



Meet the rider

**Name:** Katie Clark  
**Based:** Buckinghamshire

Katie is riding Springtime Diamond Blue, or Brian, a 16.3hh, Irish Sport Horse. Brian is Katie's first event horse. Their first event together was a Pre-novice competition, and before this lesson, they had competed three times, coming 11th at one of the events. Katie hopes to compete with Brian to at least Novice level.

Meet the expert

**Name:** Jeanette Brakewell  
**Based:** Leicestershire

Jeanette is one of Britain's leading event riders. She was awarded the Horse Trials Support Group Scholarship in 1997 and was seventh at Blenheim that year with Over To You. Jeanette was ninth at Badminton with Over To You in 1999, eighth at Burghley in 2002 with The Busker, and ninth at Burghley the same year with Plantaganet of Rushall. She was a member of the gold medal-winning

European teams in 1999, 2001 and 2003, and also in the silver medal-winning team at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Jeanette was also a member of the British team at the 2002 World Equestrian Games in Jerez, Spain, where she won an individual silver and a team bronze medal. In 2004, riding Over To You, Jeanette was part of the silver medal-winning team at the Athens Olympic Games.



## 1 Assessing the problem

Katie says she would like some help with Brian's strong will. "He just gets fed up and decides that he doesn't want to work anymore, then he'll buck," she explains. "I lose my balance and have to stop him to get my position back." Katie would also like to learn to get Brian's strides right between fences. "I went from a 15.3hh horse to Brian, who is nearly 17hh," she

says. "He gets too close to the fences and I can't get his stride back before the next jump." Jeanette believes that strides shouldn't pose a problem, no matter how big the horse. "The stride distances on cross-country courses are always even," she says. "When you walk a course you know that the distance is going to be the same. It's just a matter of keeping the same pace between the fences."

**"I lose my balance and have to stop him to get my position back"**

## 2 Riding through a buck

As Katie warms up, Brian has no problem expressing how he feels – he bucks whenever Katie puts her leg on him, then swings his haunches back and forth.

Because Katie has a tendency to lean forward slightly and take her lower leg off, her position can be insecure. Brian is able to buck and dislodge her forwards.

Katie says Brian has been checked out by her vet, and that the bucking is a mental reaction rather than due to physical causes. Jeanette agrees – even at walk, Brian tries to get his way, evading Katie's contact and then refusing to halt when she asks him to.

Jeanette decides to get on board Brian, and asks him to trot forward. Immediately, he runs through her contact and leaps about, swings his haunches and starts bucking. Jeanette calmly works him through it.

"When Brian prepares to buck, sit quietly and ride him forwards," she tells Katie.

Brian stops bucking and settles down to his work. Jeanette reminds Katie to keep both legs on when she rides, and to think of riding the horse into both hands.

**"When the horse wants to buck, sit quietly and ride him forwards"**



When Brian bucks, Katie is dislodged forward (above). Jeanette rides Brian through his attitude problem (right).

Katie says she has to tire Brian out an hour before his dressage test. "That is really hard work," Jeanette says. "You should just be able to get on, warm up and go into your test."

Jeanette's top tips

- Maintain a quiet seat with your legs on.
- Refrain from disciplining the horse or getting angry.
- Sit calmly and wait for the horse to finish bucking.
- Use a half-halt to prevent the horse running through your hand.



# Changing a bad attitude

Top event rider Jeanette Brakewell teaches a reader how to stop her horse bucking and pay attention to her aids

Words: Sharon Biggs Photography: Steve Bardens



While working small figures-of-eight, Brian begins to stretch into the bit through his neck. Jeanette says Katie must let him go forwards and not try to condense his power.

### 3 Accepting the leg

With Katie back in the saddle, Jeanette suggests she work Brian in small, figure-of-eight circles on a long rein in walk to get him used to moving off her leg.

Brian moves off in a nice forward trot, this time without the bad attitude.

"Try to feel when the horse swings his haunches – this is when he will buck," says Jeanette.

Not only is Brian now working better, but he is also starting to stretch into the bit through his neck. "When you feel him stretch forward like that, let him have his head, but don't let him go beyond his balance," Jeanette says.

"Let him go forward. He's a powerful horse, and you've got to learn to ride him within his power and not to try to condense it."

