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# Horses Inside Out

*Australian Tour*



*Painting the spinous processes on Eskimo Rob 'Moet', also pictured opposite, owned by Debbie Barnett. Photograph by Sophie Barrington.*





By Cristina Wilkins, Editor

**T**he Gatton Indoor Equestrian Centre is buzzing with activity, people have come from far and wide. Attendance is exceeding expectations and we recognise horse people from a variety of backgrounds. There are professional trainers and coaches, therapists, saddle fitters, show horse people, endurance people, even teenage pony club enthusiasts. They have all come to see, for the very first time in Australia, painted horses in the flesh, and to learn from Gillian Higgins about a subject that has, to date, been less accessible to the average horse owner: anatomy and biomechanics - *Horses Inside Out*.

Gillian Higgins, a sports and remedial therapist and event rider based in the United Kingdom, developed *Horses Inside Out* to teach, in a fun and interactive way, how a knowledge of anatomy, biomechanics and physiology of the horse can help riders, trainers and therapists improve the horse's wellbeing and performance, and reduce the risk of injury. Gillian is renowned for her artistic depiction of the internal structures, which she paints on live horses.

This first visit to Australia happened thanks to Kathy Sagers, an Arabian horse

breeder and judge with a keen interest in anatomy and biomechanics, and a passion for improving the level of education in this field and spreading the knowledge across all sectors of the horse world - from the highest level judges to kids in pony club.

Traditionally, anatomy is learnt through the dissection of equine cadavers and Kathy, who has travelled far and wide to attend such clinics with the world's most respected lecturers, is the first to admit that the experience is not for every horse owner. "I have photos from the dissections and so many people say they don't want to look at them. They don't want to see under the skin of a real horse," Kathy said. "This is why I wanted to bring Gillian Higgins to Australia. To get people interested in anatomy and to get them to look at horses in a different way - from the inside out - without having to make a single cut!"

Kathy believes that most horse people, including those who have studied anatomy books and certainly many judges, find it difficult to see beyond the horse's silhouette or posture, and miss what's going on underneath the layers of skin and muscle. "There are many skilled riders and handlers that can make an average horse look wonderful, so my idea for judging has always been to look through the

condition at the horse's skeleton, because skeletons don't lie," Kathy said.

Kathy saw that Gillian's painted horses are the ideal opportunity to educate horse owners, riders and judges, and show them another way of looking at the horse - from the biomechanics perspective, from the inside out. So, she contacted Gillian who was thrilled with the opportunity to add Australia to her busy travel schedule.

While Gillian is the star of the show, *Horses Inside Out* is very much a family affair, and we got to meet Gillian's father, David, who takes care of the technology and ensures the shows run smoothly. The visit was shared between south-east Queensland and Western Australia with a variety of different formats chosen by the organisers to take advantage of Gillian's ability to present this information in varied ways. In Queensland, participants had the choice of three events. The first was a 2.5 hour evening demonstration showcasing two painted horses, one in-hand and the other under-saddle, to provide a general overview of Gillian's work and to develop the audience's interest in looking at the horse's skeletal system in movement - a very visual introduction into the subject of biomechanics.

ABOVE: Photographs by Sophie Barrington.





Teenager Jessica Sagers feels for anatomical landmarks on her much loved Arabian pony Duranbah Sebastian.  
Photograph by Sophie Barrington.



Gillian Higgins demonstrates one of the carrot stretches with Eskimo Rob 'Moet' before the group returns to their horses to practice the stretch.  
Photograph by Sophie Barrington.



Arabian stallion Lindall Centurion, owned by Kathy Sagers, displays the full equine skeleton painted by Gillian Higgins. Photograph by Kathy Sagers.



The next event was a full day clinic where participants could first learn the basics of Gillian's anatomical painting and, in the afternoon, they could learn and then apply Pilates for horses, which are stretching exercises to improve core stability. It was a wonderful day and, despite the amazing talent shown by all the participants, it was not an art class! It was a chance to learn, in the most hands-on and educational way, how to feel for and find the main anatomical landmarks on the horse's body. Several participants had brought their very patient horses who became the 'live canvasses'. We formed groups and, after watching and listening to Gillian describe each landmark on the horse in detail and how to paint the structure, we then had to go find those landmarks and paint the bones ourselves!

