

# Move it like Piggy French

The eventer on being self-critical, observing other top riders and testing herself when she's riding

## The element of surprise

"I'll often randomly plonk a fairly decent fence in the school and trot up to it from different angles at various points during a training session," Piggy says.

"Not only does this get horses thinking quickly for themselves as they are not expecting the question, but it's also hard for both horse and rider to stay in balance jumping out of trot. Practising things like this helps improve balance, trust and ensures you can react quickly to avoid preventable incidents."

**A** big thing for me is self-carriage, for both horse and rider," says Piggy. "Rider balance is key and the seat should be in control of everything. I never rely on riding off my reins and feel strongly that I should never carry any of the horses I ride. They need to think for themselves — people are often surprised that 95% of my horses go in the same snaffle for dressage. The mouth is the last thing I think about."

To this end Piggy confesses to being extremely self-critical to ensure that she maintains the classical seat she believes creates the balance of strength and lightness she is looking for. She's also a keen observer of riders such as Michael Jung, Ruby Walsh, Carl Hester and Marcus Ehning, who she believes have mastered this style of riding.

"You can evaluate your position via photos and video," says Piggy. "I've done this so much over the years that the position I strive for is now second nature. This is valuable in dressage, where you are essentially presenting yourself and your horse, and being ahead or behind the movement can lose you marks.

"I constantly test myself when I'm riding, too. For example, checking that I can give or take either rein at any time without the horse losing its balance. This also helps to ensure that I keep my wrists and elbows soft." **H&H**

## Look forwards, not back

Piggy has suffered cruel blows, with top horses picking up injuries before the 2012 Olympics and the 2013 European Championships. But she says: "I always try to look forwards and never back. It's important to keep doing what you like doing in the way that you like doing it and surround yourself with supportive people. Nothing will ever go your way 100%, and you have to be able to take the knocks when they come."

## Core strength

"All good riders have unbelievable balance," says Piggy. "And this results in strength and incredible lightness. I'd recommend Pilates to any rider. I wouldn't say it's changed my riding, but it certainly helps.

"Self-awareness is key — I know the feeling that I want to achieve with my horses and I train in a simple but consistent fashion until I get it. If you do too much for horses they learn to expect it, so I ride any horse in the way I want to it to go from day one. This helps them to build up the core strength they need to think for themselves, and be quicker and lighter on their feet."