#### Jeanette's top tips

- Keep an even contact and ride the horse forwards.
- Try to feel when the horse swings his haunches – this is when he will buck.
- Put your legs on, so the horse has no option but to go forward into the contact.
- Don't let your reins go slack; carry your hands.

"Try to feel when the horse swings his haunches – this is when he will buck. Ride him within his power"

### 4 Achieving smooth transitions



As Katie asks for a transition to canter, Brian thinks about bucking, but Jeanette reminds her to make him work and to ride purposefully forwards.

Katie asks for canter in a big circle on the right rein. As she asks for the transition, Brian thinks about bucking again, and Jeanette reminds Katie not to get annoyed with him, but to make him work.

She asks Katie to do the following:

- Be consistent with your hands – shorten the reins.

- Ride the horse purposefully forwards.
- Use your leg through the transitions.
- Maintain a stable, secure position.

By following these tips, Katie is able to make a good transition. She changes to the left rein and picks up canter again. Brian thinks about bucking, but Katie puts her leg on and moves smoothly into the canter.



Katie then asks for transitions to trot and back to canter, and Brian responds with a smooth, balanced transition, accepting the change of pace without bucking.

"It's all about moving forward, because for a horse to buck, he has to slow down," Jeanette says. "Also, if you keep everything secure – seat, hand, leg – he'll change his mind about bucking."

Katie asks for a transition to trot, and back to canter. Brian accepts the change of pace and responds with a smooth, balanced transition.

### 5 Honing strides for jumping

Having tackled Brian's bucking, Jeanette now turns to helping Katie judge his strides between fences. She sets up a grid with a placing pole approximately 8ft in front of a small cross-pole. Another cross-pole is set on a non-jumping stride, approximately 19ft away. Then she puts another placing pole on the ground, midway between the two fences.

Katie circles Brian in trot on a circle, until he is settled. At the first approach to the fences, however, Brian isn't expecting to jump, and trips his way through the grid (1). "That's actually good; he'll learn from these experiences," says Jeanette. His second attempt is better (2).

The cross-pole is then put up to an upright and initially, Brian rushes through the grid (3). However, Jeanette advises Katie to keep going and repeat the exercise, and on the next attempt, he takes the grid steadily (4). "You've worked him through the bucking and he's also paying attention now, so the stride length isn't an issue," says Jeanette.



Initially, Brian rushes through the grid, tripping over the fences instead of jumping them.



His second attempt over the cross-pole is calmer.



When the fence is put up to an upright, Brian rushes at it, and Katie has to hold on tight.



Because Katie has worked through the bucking, Brian is now paying attention to her.

"If you work through the bucking, the strides won't be an issue"

Brian is now listening to Katie instead of grabbing the bit and rushing at the fence. This time, he jumps through the grid with impressive scope. After one fence he thinks about bucking, but Katie feels him swing his quarters and corrects him with her leg before it becomes a problem.

Horse and rider look much more together now than at the beginning of the lesson – Katie has managed to work through Brian's attitude problems today, with excellent results over fences.

### What Jeanette says

"I don't think Katie will have any problems with her jumping once Brian stops bucking. She's got to school him out of that by riding with positive aids. There is nothing physically wrong with Brian to make him buck – he just has to know what's right and wrong, and bucking is not right. Katie shouldn't tell him off for bucking because

he's such a cocky horse with lots of talent; if she punishes him, he'll stop working for her completely. Instead, she's got to work him through his attitude. She has to ignore what he's doing, and he must respond to her leg and slow down when she uses her hand. The pair showed great improvement today."



Jeanette is impressed with the improvement of the pair, and says Katie should ride him positively through any bucking.

### What do you think?

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### What Katie says

"Since the lesson two weeks ago, Brian hasn't been bucking much at all. He still takes some time to warm up to the job in hand, and puts in the odd buck. However, when I ride him, I keep a mental checklist of what Jeanette told me to do (see right), and that is really helping me. I ride him through the bucking and he seems to be accepting his work now and listening more. "I took him to a cross-country course after the lesson and he was so bold, he flew over everything! He still attacks his fences, but now we are in a rhythm."



### Your bucking checklist

- Keep an even contact, put your legs on and ride into the bridle.
- When the horse swings his haunches, ride him forwards.
- Maintain a quiet seat and calmly wait if the horse bucks.
- Use half-halts to prevent the horse running through the rein contact.

### NEXT MONTH – SUMMER

Guy Williams helps an aspiring event rider shorten her ongoing strides in the showjumping arena.

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