



WELLBEING SERIES

FINANCE



IT'S NOT AN AREA WE THINK OF FOR OUR OWN WELLBEING BUT KEEPING YOUR FINANCES IN GOOD HEALTH HAS A HUGE IMPACT ON YOUR OWN MENTAL AND PHYSICAL STATE. IN THE FINAL INSTALMENT OF THE SERIES, **ANDREA OAKES** GETS SOME GREAT ADVICE.

So far we've discovered how achieving a healthy balance in different areas of life can enhance wellbeing, from fitness and food to finding focus. But what about

a final 'F', for finances? How can managing our money benefit how we feel – not just emotionally, but also physically?

There's no escaping the harsh reality that horses are expensive to buy, keep and compete. Spend any time in their company and you'll know that finances tend to flow one way: out of your pocket.

"Very few people make money out of horses," agrees Lotte Olsen, a chartered accountant and chairman of the British Dressage Eastern region. "For most of us, a horse is an expense and not a source of income. What's more, there's a potential for unexpected expenditure."

DISASTER HAS A HABIT OF STRIKING AT THE MOST INOPPORTUNE MOMENT. LACKING THE IMMEDIATE FUNDS TO PAY FOR VITAL VET TREATMENT CAN LEAD TO SOME DIFFICULT DECISIONS AND EMOTIONAL HEARTACHE...

These unforeseen outgoings are what tend to tip the balance – the ripped rug that needs replacing, the mystery lameness that eats up the insurance payouts or the engine trouble that leaves the lorry out of action. What was once just about affordable becomes less so, as savings are raided and other luxuries sacrificed.

Not surprisingly, the feeling that finances are spiralling out of control is incredibly stressful. Constant worry can affect sleep quality, impacting health and leading to poor performance and decision-making. A devastating ripple effect can spread to other areas of life, damaging relationships and creating issues that affect the whole family. While

there is no magic formula for conjuring up riches, there are ways to avoid such a rollercoaster ride. The best starting point, explains Lotte, is an honest assessment of what horse-owning involves.

"It's important to accept that owning is a long-term commitment," she says. "People will tell you that you can always sell the horse if things don't work out, but you need a willing buyer – which may not be easy if the horse is ill or injured. Suddenly, an asset becomes a huge liability." When considering costs, Lotte recommends planning for all eventualities.

"The price you pay for the horse is a one-off expense," she points out. "It's what comes

after the purchase that adds up. You'll know the rough costs of his ongoing day-to-day needs, but you need to make some provision for the unexpected. "Insurance can help, but it has its limits," says Lotte. "Some horses may be uninsurable because of age or health history, or the policy may contain so many exclusions that very little is actually covered. If you choose instead to cover vets' fees yourself, be sure to put the money aside each month rather than just saying you will."

Disaster has a habit of striking at the most inopportune moment. Lacking the immediate funds to pay for vital vet treatment can lead to some difficult decisions and emotional heartache, so it makes sense to keep a safety net in place for the hard times.

"It might be you that's ill or injured and unable to work," Lotte points out. "How would you manage then?"

Whether you opt for Excel or prefer a more low-tech notebook and pen, map out how these costs will fit into your overall budget for the next year.

"Start with a simple spreadsheet, but be realistic about incomings and outgoings," suggests Lotte. "This is an important exercise in terms of how your riding is funded. If resources are limited, you need to make sure you can live within them."

Many riders go to extraordinary lengths to make things work, balancing the books with creative ideas that save cash. Remember that time is money. High-earning amateurs may be paid well but typically have fewer hours at their disposal, whereas those earning less may have time to do much of the hands-on work themselves.

