

FORWARD THINKING

THIS
COULD BE
YOU!

RIDER
CLINIC

Amy Middleton's horse Aniseed has become dead to the leg, so it's time for her to get out of the slow lane and to start listening

Words Imogen Johnson

The pupils

Amy Middleton and Aniseed

Aniseed is my first horse. I've owned her for nearly eight years and she's now 11. She's quite lazy and although she'll work nicely in an outline she often doesn't work from behind and consequently works either behind the bit or leaning on the hand. I'd like some help in getting her to listen and to get her off the leg so I can get out and do more dressage this summer with good results. I've not worked with an instructor like Nicole before so it will be really interesting to try something new.



The expert

Nicole Golding

Nicole and her partner Adam have their own yard near Cirencester in Gloucestershire where they've been running Intelligent Horsemanship (IH) clinics and private study visits since 1998. Nicole has also taught on the IH foundation courses with Kelly Marks for more than 12 years, as well as studying the work of Mary Wanless, among others. Nicole teaches riders of all levels and from all disciplines, including western, showing, jumping and dressage. With Adam, Nicole has written two books, *Whispering Back* and *Born to Whisper*, with introductions from Kelly Marks and Monty Roberts.

➤ To find out more about Nicole or for contact details visit www.whisperingback.co.uk

Amy lets Aniseed look around



Taking time to relax

Introductions over, Amy leads Aniseed to the school, where Nicole suggests she gives her some time to take in her new surroundings.

"Today we're going to try to get Aniseed working forward so we want her to be as settled as possible before we start – we don't want her appearing as though she's working forward simply because she's excited about being somewhere new," says Nicole.

Nicole tells Amy to let Aniseed stop to look at things if she wants to in order to help her feel completely relaxed.

"What I've noticed is that automatically you've chosen to lead Aniseed from the inside on both reins. If she spooks she's likely to go into you so it's actually safer for you to lead from the outside. When you're on the outside you're nearer the scary things and that will help Aniseed to feel protected."

Amy swaps sides and continues

Amy switches to the outside



to lead Aniseed around the school. Soon Aniseed's head and neck begin to lower and she starts to lick and chew, indicating that she's becoming more relaxed.

"This is great, Amy, she's definitely more relaxed than when you first entered the school. She's still looking around but it's out of curiosity now, not fear."

Nicole asks a helper on the yard to continue walking Aniseed around while she discusses the lesson plan with Amy.

HOW TO

TAKE PART IN A CLINIC

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The plan

"The aim of our lesson today is to get Aniseed 'self propelling' or working forward willingly. To do this, I need you to start asking her to go forward in a different way, using signals or aids other than those she's switched off to. This means you won't be using your legs at all," explains Nicole.

"At the moment she just won't listen, so you keep repeating yourself. However, what you need is one aid that will last until you ask her to do something else. It needs to be an aid that's enough to get her to do what you're asking of her, but not one that uses force. It might sound a little sarcastic but she's not a bicycle and therefore she doesn't need that constant input of energy."

Nicole shows Amy the wip-wop



Nicole demonstrates how to use the wip-wop

– a soft cotton fibre rope with a tasselled end and a loop for the rider's wrist.

"The wip-wop is used by waving it around your head and body, using lots of energy. I always show people that it doesn't hurt by using it on myself – you can hit yourself really hard but it doesn't hurt at all. What it does is create a reaction in the horse that gets him moving – so when you try it you may find that Aniseed leaps forward in

surprise or that she simply moves forward as though she's been rudely woken up!"

Nicole demonstrates on herself the sort of movements and sounds to make with the wip-wop and when exactly to use them.

"You only use the wip-wop as a consequence of her stopping moving her feet and that's really important. You know Aniseed, she's your horse, so it will be tempting to anticipate when she's going to stop. However, it's so important that you give her the opportunity to get it right before you tell her she's got it wrong. If she thinks about stopping but then thinks again and keeps walking, and you've already gone crazy with the wip-wop, you're not allowing her to learn."

No legs!



With a tap, Nicole shows how light the aid should be



Amy walks Aniseed on a loose rein

On board – wip-wop at the ready

Nicole asks Amy to have another walk around the school now that she's on board and then to warm up as she would at home.

"Compared to normal, on a scale of one to 10, 10 being the best, how forward would you say Aniseed is at the moment, Amy?"

Aniseed works at a leisurely pace but by no means drags her heels, but Amy still feels she's not getting the best from Aniseed.

"Probably about seven at the moment, but it changes as we

move round the school, she'll see something and slow down. I still feel like I have to push her on all the time," replies Amy.

Amy tells Nicole that she normally schools using a schooling whip and spurs, which create a reaction straight after they're used, but one that dies off quickly.

"Yes – that's the danger of using aids, even the wip-wop, if they're not used properly. They just become another aid for her to switch off to.

"Do you use any other aids?"

Amy explains that she sometimes uses a kissing sound or pushes with her seat and body, along with her leg aids.

"Yes, those will sometimes work too, but more often than not they'll eventually fizzle out," says Nicole.

"It's Aniseed's brain that tells her how fast to go, so that's what we need to work on here. It's all about thinking differently, which can be a very hard transition to make at first."

Nicole explains that the way she rides and teaches others to ride involves using no leg – or no leg in the conventional sense.

"We use something like this..." With the back of her hand, Nicole demonstrates how lightly she may apply a gentle leg aid when asking a horse to move forward.

"There's nothing inherent about a horse moving off from a leg aid. A newly-backed youngster will often stop or go backwards if squeezed with the leg because they naturally move into the pressure. It's such a common issue – horses not moving off the leg. We seem to forget that horses will quite happily walk across their fields to the water trough with no one on board kicking them."

Nicole prepares Amy to use the wip-wop by getting her to first practise not using her legs at all.

"Don't completely disappear but resist the temptation to use your legs or body, even if you think she might stop. You can still guide her round the school so that she knows you're still alive up there."

Amy walks Aniseed around the school concentrating hard. Her boots make a squeaking sound against the saddle so there's absolutely no way she can cheat!



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