



Learn how to:

- Achieve straightness;
- Relieve tension;
- Ride flying changes.



OUR TRAINER
Andrew Gould

Andrew's CV
Dressage rider Andrew has ridden on Great Britain Junior and Young Rider European teams and has competed internationally at Grand Prix level. He has won 11 British Dressage regional championships and three national championships.

Louise's aims

Louise rides Quadrille, an eight-year-old ex-racehorse owned by The Queen. The 16.1hh gelding has been out of racing for four years and is competing at Advanced Medium-level in dressage. "Quadrille has a lovely, trainable temperament, but he gets



OUR RIDER
Louise Robson

tense," says Louise. "He is quite a 'hot' horse to ride and I struggle to keep him relaxed, especially in flying changes."

Masterclass with Andrew Gould

1 Accepting the aids

As Louise and Quadrille warm up, Andrew notices how hard the horse tries to please his rider, which is a lovely trait for a horse to have.

"He's trying so hard to get it right, hence why he gets tense," Andrew tells Louise. "That makes your job harder because you have to give him clear signals, but you can't be too firm otherwise he'll get upset and lose confidence."

"As he's a 'hot' horse, it will be tempting to ride him with less leg, but he has to learn to accept the leg aids."

"With a hot horse, you often need more leg so he stays connected from the leg aid to the bit."

In canter, Andrew asks Louise to make some simple transitions from canter to trot and back to canter again.

He spots that when Louise takes more of a contact on the reins, to ask for a downward transition, Quadrille curls his neck back to avoid accepting the contact.

The horse then shortens his canter stride before making the trot transition, which allows him to fall onto the shoulder and interrupts the forward momentum.

"Ride him more forward in the canter," Andrew tells the rider. "Lift your hands slightly

and close your legs around his sides to keep the energy levels up.

"Think of that feeling of self-carriage, where the horse is working actively forward from the hindleg into a secure rein contact."

With more power, Quadrille travels forward in better balance, without dropping behind the contact.

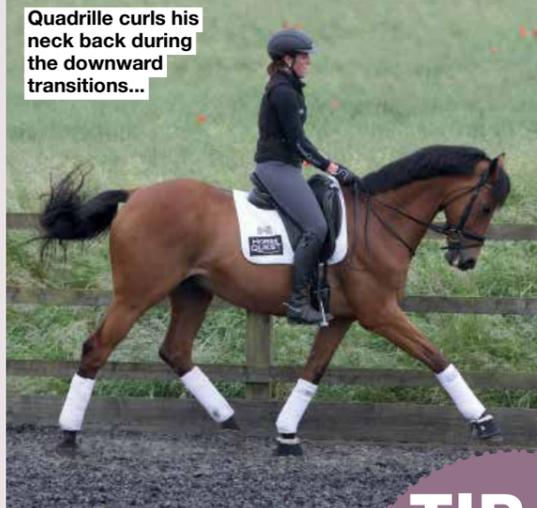
"Good," Andrew praises. "Now ride a trot transition from the more forward canter, without

allowing the horse to shorten his stride. Keep your leg on to maintain the impulsion.

"If he goes to shorten, ride the canter on, then ask for another trot transition."

While Quadrille still wants to shorten the canter before making a trot transition, the quality of the transitions improve.

"That's something to work on at home," says Andrew. "It's a basic thing, but it's important."



Quadrille curls his neck back during the downward transitions...



....so Louise adds more power to the canter

Words: Nicky Moffatt; photography: David Miller

2 Addressing straightness

Like most horses, Quadrille has a stiffer and a more supple side and Andrew notices that the horse wants to bend more to the left than to the right.

While straightness is an issue a lot of riders forget to address in the early stages of a horse's training, Andrew points out the importance of being aware of it at all times.

"It is something we have to continue to work on throughout a horse's dressage career, because they will always favour one side," says the trainer.

"If it's not addressed, it will show up more as the horse goes up the levels. All the advanced exercises, such as half-pass and flying changes, will be better one way than the other."