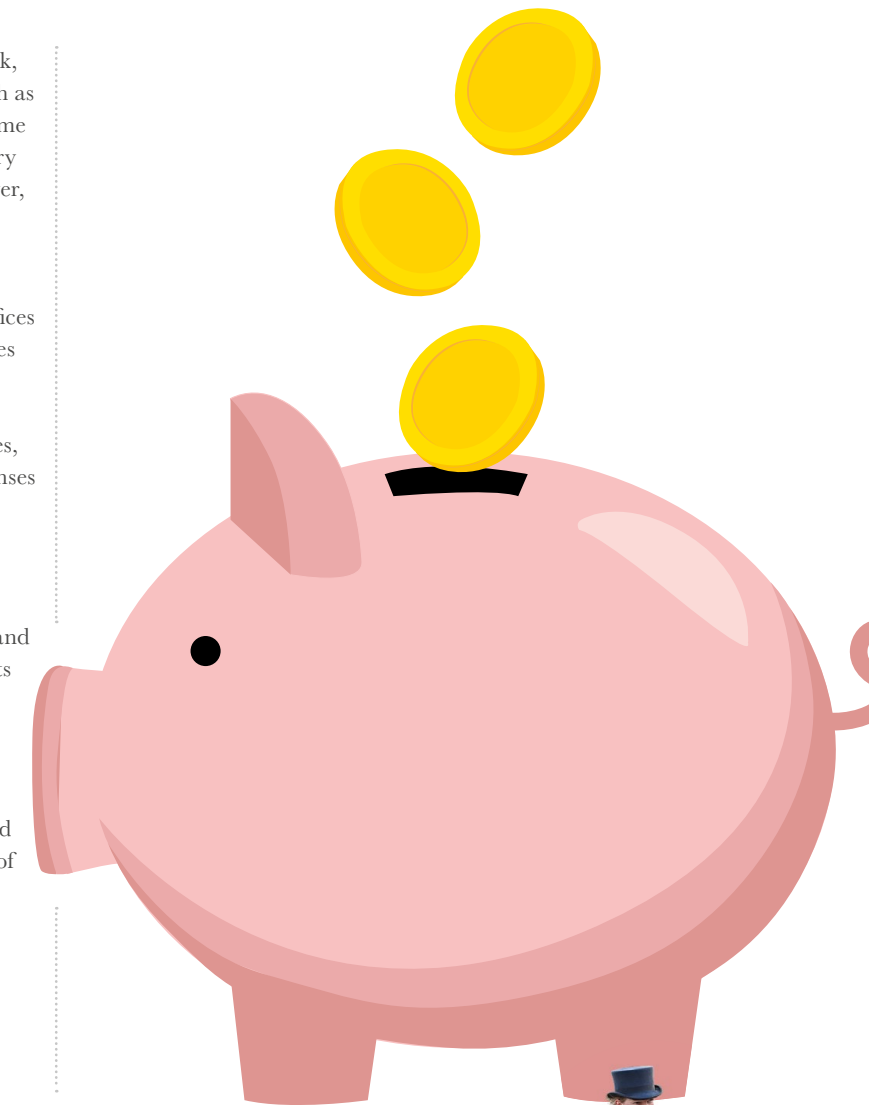
To make ends meet, consider options such as grouping

together to buy supplies in bulk, developing a little sideline such as clipping or taking on a part-time job. When you're pouring every penny into your hobby, however, try to keep the bigger picture in mind.

"Take a look at what you're risking and consider the sacrifices you're willing to make," advises Lotte. "It's one thing to fund your riding using money that would otherwise be for luxuries, but quite another if your expenses impact on your basic needs – especially if you have family responsibilities."

Reining in the spending is usually easier said than done and debt can soon escalate. Experts advise tackling the problem head on – Citizens Advice is a good place for help with debt management.

Knowing that you can afford your passion can bring peace of mind and added enjoyment, so it's worth trying to stay on track. Plan for the routine, prepare for the unexpected and maybe think twice before blowing the budget on yet another blingy browband. ■



CASE STUDY: FINANCE

SETTING clear goals has helped Louise Clark fund a passion for dressage.

"I knew that I wanted a career, not just a job, so I trained as a chartered accountant and now work for a global bank based in the City," she explains. "I bought my horse Feiner Pino at three, as it was cheaper than buying a fully trained horse. I always wanted to reach Grand Prix and, 14 years later, we're now competing at that level."

"Every financial decision I've made has been based on whether it will help or hinder me in reaching my riding goals," adds Louise, who keeps Feiner Pino on full livery so that she can make the most of her free time to train. "I drive an old Range Rover and trailer, because buying a flash horsebox wouldn't help my results. A good trainer makes a difference, though, so that's where I invest. I also make sure that I never go out on a Friday night, so that I'm in the right frame of mind for my Saturday morning lesson."

"The British Dressage camps and training days are good value for money, so I try to do those," she says. "I also buy my diamanté from China and sew it onto saddlecloths myself. It can be difficult to budget, as horses have a tendency to write their own cheques without consent, but having purpose and direction has helped me to manage my finances. It also motivates me to do well in my career – I need to, to fund the horses."

