

Putting hypnotherapy to the test

HORSE DEPUTY EDITOR SARAH JENKINS GIVES HYPNOTHERAPY A TRY TO SEE IF IT CAN HELP HER OVERCOME A FEAR OF RIDING ACROSS MOTORWAY BRIDGES

I was apprehensive about being hypnotised to get over my fear of riding across motorway bridges. But nowhere near as apprehensive as I am about riding across said bridges, which is why I decided it was worth a shot.

My prior understanding of hypnosis was the participant lost consciousness and there was a risk they'd emulate a chicken should someone click their fingers at them a few days later.

Sherree put me at ease, explaining it wouldn't be anything like that. I would be in a relaxed state, but able to get up and leave the room at any time.

Before the hypnosis, we discussed my phobia, where it might have come from and how it manifests itself.

In short, I have to cross a motorway bridge with low sides to access bridleways. Yes, my horse is good on the roads. Yes, I'm confident hacking her out. No, she's not likely to launch sideways, hurling me over the precipice. But, then again, she is a horse.

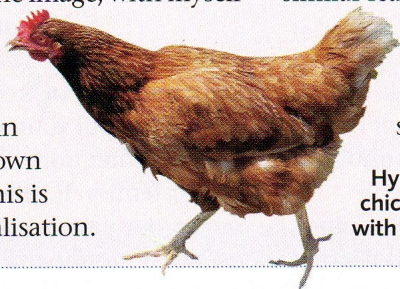
When I ride across this bridge – I've done it twice, in company, with a lot of encouragement from my hacking buddy – I can feel my heart beating through my chest, I struggle to breathe and my muscles get tense. Basically, the mere notion terrifies me.

Being hypnotised

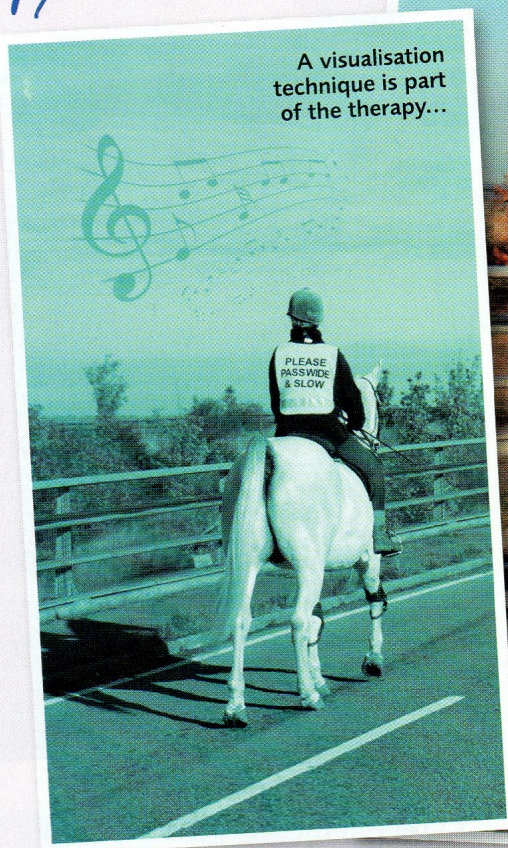
While sitting in our comfy chairs, Sherree told me to close my eyes.

She asked me to imagine I was looking at a black-and-white cinema screen, watching a rider cross the bridge in the way I'd ideally like to do – relaxed and smiling, with their horse calmly strolling along.

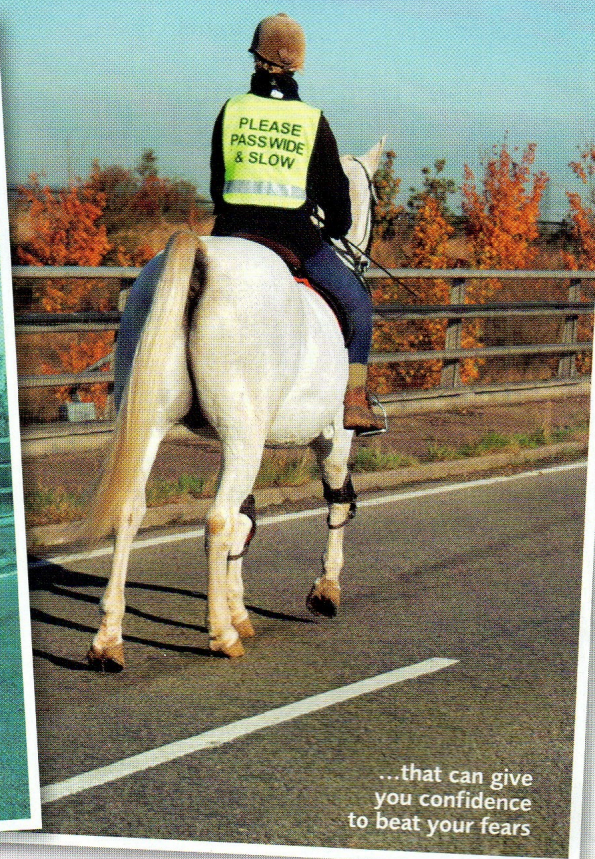
I had to replay the image, with myself in the scenario on the screen, so I was riding across the bridge in the way I'd ride down any other lane. This is kinaesthetic visualisation.



Hypnosis needn't be about doing chicken impressions – it can help with a range of issues



A visualisation technique is part of the therapy...



...that can give you confidence to beat your fears

I had to give this image a colour that I liked, and after that, set it to a soundtrack – a song I find uplifting and which reminds me of a really happy time.

I went with turquoise, and Elbow's *One Day Like This*. Sherree later shared that her song for such occasions is Aretha Franklin's *I Will Survive* – each to their own.

She explained that, by simply closing my eyes and taking slow, deep breaths, I could put myself into this relaxed state and start to access my subconscious.

In this state, Sherree reassured me that crossing this bridge was something I could do, on my calm horse, just by focusing on where I wanted to go. I began to feel like I could do that, recalling the image, the colour and the song.

She reminded me I have overcome similar fears of heights before. We work in a glass office block at *Horse*, and on my first day in the new building it took me some time to work out how to

get to my desk, as there was no way I was walking over the glass bridge that crosses the atrium on the ninth floor.

In conclusion

I walked away from this, my first experience of hypnotherapy, feeling

I realised that the more I crossed the bridge, the smaller my fear would be

like I'd just done a relaxing yoga session, and with a different mindset.

My fears didn't seem so justified; I was willing to give traversing the bridge a go. And I realised that, just as with the glass bridge at work,

the more I crossed it, the smaller my fear would be, until it disappeared.

I was sceptical about the process, and perhaps you have to believe something will help you in order for it to work. If you are open to the idea, and struggle with confidence in your riding, it wouldn't hurt to give someone with Sherree's expertise a try.

I certainly came away with 'tools' to help me recover my composure and kick on when facing situations I might otherwise lack the ability to negotiate with confidence. Skydiving, anyone? **■**