

Getting Over Your Nerves

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I couldn't ride.

The next horse that I rode was a blessing in disguise. He was a very spooky six-year-old gelding with limited show miles. I would spend several hours on warm up days schooling him till he'd quit spooking. It seems like an odd solution, but it worked. The only way I could get through to him was by being braver than he was. He became a winning 1.20m jumper seven months after starting as a 3' hunter. The year that followed I went from competing at a 1.20m to jumping 1.50m at the North American Young Riders Championships.

Thomas Edison once said that opportunity is missed by most people because it's dressed in overalls and looks a lot like work.

Continued on page 14

One of the greatest challenges a rider can face is show anxiety. It can be as mild as a little nervousness at the in-gate, or as crippling as the fear that causes you to freeze when you're halfway through a class. The mental training it takes to overcome this fear can be infinitely more important than any exercise you can jump at home.

I think everyone who rides horses must go through a period of learning how to deal with these nerves if they've been competing long enough. I sure did. When I started show jumping as a kid, fear wasn't a huge factor. You went to the jump and you jumped it, which seemed simple enough. But then it got hard. I started competing on a horse that stopped and it taught me to freeze. My brain would just shut off when something went wrong. I fell off multiple times and struggled to figure out what was going on. I ended up in a low place and felt like

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Continued from page 13

And it couldn't be more true. It was a hard road and took a lot of work to overcome that fear that I'd developed, but I got through it. If you're in the middle of that stage in your riding, don't give up. Use that fear to give you the edge you need in the ring. Practice tough situations at home and retrain your brain to react to situations instead of shutting off. Use those nerves to get sharper in the ring instead of freezing. Most importantly, give yourself a break and find a support system to help you. We probably don't say it as often as we need to, but we've been there too. If you get tough and gut it out, you'll come out far stronger than when you started.



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