"On the left rein Louise's horse bends too much to the inside, and on the right rein, he still wants to stay in left bend," says the trainer.

Andrew asks Louise to go large in left canter and position the horse in outside – counter – bend.



Outside bend helps with straightness

"Riding counter bend on this rein does the opposite to what the horse finds easy," Andrew tells her. "It gently stretches the muscles on the left hand side of his body, which will help straighten him."

At first, Quadrille reverts back to being tense, something he does when he's unsure about an exercise.

"That's fine," Andrew reassures Louise. "He must let you ride him through tension, rather than using it as a way out of something."

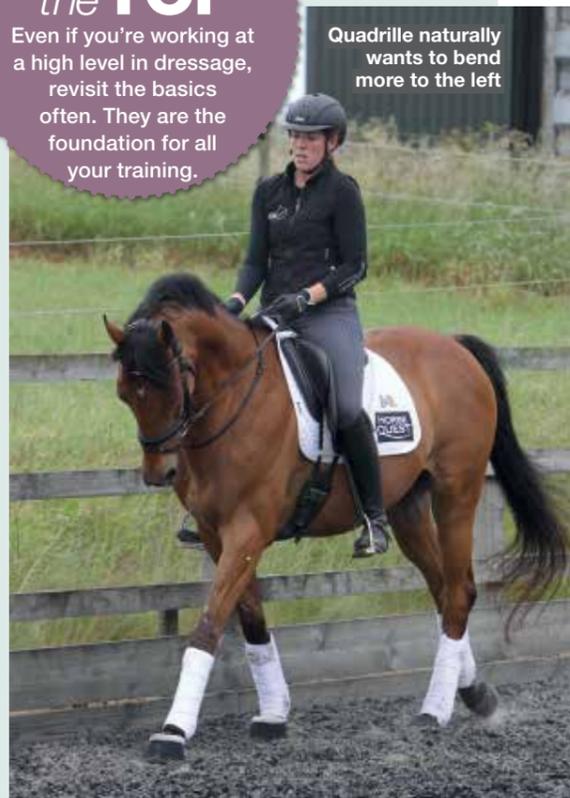
"If you back off him when he gets tense, he'll always use it as an escape route. Ride forward positively and wait until he relaxes."

Soon Quadrille is accepting Louise's outside aids better and becomes more relaxed.

"Good, tell him he's a clever boy. With tense horses, you have to build up confidence in small steps," Andrew adds.

TIP from the TOP

Even if you're working at a high level in dressage, revisit the basics often. They are the foundation for all your training.



Quadrille naturally wants to bend more to the left

3



Louise rides onto one of the long sides in true canter...



...makes a trot transition and then picks up counter-canter

Perfecting counter-canter

In preparation for riding flying changes later on in the session, Andrew asks Louise to perform a canter exercise, making transitions between true canter and counter-canter on the long sides of the arena.

"Start in true canter and go large," he tells her. "Make sure the canter is moving forward in a good rhythm and balance and that your horse is accepting the rein contact."

"As you come onto a long side, ride a trot transition and pick up counter-canter."

While Quadrille shows some tension throughout the exercise, he does as he's asked and makes an obedient downward transition to trot before picking up the outside lead for counter-canter.

"Now do the opposite on the next long side," Andrew suggests. "Ride from counter-canter to trot, then pick up true canter."

As expected, Quadrille's straightness issue shows up during this exercise, which Louise carries out on both reins.

"He swings his quarters left and has too much left bend," says the trainer. "Keep him straighter by closing your legs around his sides and having equal weight in both reins."

"Make sure you're not tense in your arms and shoulders, otherwise that tension will transmit through to your horse."

"We won't fix this in one session, but be aware of it when you ride," Andrew tells her. "You want him to bend equally both ways."

4 Tackling

At Advanced Medium level in dressage, horse and rider are required to show single flying changes in either direction. However, Louise has been putting in some practice for the tempi-changes, which are required from Advanced level upwards.

