

## EVENTING

## Green issues

- Unusual fences
- Snaking
- Running out

In a post-event interview with *H&H*, this year's Tattersalls CIC3\* runner-up Bill Levett said of his ride, the nine-year-old *Improvise*: "I think he got a fright at the first ditch at fence seven and went a bit green after that."

We asked Bill exactly what he meant by this.

"The fence was a corner sited over a yawning ditch and he'd never seen anything like it before," explained Bill.

"I didn't see the best distance and he had to really stretch to make the back rail.

"He's naturally very brave and the experience taught me that even the boldest

horses can go green on you when presented with something they're not expecting. I had to ride him really strongly around the rest of the course."

Ditches, water and steps are the three types of cross-country obstacles that are most likely to catch out a green horse – at any level.

"Most are wary of at least one of these," says Bill. "If your horse hesitates in a competition – even if you don't pick up any penalties – you should take him schooling afterwards."

Harry Meade, who is renowned for instilling confidence in horses across the country, echoes Bill. He also has another tactic.

"If a horse has a specific issue, for example with water, I will make a point of incorporating it into his daily work," he says.

"I find a place within hacking distance with a river or a stream and take the horse through it every day so it becomes routine."

## Dealing with distractions

OFTEN, when you take a horse to his first event, it's not the fences themselves that are bothersome, but the distractions in between.

"A green horse will be looking at everything around him: he may wriggle and back off, he may dive left or right, or he may hang towards his friends," says Harry.

"I want to have done enough preparation at home so that he understands and trusts me when I tell him to go forward."

To prepare a horse for his first event, Harry does specific canter training.

"A lot of people just train in a purpose-built cross-country field, but I also want my youngsters to learn how to go forward for themselves in a straight line in a wide, open field," he says. "I go to a local farm and canter them behind an older horse."

"I do a complete circuit of the farm at a cross-country pace. Some horses only need to do this once or twice, whereas others need more."

## Holding a line

AN experienced horse will learn to look for the flags and hold his line at technical fences. But a green horse may be more inclined to take advantage of an obvious way out.

"As a horse moves up the levels, you need to prepare him for the unexpected," says Bill, who explains how he sets up fences at home to teach a horse to react quickly.

"I will play around with small corners and skinnies in the arena. I'll put a jump wing three or four strides in front of the fence so that I turn inside it (see diagram, right). That

Steps are an obstacle likely to catch green horses out



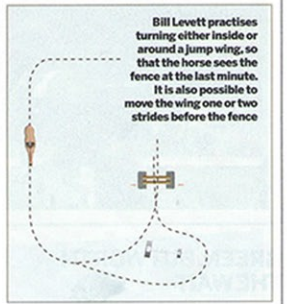
way the horse only sees the fence at the last minute and has to think on his feet."

Vicky Brake says that even the country's best eventers have learned a lot from Michael Jung's approach to cross-country training.

"Hearing about Michael's set-up – how he has hundreds of little schooling fences dotted around his yard, which he incorporates into his horses' work almost every day of the week – has opened up our eyes," she says.

"His horses are constantly tuned into jumping cross-country fences and solving puzzles. You rarely see his young horses running out."

Bill Levett practises turning either inside or around a jump wing, so that the horse sees the fence at the last minute. It is also possible to move the wing one or two strides before the fence



Green horses can be tempted to take advantage of an obvious way out at an unwelcome fence

## THE VALUE OF HAVING TO CONCENTRATE

## Green issue: Spooking

VICKY BRAKE admits that initially she "despaired" over her young advanced horse, *Cooleys First*.

"He was so spooky, especially in the showjumping. He'd have two or three rails down because he wouldn't concentrate," she says.

"Early in his career, I deliberately built really spooky fences in the arena and schooled him over them the day before a competition to try to desensitise him. Interestingly, though, this made him worse, as he started pre-empting trouble."

Now, Vicky focuses on sitting quietly and resisting the temptation to increase the pace when she thinks *Cooleys First* is going to spook.

"When he moved up to advanced level and suddenly had to concentrate, it was the making of him," says Vicky. "At Blenheim this year, he jumped one of only a handful of showjumping clears in the eight- and nine-year-old class."

