



coached in the right methods. I'm really enjoying it and getting a lot out of it."

Now the ex-jockeys play the role of tutor. Three BRS students and their well-seasoned schoolmaster horses trot in circles around an all-weather arena and the class splits into pairs. Bellamy and Tinkler take on the case of Mhari Pickering, Bellamy as mentor and Tinkler as observer.

BELLAMY chats away to Pickering, getting the drift of how she rides, where the problem is, working out how he's going to address said problem. It emerges Pickering took a couple of falls this morning, has issues with flighty horses, needs a little shot of confidence. Bellamy accentuates the positive, recommends dropping the stirrups a couple of holes and using a neckstrap. Pickering makes a few circuits, consults with Bellamy before making a few more, this exercise a good demonstration of the 'set up and stand back' style of coaching.

Half an hour later, Tinkler turns assessor. "Perhaps you could have pushed her a little more, challenged her more," she says. "That said, it would have been more constructive for you and for her if she'd been riding the horse she'd previously fallen off."

Ringrose oversees each pair, listens to feedback, underlines the importance of a relaxed session rather than anything too intense, of having a plan of action before starting while at the same time being able to alter plans if circumstances dictate. It's early days, but the process is taking hold among the ex-jockeys.

"I think jockeys make very good coaches," says Breisner. "They have very good technical knowledge of all aspects of the sport, and during their career

they've actually been coaching the horses they've ridden, so in a way they're already used to the teaching process. What we're doing here is formalising that process.

"Where it's difficult in racing is that, similarly to tennis and golf, it's a competition-based sport rather than a training-based sport. Whenever a jockey goes out on to the racecourse he is expected to win on a daily basis, every time, instead of being part of a football or rugby team that is only competitive once a week. It's pretty specialised in that respect and having specialist coaches will be a big advantage."

Ringrose rounds off the session with a section on communication – verbal, non-verbal, and the tone employed for each, the emphasis being on clarity and constructiveness – before dishing out homework in preparation for the next session in three weeks. By mid-April, each of these eight ex-jockeys should be in possession of UKCC Level 2 qualifications and ready to begin the rewarding task of encouraging the next generation to succeed.

"I rode for 34 years, had plenty of ups and downs, and it's nice to be able to put something back," says Hills. "I'd have loved to have had a coach when I was young, it would have made a huge difference."

"To have someone on the phone to help with how to ride different tracks, how to conduct yourself with owners and trainers – that's all very important for a young jockey, and all the type of thing ex-riders can help with. This scheme is going to be a big head start for so many youngsters, a massive push in the right direction."



CLARE'S CRUSADE

In a fortnightly series in the run-up to the St Patrick's Derby at the Cheltenham Festival, Coral PR director Simon Clare tells us about his preparations

WHEN I set my sights on riding in the St Patrick's Derby at Cheltenham I knew it would be an enormous challenge, requiring a huge amount of hard work and commitment, and I was totally prepared for that, but bizarrely I completely underestimated how much fun it would be. Now every time I get legged up on a racehorse it is quite simply a total thrill.

Every aspect of the experience is a joyous one, from successfully tacking up a horse without assistance (a rarity) to washing the horse down after exercise, but there is no question that riding work is the most special part of all. Every time I approach the start of Zoe Davison's gallop I can feel my pulse-rate quicken and my body tense with anticipation.

This is actually far from ideal as at precisely this point I should be trying to feel completely calm so as to avoid my equine partner getting even more excited than me! Trying to act relaxed and indifferent when I have adrenaline coursing through my body is the ultimate mental challenge.

Then the action starts. It rarely takes more than a slight tap with the heel and my regular partner William (racing name, John's Gem) jumps into a canter, which can be hair-raising, and I scramble around to get my reins and hands in a good position on the horse's neck.

I concentrate on settling myself into a balanced position with my heels down, bum up and head looking straight ahead between my horse's ears. If everything has gone well until now the rest of the uphill gallop is a pleasure as my partner strides out at a pace I'm controlling and I can literally enjoy the ride. Feeling the incredible strength and power surging through the horse beneath you is an enormous buzz and there is an even greater sensation of speed when you are on board than when you are standing watching.

There have of course been many times when it hasn't gone so well, where my horse has

Trying to relax is ultimate challenge

pulled my arms out all the way or, in the early days, run away with me completely. But even these occasions were exhilarating and left me wanting to understand where I'd gone wrong and determined to get better.

As I strive for improvement, I've started visiting the British Racing School, where they have kindly allowed me to use their excellent facilities and receive instruction from jockey coach and ex-jockey Michael Tebbutt.

I love these sessions on the simulators and mechanical horses. It may not look difficult, but I promise you riding a simulator is incredibly tough, and before long your leg muscles feel as though they're burning under the strain and effort. These sessions with Michael are going to prove invaluable over the coming weeks.

TWO weeks ago I also had the privilege of riding out on the historic Lambourn gallops for Oliver Sherwood, which was an incredible experience. I had stayed over with my good friends Josh Apiafi and his wife Abby, with my kids Eloise and Ollie, and Josh had kindly arranged with Oliver for both of us to ride first lot.

I was legged up on a nice four-year-old called Bountiful Sin, who Oliver said was safe, if a bit lazy. Just walking along the roads and then trotting up to the gallops in a string of 20 was incredibly daunting yet also thrilling. With the 7.30am sky still black it then started to snow, which made the occasion even more surreal.

Oliver came past in the car giving instructions as we trotted. "Twice up on your own," he shouted to me. Then past came Abby in her car with my kids waving and shouting excitedly out of the window.

By then I was absolutely buzzing with excitement. Bountiful Sin looked after me well as we cantered twice up the five-furlong all-weather gallop smoothly and without a hint of drama. As we slowly made our way back to Oliver's yard across the amazing snow-covered Lambourn countryside I felt truly blessed to be able to experience special moments such as this.