It was fascinating to hear other participants remark that they never realised how low the insertion of the neck vertebra is in relation to the horse's trunk. Until then, many thought the neck vertebra sit below the crest of the neck! There was also surprise amongst some to discover that the shoulder blade and front limb are not attached to the rest of the skeleton. "People don't realise that horses are different to humans and it's about getting that information out", Kathy said. "And it was all about making people aware. Opening their eyes to another way of looking at the horse - from the biomechanics perspective. We all have anatomy books and have seen the pictures, but to see it on a live horse and to then have to find the landmarks yourself, it is such a good way to learn anatomy."

After a quick lunch, the much anticipated Pilates demonstration began. Horses and People Magazine were, at the time, in the middle of running a series of articles explaining the subject, so we were even more excited with the opportunity to see it live. It was hands-on and enlightening to see how these stretches can make our horses happier, healthier and more ambidextrous. "I am very aware that horses are crooked," Kathy said at the end of the day. "And learning exercises to help them on the ground is invaluable. I've had horses with injuries that needed physiotherapy treatment, but Pilates is something you can actually do yourself between therapist visits. We all need the advice of veterinarians, therapists and chiropractors but, in between visits, we, as riders, need to become our own horse's physiotherapists. It's not about whether you call your vet or physio when you think there's something wrong with your horse - of course you do that - it's about understanding how your horse is working daily and how you could help him work better."

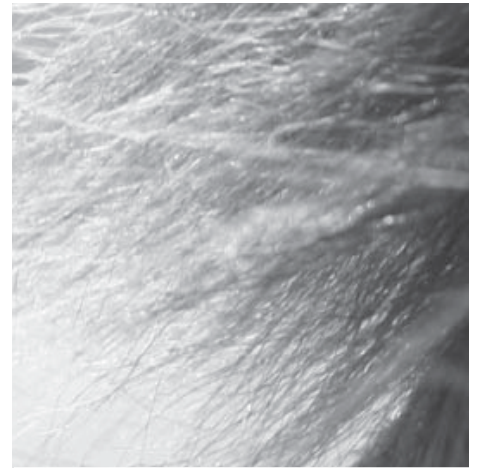
Gillian's Queensland stay finished with a full day clinic titled Arabian Horses Inside Out. Originally, Kathy had thought of judges and halter enthusiasts, but she was surprised to see the number of endurance competitors that turned up. "They were the ones that showed a real interest in soundness and biomechanics," Kathy said. "They wanted to know how they can get the horse moving better. So, I found that very interesting. As a breeder, judge and trainer of judges, I just believe that all Arabian horses need to be as functional as endurance horses."

Gillian painted Kathy's stallion, Lindall Centurion, for the talk and demonstration and, in the afternoon, they presented three horses - a warmblood cross, a pony and a young filly, all of whom did a workout and helped present the anatomical differences between them. As well as Gillian, Kathy had invited Coralie Gordon, chairwoman of the Arabian Horse Society board until last year, National Panel judge and breeder of endurance horses. Coralie also spoke, and related Gillian's anatomy and biomechanics back to the Arabian Horse and its Standard of Excellence.

It was time to say goodbye to Gillian and wish her well for her trip to Western Australia where Jessica Blackwell had arranged a two-day clinic aimed to those with a serious interest in therapy, as well as an evening extravaganza to provide the general public another fascinating insight into equine locomotion, training and biomechanics from an anatomical perspective. We are looking forward to seeing Gillian back in Australia in 2016 as arrangements are already being made to fit in to her well-booked and hectic travel schedule.

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If you would like to learn more about how to become your horse's therapist and would like to do the best for your horse - from the inside out - go to [www.horsesinsideout.com](http://www.horsesinsideout.com). And, don't miss the 2015 **Horses Inside Out Annual Conference** on Training, Therapy and Performance, to be held on Saturday 28th February and Sunday 1st March 2015 in Warwickshire, United Kingdom. HIO conferences have an international reputation for attracting world leading top quality speakers and providing exceptional customer service in an easily accessible, friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Join Christopher Bartle, Adam Kemp and Matt Frost, Dr Kathryn Nankervis, Dr Colin Roberts, Dr David Marlin, David Newbound and Gillian Higgins next year!



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