

UK Scholarship – not just for the youngsters

Tania Thompson explains how the Indoor Carriage Driving Scholarship is not just for the young

I was awarded a Novice Scholarship at the National Indoor Finals at Keysoe, in April this year and, to be brutally honest, I was a bit stunned. I mean, I left school and started my first job in the early 80's (and that's the only clue you're going to get!) People my age can't get scholarships, can they? Oh yes, they can!

This amazing opportunity was given to me – to have training with a UK Coaching Certificate (UKCC) approved instructor, and someone else was going to pay. I shall never know who the benefactor is as they wish to remain anonymous, but I do know that they are going to do it again this year. Three deserving recipients will receive a Novice Development Certificate entitling them to benefit in the same way that I have.

So, what did I do when I received mine? I took that certificate and stared at it for quite a while (probably too long as I began to get odd comments from my other half) and I got onto the British Carriage Driving website and had a look at the UKCC instructors that are listed. I chose Anna Grayston, after a lot of deliberation, and a phone call was all it took to book up some lessons. I have regular training with Sara Howe and it was important to me to integrate my scholarship lessons with these. Their training methods really do complement each other perfectly. I realised I had chosen well!

In my first lesson, Anna asked me what I'd like to work on – Well, "me please" as I felt I was not quite able to give the right instructions to my pony so he was getting confused and stressed. Anna stood back and watched me drive. I had taken my youngster, Murphy and frustratingly, was getting the same trouble establishing right bend as I was with my other pony, Paddy. Knots in my reins identified I didn't sit quite straight and was constantly asking for left bend. No wonder there was confusion! This prompted a course of physiotherapy for Paddy to undo what I'd done to him, and some exercises and mental reminders about my sitting position every time I got in the driving seat.

While Paddy was having his massages and physio, Anna worked on teaching me to drive Murphy to get him off his forehead. This was quite hard as I had to use my whip hand a deal more than I'm used to, and this identified another thing. After a very short while, I had a numb right hand and had to stop. I had been driving like I ride, but Anna changed the way I hold the reins and whip – only subtly – but it's made another big difference.

Each session would end with some revision, one or two things to work on for next time or to practise as homework. Getting me to remember them was a feat in itself – woman

of a certain age with the memory span of a goldfish these days – but my favourite saying of Anna's is "move your arms like George (her young son) does when he's pretending to be a train." Now that makes perfect sense to me! The importance of the half halt (something I always forgot) has been ingrained. Having the opportunity to train with a second coach is brilliant, two like-minded individuals explaining the same thing but in different ways, really reinforces it in my head.

What have I achieved in this summer of training? In a word, progress. I can feel the difference. Other people, people whose opinions I truly value, have said they can see the difference. So, it's not just because this scholarship is a prize that has a monetary value, although of course that's exactly what this is but, for me, it's the fact that someone thinks enough of me and other novice drivers to invest their own money in us.

To those Novice drivers that get to the ICD UK National Finals at Keysoe in 2018, please remember there is a sponsor out there who is so obviously passionate about our sport that they will be awarding 3 more Novice Development Certificates again this year and I, for one, am eternally grateful to them.

Tania putting her refined skills into practice

