



Erynn Ballard and Nanini van d'Abelendreef; photo © Jump Media

THIS ISSUE'S  
QUESTION:

“How do you ensure a successful outcome when catch riding?”



Erynn Ballard, Canadian Show Jumping Team veteran; photo © Starting Gate Communications

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Each issue, a new question is answered by an industry professional. Have a question you want answered? Send it to [sarah@horseandstylemag.com](mailto:sarah@horseandstylemag.com)

*Catch riding a horse for the first time and heading straight into the show ring can be the ultimate test for many riders. The ability to get on a new horse and figure them out well enough to have a successful round in the ring is a challenging task and requires certain skills.*

**T**he first thing I do when I am asked to catch ride a horse is ask the trainer about any quirks or bad habits the horse may have. I like to know the worst thing that the horse might do, so that I can be prepared.

Nothing is worse than going into a busy warm-up ring unaware that your horse is not good with traffic. If you know what to expect, you can make a plan so you and the horse both have a safe and pleasant experience.

For the most part, I'm lucky enough that I never have to catch ride a bad horse to make it better; I mainly catch ride good horses to make results.

If possible, I try to do a little homework on the horse I'll be catch riding before I get on. When I know the horse's name, I watch videos to see how the horse goes and how they like to be ridden. When you get on the horse, you don't want to try to change them or the way they like to go. Instead, you want to ride them in a way that allows

them to perform at their best, which is why watching videos can be beneficial.

I also think that it is helpful to have a relationship with, or knowledge of, the trainer or professional that you are riding for. It's useful to know their training style and what types of horses they generally get. Additionally, I think when it comes to changing equipment, you can offer suggestions for bits or back boots for a jumper; but if you are catch riding for another professional, you need the ability to work with that person and their training techniques.

When I first get on, I immediately try to get a feel for what the horse likes or needs. I put my leg on and see if they listen to my leg. I pull the reins a little to see how they listen to my hands. I like to test all my gears and then I go from there. Overall, you really want to focus on working with the horse. That's why you're riding it. You're going to have a better result and be more successful than if you try to change it too much, especially in that short period of time.

At first, it may seem foreign to get on a horse you don't know and understand it right away, but the more catch rides you do the more natural it becomes. After you catch ride for a while, I think it almost becomes easier than riding a horse you know because there is less emotion attached. When I ride a horse for the first time, I don't know what it does or how it

feels, and sometimes that is easier because I'm not trying to fix anything. I'm just going out there to ride the horse to the best of my ability.

The last and one of the most important things you should always do as a catch rider is to say thank you. The owner and trainer have given you the opportunity to ride their horse. They have paid all of the show fees, including the entries, the training fees, the braiding; and they have taken the time to prepare the horse. No matter what the experience or outcome is, always say thank you.

## — ERYNN BALLARD

*Canadian Show Jumping Team veteran Erynn Ballard opened the 2022 season as the top-ranked female show jumping athlete in the world. Her career began with great success in the hunter, jumper, and equitation rings as a junior rider, including becoming only the second Canadian ever to win the ASPCA Maclay National Championships in 1998. One year later, Ballard won the individual gold medal at the 1999 North American Young Riders' Championship. In 2006, Ballard made her Nations' Cup debut at the Spruce Meadows 'Masters' tournament and helped Canada win for the first time in the event's history. That same year, she was named 'Equestrian of the Year' by her National Federation. Since then, she has accumulated numerous wins at the five-star level. Renowned for her impressive catch-riding abilities, Ballard currently rides for Ilan Ferder Stables, an internationally-respected training and sales operation.*



Erynn Ballard and Ilan Ferder (left);  
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Erynn Ballard and Monty Python  
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