Tempi-changes ask the horse to change canter lead after a certain number of strides. So, four-time changes are every four strides, culminating in one-time tempi-changes, which require a change of lead every stride – like the horse is skipping!

To ask for a change from right lead to left lead, the rider should push their left seat bone forward, keep their left leg at the girth and swing their right leg back.

They should keep a contact on the right rein but soften the left rein so the new inside hindleg isn't blocked from coming forward.

Andrew tells Louise to come across the diagonal in true canter and ride some tempi-changes. But she should only ask for the change when the horse feels relaxed, rather than sticking to a set number of strides.

Louise and Quadrille make a good attempt at this exercise and manage to perform

tempi-changes

three obedient flying changes across the diagonal of the school.

"The first two were really good," says Andrew. "You 'threw' him into the last one by leaning over to the left."

Their next attempt is even better and Andrew reminds the rider to focus on a point straight in the distance.

This will help her stay on a straight line throughout the exercise.



Louise starts in right canter...



...and rides a flying change into left canter

TIP from the **TOP**
Keep exercises simple and reward the horse for any effort he makes. That's the key to achieving a confident, willing horse.



Riding across the diagonal into counter-canter teaches Quadrille not to anticipate flying changes



Then, when Louise does ask for a change, the horse is obedient

5 Teaching the horse to wait

Andrew says when training a horse to perform flying changes, it is essential he waits for the rider's command, rather than anticipating the movement.

To help with this, he describes the importance of varying the exercises you do.

"If you always ask for a flying change in the same place, you'll soon find the horse puts in a change before you have even applied the aids," he states. "With horses like Quadrille, who try hard to please, this is even more important because he's always thinking one step ahead."

The trainer asks Louise to canter around the arena and come onto the diagonal. He suggests the rider doesn't ask for a change, and simply rides across the diagonal into counter-canter before making a trot transition and picking up true canter the other way.

"Do this a few times," he tells her. "Then ride onto the diagonal again and ask for a flying change through X."

While Quadrille anticipates a flying change the first time the pair come onto the diagonal, he soon realises it is not required and becomes more relaxed.

Then, when Louise does ask him to change legs, he performs a calm and obedient flying change.

"That's a good exercise for him," says Andrew. "Keep him guessing, so he doesn't make decisions for you."

6



TIP from the **TOP**

When you're riding, ask yourself how the horse feels. If he's tense, crooked or lacking power, correct it.

Quadrille offers some quality stretching work at the end of the session

Finishing on a relaxed note

Stretching is an essential part of any horse's training. While some horses find it easy, others will be more reluctant to take the contact forward and down.

Tense horses, like Quadrille, usually stretch better at the end of a session, when they have worked the muscles hard and want to 'let go'.

"Spend five or 10 minutes working him in a long and low frame in trot," Andrew tells Louise. "Keep him straight and make frequent changes of rein so he's listening to your aids."

"If he has a tense moment, use your leg to ride him on again and keep your rein contact even to help him stay straight."

After a productive session, Quadrille offers some pleasing stretching work.

"The horse should still use his body properly in the stretching," Andrew states. "He must be working forward from the hindleg into a secure rein contact and remain straight through his body."

The trainer reminds Louise to position Quadrille a little in outside bend when working on the left rein, to help with straightness.

"Good, he's done enough," Andrew concludes. We'll finish on that note."

WHAT OUR RIDER LEARNED

"My lesson focused on working with the tension that can creep in when working on more advanced movements, such as flying changes," says Louise.

"Tension and shortness of the neck is a key problem with ex-racehorses.

"All the horses I work with are ex-racehorses, so I was open to any exercises that may help me with this.

"Andrew got Quadrille to wait for me rather than anticipate movements. The trot to true canter and trot to counter-canter exercise was really helpful.

"When we rode tempi-changes on a straight line, this allowed me to ask for the change when Quadrille felt relaxed to the leg and helped me focus on a distant point to keep us straight." ■



● Thanks to HorseQuest for setting up the lesson with Andrew. Visit: www.horsequest.co.uk.