, it is easy to see why all his energy goes up and down. He's a short and compact horse with a high head carriage and knee action. It's no surprise that he likes to piaffe but not stride out. I got on Tensa and showed Nicky how to open him up.

Top gears

By teaching Tensa to lengthen his paces, I am showing him that there is more than one gear in each pace. How much you teach your horse to adjust his stride really depends on what you want to do with him, but if it's something you have never thought about before then consider the following to see whether it could help you and your horse to improve:

- Being able to adjust your horse's stride is essential if you want him to jump at his best.
- It's vital for competing in



Correct the wrong response by stopping and repeating, then reward the right one with a pat

Top tip
Keep training sessions short but repeat them often. This is the quickest way for your horse to learn.

No mistakes

Before you start a schooling session, remind yourself to be dedicated to discipline. By this, I mean don't allow mistakes – not even one – to go uncorrected. With Tensa, the most

important thing is that he is always thinking forwards. If I ask him to go, he must go – every time!

Like a lot of clever horses, Tensa uses evasion tactics to avoid opening up. I asked him to take bigger steps in walk – he trotted. I asked him to lengthen his trot – he cantered. He does this because it is easier for him to go up a gear than to make his body longer. Nicky told me he uses Spanish walk, piaffe and passage as evasions, too.

It's up to us, as our horse's trainer, to convince the horse that

doing the right thing is the best option for them. I find that the best way to do this is to correct the wrong effort – not by punishing, but by stopping and repeating the exercise again – and then reward the right response by giving the horse a pat.

I suggested to Nicky that she didn't allow Tensa to work in a sloppy way at all, and that she disciplined herself to correct him every single time she wasn't happy with something. It's difficult to say how long it will take before you see results because it depends on the horse – and the rider! – but you can usually start to see changes after a week.



Try not to allow even one mistake to go uncorrected

Top tip
Give your horse lots of short breaks so he can reflect on what he has learnt and get his breath back.

dressage classes, especially as you go up the levels.

- Whether you compete or not, a horse who can adjust his stride easily is much more balanced, and balanced horses are generally a lot more pleasurable to ride.
- Good balance keeps a horse more supple and mobile, which can help him to lead a longer active life.
- Learning to go up and down the gears will improve your riding and your core strength, helping you to transfer your skills to your next horse.



More than enough

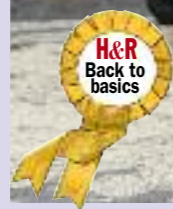
With horses like Tensa who tend to be a bit reluctant to go forwards, it is a good idea to ask for more energy than you need, so try this.

In walk, think that you want to be almost trotting and in trot, think almost canter. This really gets your brain thinking forward so your horse will start to, as well.

Forget about rein contact and what's going on with the horse's front end for now – in fact, if he's really lazy, throw your hands forward at him to get a reaction when he doesn't listen (pictured right). Then, when he goes and you get the energy you want, give him a big pat,



Top tip
Ask for more energy than you need with lazy horses. If you start with more, you can allow for losing a bit



walk to reward him, then trot again. Give him lots of commands so that he starts to really tune in to you. If you allow him to switch off, you will get just the opposite.

Tensa has a really nice canter, it's very uphill and active. However, like all his paces, it is more airborne than forward. I found that lifting my

inside hand up and towards his inside ear helped to pick him up a bit and encourage him forward.

After a while, he started to really open up and as his back stretched more, so did his neck – you can see the difference in the picture left. This kind of work will help him to become more supple and more reactive.

Give your horse lots of commands so he starts to really tune in to you

Top tips

- When you are schooling your horse, try to make him think about what he is doing by stopping and repeating every time you get the wrong reaction and rewarding when



he does what you want. Your horse starts to learn that he doesn't benefit from using evasions.

- Have belief your horse can do anything you want him to do. It's easy to think 'my horse can't lengthen, his legs are too short'. Try it, you might be surprised.
- Tensa is quite a dominant character and he has his own ideas about how things should be done. With horses like this, you need to let him know you call the shots – be assertive.
- Give your horse your full attention, otherwise you can't expect him to give you his. If you ride around chatting to your friends, then your horse has every right to evade you.
- If you allow your horse to do something wrong one in 10 times, he'll keep trying to find the easiest route. Do it right 10 times out of 10 and he'll start to co-operate.

More information

To give your young horse the best start in life or if you've got a problem horse who needs help, call ☎ 01865 842806 or www.michaelpeace.co.uk

To buy Michael Peace's new Semi-Flex saddle and have it fitted by expert saddler, Barry Swain, while Michael Peace rides and assesses your horse, call ☎ 01865 842806.

Next month

Your young horse is backed and ready to go, what do you do next?

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