

GEORGIA BODLE

SOMETIMES THE BEST LESSONS COME FROM UNLIKELY PLACES...

WORDS: TANYA ROBINSON PHOTO: WWW.RISINGPHOTOGRAPHY.CO.NZ

We all have our demons, problems and achilles heels when it comes to competing. Very few riders are candid enough to admit to them, let alone discuss these with strangers!

No such difficulties arise for the nine year old Georgia Bodle. Georgia has been riding since she was two years old. Her first pony was the adorable Poppy the Pony, inherited from her older siblings, Hannah and Harry. She has attempted Lead Rein and First Ridden classes, and is now dabbling in Show Hunter events. Her current pony is Firefly, paddock name Ace. Aged around 15 years old. Ace has been a tutor for a few children in his years.

Georgia does all the work on her pony. Her mum, Jo, laughs that Georgia insists on having him looking fabulous all the time, often holding up an afternoon ride while his feet are oiled! Georgia follows a strict weekly routine with her pony – Monday is his day off, Tuesday and Wednesday she rides in the cross country paddock, Thursday consists of Ace being worked in the arena, with the possibility of some jump practice, and Friday is the preparation day, where Georgia helps to get Ace looking fab before the show on the weekend. Georgia explains how she and Hannah laugh and joke together on their ponies, and talk about all sorts of things. The supportive bond with Hannah is lovely to see. Hannah provides many hints and tips and Georgia is appreciative of the help she gets from her big sister. If need be Hannah will hop on Ace for Georgia and jump a round, so she can see everything is OK.

Georgia suffers badly with her nerves. She has always wanted to have the confidence of Hannah and Harry. Up until last October at times Georgia wasn't even confident enough to canter around the arena, or go over so much as a pole on the ground, let alone take up jumping and qualify Ace for category B show hunter at Horse of the Year this season!

This has been a fantastic highlight for Georgia this year, but still those nerves plague her. She really loves the competition, but the odd time her nerves still get the better of her. Jo says that on those days, Georgia will get up, brush her pony, and in her heart still really want to compete, but she just can't. Fortunately the next day always seems better according to Georgia! She is lucky too that her parents don't force her out of her comfort zone, or make a big fuss when these days arise.

Georgia talked me through her feelings when she rides a round at the show – her initial thought was "Oh my god" (Which was quickly corrected to "Oh my gosh")! Followed by "will I make the first fence"? Jo explained that Ace can sense the nerves, and (as some clever ponies tend to do), will take a detour at the first fence if he thinks the nerves are too much. Once the pair are over that first fence, they are away. Georgia explains she then starts concentrating on big corners and forward riding.

While it may be a wee way off yet, Georgia thinks when she grows up she might just get a job that pays for her riding. She also wants to help other kids like her to overcome their nerves.

With maturity way beyond her years, Georgia suggests riders should just have a go at Show Hunter, as it is an encouraging sport.

She recommends going to winter show hunter training days – some heights are only 40 or 50cm, and at Waikato Show Hunter Group there are cool people to help you get around the course!

She also advises to start at the lowest height and only move up when you feel ready – that is what she and Ace have done. The most important piece of advice is to breathe when you are going around, as you will die if you don't! (Georgia said her mum always tells her that. The story behind this saying is poor Georgia forgot to breathe while jumping a round one day. She had jumped a brilliant round, but toppled off the pony before the flags – the fall was caused by a lack of oxygen!).

Georgia is looking forward to the day when she isn't quite so nervous before competing. She says the worst days are those when she goes back to the truck not having made that first fence, "but it doesn't matter – there is always another day".

She said she feels so lucky with the support she has, and dreams of winning Show Hunter Pony of the Year one day. She says "Look at me; I never thought I would ever jump, let alone qualify for Horse of the Year in Show Hunter. So anyone can do it if they really want to".

Her final piece of advice is an absolute gem: "If you are really nervous, and believe me I really am, just believe in your pony and yourself, and you never know what might happen".

Show Circuit wishes Georgia all the very best in her continuing competitions, and hopefully the nerves will remain quiet for her on those big days! Good luck with achieving your dreams Georgia, and thank you for sharing them with us.

