

Why Running a Riding School Isn't 'Just a Hobby'

People often see ponies in the sun and happy children in the saddle and assume running a riding school is a gentle pastime. The truth is: it's a physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding business. This is **not a hobby**—it's a 24/7 operation requiring hard work, leadership, and total commitment.

1. It's a Regulated Business

We manage:

- Payroll, rotas, staffing
- Insurance, inspections, licensing
- Health & safety compliance
- Risk assessments, safeguarding, and admin

2. The Physical Labour Is Full-Time

Tasks include:

- Poo picking 15+ acres, mucking out, and daily stable disinfection
- Feeding 18+ horses daily, managing water supplies
- Biosecurity, individual health plans, vet and farrier coordination
- Field maintenance, fencing, grass care
- Handling emergencies including colic, abscesses or lameness at any hour 24/7

3. General Yard and Equipment Maintenance

Behind-the-scenes work includes:

- Daily tidying, sweeping, fixing, organising, and being endlessly prepared for inspections
- Tidying and maintaining communal areas
- Oiling and inspecting 18+ sets of tack
- Cleaning and organising grooming kits
- Managing over 200 rugs: cleaning, storing, repairing
- Replacing broken items, ordering feed/supplies, chasing deliveries
- Setting up jumps and courses for lessons and events
- Cleaning the toilet, organising tank emptying

4. Staff Management and Leadership

Essential but often invisible tasks:

- Keeping staff morale high, managing stress and workloads
- Holding regular team meetings and 1:1 check-ins
- Organising CPD and mandatory license-related training
- Observing and reviewing lessons, offering feedback
- Ensuring lesson plans are progressive and safe
- Handling grievances, HR issues, rotas, and holiday cover
- Organising work experience, working pupils and apprenticeships

5. Constant Rider Supervision and Education

We run structured lessons that include:

- Progress tracking, assessments, rider passports
- Teaching confidence, empathy and skill
- Safeguarding, supervision, and first aid cover

6. Community Building and Welfare

We:

- Host camps, pony days, shows
- Provide structured volunteering via helper schemes including nationally recognised qualifications
- Support young people's mental health and personal development
- A safe space for riders to develop confidence, skills, and friendships
- Emotional support, mentoring, and inclusion

7. We Reinvest — Not Profit

With the increased cost of feed, hay, bedding, vet care, equipment, repairs, staffing, and training, there is rarely, if ever, profit. Any surplus goes back into the yard and horse care.

8. And Barely Any Time to Ride Ourselves

Ironically, while we work with horses all day, the reality is that we have little to no time to ride ourselves. The demands of the business, the care, the planning, and the people come first. Our own riding gets pushed aside—not out of choice, but necessity.

Running a riding school *is* incredibly hard work. The long hours, emotional and physical exhaustion, relentless responsibilities, and the constant juggling of people, horses, and logistics—it can feel overwhelming, especially when there's barely time for yourself, let alone time to ride.

But here's why we do it:

- **We love the horses.** Not just riding them, but caring for them, knowing them, helping others build a connection with them. You probably can't imagine a life without them. They all have their own stories. The majority are my own, others are on loan – but they all treated as if they are mine.
- **We are creating something meaningful.** Every time a nervous child beams after their first canter, or a once-withdrawn teen finds confidence through horses, we've made that possible. We are shaping lives.
- **We believe in what riding can do.** For mental health, for physical ability, for responsibility, for joy. And our riding school gives people access to that—often people who might not have found it any other way.
- **We are part of a legacy.** A dream built from the ground up, that has been fought hard for, there's pride in what we have created and kept going.
- **We care about doing it *right*.** Welfare, education, community—it matters to us. And even though that makes it *harder*, it's also what sets our riding school apart. This is a *regulated* industry with strict welfare standards. To stay licensed and legal, we undergo inspections and must provide ongoing CPD for staff, documented welfare routines for animals, and demonstrate high levels of professionalism in everything we do.