

# the spring rider reset

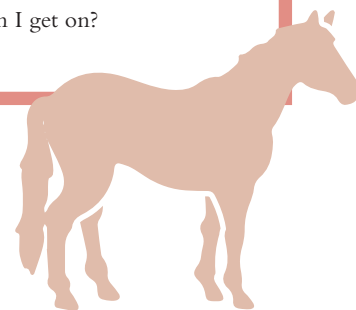
Spring is an exciting time in the horse world. New show season, new goals, new training plans, new equipment, and fresh motivation. Everyone is adjusting feed programs, conditioning schedules, shoeing plans, and lesson schedules. But every year I see the same thing happen: the horse gets a full performance program, and the rider gets pressure. So before this season really gets going, here's something I often suggest riders do - a Spring Rider Reset.

## Start With Your Nervous System

Horses are incredibly sensitive to changes in breathing, muscle tension, balance, and heart rate. Research has shown that horses can even synchronize their heart rate with riders during riding and handling. So if you feel anxious, rushed, or tight, your horse feels it immediately.

### Spring nervous system check:

- Do I hold my breath when I ride?
- Do I rush when I'm nervous?
- Do I get tight when things don't go perfectly?
- Do I feel pressure every ride?
- Do I feel calm when I get on?



## Your Brain Thinks a Horse Show is Dangerous

From a neuroscience perspective, this is actually true. The part of your brain that processes fear and pressure cannot tell the difference between:

- A physical threat
- Public speaking
- Competition
- Riding into a show ring
- Jumping a bigger course

It only detects uncertainty, risk, and pressure. When that system activates:

- Your breathing changes
- Your muscles tighten
- Your vision narrows
- Your timing gets worse
- Your horse feels all of it

This is why so many riders say:  
"I ride great at home but different at shows."  
You are not a different rider.  
You are a different nervous system.

## Riders Are Athletes, Even if We Forget

### Riding requires:

Core stability, Balance, Coordination, Reaction timing, Endurance, Mobility, Focus, Emotional regulation under pressure

### Yet many riders:

- Don't drink enough water at shows
- Sleep poorly during show weeks
- Eat sugar all day
- Never stretch
- Then wonder why their body collapses in the third round

### Many riding "position problems" are actually:

- Fatigue problems
- Mobility problems
- Stress problems

*Your horse has a conditioning program. The rider should too.*

## Confidence Comes From Evidence, Not Positive Thinking

Many riders think confidence comes first, and then performance follows.

In reality, confidence is built through experience and repetition. Your brain builds confidence by collecting evidence that you can handle difficult situations.

### Confidence is built by:

- Finishing rounds
- Making mistakes and continuing
- Riding when you're nervous
- Getting back on after bad days
- Repeating experiences
- Learning instead of quitting

Confidence is not built by telling yourself you are confident. Confidence is built by collecting evidence.

If I could ask every rider one question at the start of spring, it would be this:

*Are you riding to improve, or are you riding to prove something?*

Those create very different seasons.

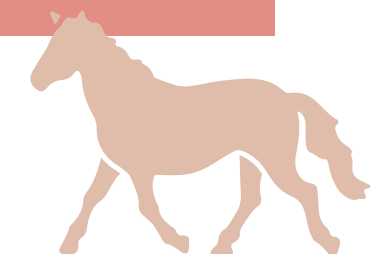
Riders who ride to prove something:

- Ride tight
- Ride careful
- Ride frustrated
- Feel pressure every ride

Riders who ride to improve:

- Ride curious
- Ride relaxed
- Learn faster
- Recover faster
- Actually perform better

## The Most Important Question for This Season



# Spring Rider Check-In

*Before the season really begins, ask yourself:*

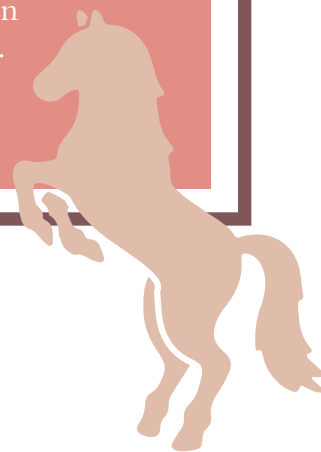
- U Am I breathing when I ride?
- U Am I hydrated at shows?
- U Am I sleeping enough during show weeks?
- U Am I stretching and taking care of my body?
- U Am I riding with pressure or with curiosity?
- U What do I want this season to feel like, not just look like?
- U Am I riding to improve or riding to prove?

Every spring, riders make plans for their horses.

The riders who improve the most are the ones who also make a plan for themselves — their mindset, their body, their nervous system, and their goals.

Because sometimes the biggest upgrade in the barn is not a new horse, a new saddle, or a new trainer.

*Sometimes it's a new rider.*



Pernilla Nathan, Psy.D. a high performance consultant, works with female athletes, specializing in equestrians and entrepreneurs. Her passion is helping people reach their dreams and heal their anxiety. You can find her on IG @DrPernillaNathan, website DrPernillaNathan.com, or email [pernilla@equipsyperformance.com](mailto:pernilla@equipsyperformance.com).