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JUNE 2011 £3.50



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People *Gillian Greenwood*

Pilates expert and horse enthusiast Gillian Greenwood talks to VICTORIA NEVILLE about the state-of-the-art exercise that can help riders.



stay relaxed in the saddle

Q. Pilates seems to have become very fashionable at the moment, with lots of celebrity fans, but you've been practising for many years.

Yes. I've done classical ballet, modern ballet, tap dancing and swimming since I was five years old – also karate, scuba diving and surfing! But, when I tried a Pilates class, I recognised that this was something that really worked. I realised it was a state-of-the-art exercise that strengthened my core, thus protecting my neck and back throughout the toning and stretching exercises. I trained to be a Pilates instructor and I've been teaching Pilates for about 16 years.

Q. Why do you think it works so well?

Joseph Pilates, the founder of Pilates, based his movements on martial arts, weight training, Iyengar yoga and classical ballet, focusing on control, breathing, centring and flowing movements, so you learn how to move more like a dancer than an athlete.

And, because we concentrate on the way we use the postural muscles – that's the tummy muscles and the pelvic floor – the exercises do not put any strain on the lower back. In fact, you should not be feeling any sensation there at all. We also do specific exercises that tone the legs, bottom and back of the arms – it's great for your seat!

Q. So it improves your riding?

I teach Pilates to a lot of riders and find they come back with very good feedback. I think it's primarily because it increases body awareness. It makes us aware of our body's position while stationary and the horse's position, too, and then helps maintain that good position while riding.

Most people's posture isn't very good before they get on a horse, then nerves

and uncertainty can make it worse. Pilates really makes them focus on their body. It helps with relaxation and co-ordination. People find their legs are more toned, their hamstrings are less tight, and that helps alleviate pain in the lower back. A lot of riders develop back and neck problems, so Pilates can really help with that.

Also, developing upper body strength helps us ride with our shoulders relaxed and down, and our chest open. That prevents us from tipping forwards, which is such a common problem. I don't think I've ever heard an instructor telling someone off for leaning too far back!

Q. And you ride regularly, don't you? Did you start riding when you were little?

No, I started about 10 years ago and I ride twice a week at Wimbledon Village Stables. I go because I love animals. I love all of them – cats, dogs, rabbits, giraffes and horses! How lovely if a horse allows me to sit on its back. What an honour! I'm not looking for a workout when I go riding, I don't care if I canter or not. I just have a lovely, relaxing time with the



'PILATES MAKES US AWARE OF OUR BODY'S POSITION WHILE STATIONARY AND THE HORSE'S POSITION, TOO, THEN HELPS MAINTAIN THAT GOOD POSITION WHILE RIDING.'



Above: Gillian loves to visit the stable's horses and some lucky equines rather like it too – particularly when she's doling out the carrots!

Opposite: A twice-weekly ride with the Wimbledon Village Stables adds some welcome variety to Gillian's schedule.



A love of animals - whether large or small - is a big part of Gillian's life.

horse, and bonding with it. I particularly like chilled-out dressage. I enjoy feeding them apples and carrots as much as the actual riding.

Q. And you're able to combine teaching Pilates with your love of horses.

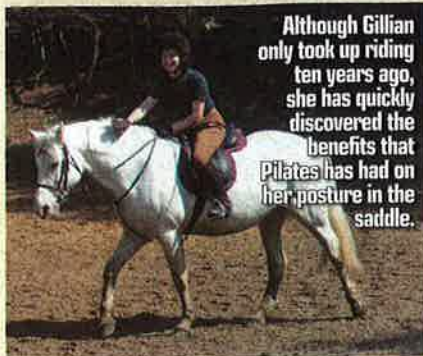
It started when some of the people coming to my Pilates classes in London just happened to be riders. Then, members and staff at the stable where I ride who had neck and back problems started to come to me for advice and exercises.

The owner of Wimbledon Village Stables, Carol Andrews, approached me for some private Pilates lessons and found they helped her improve her posture and get rid of aches and pains and, most of all, improved her riding, so she then asked me if I would teach her staff. After that, I started to teach some of the riders, then I moved on to running Pilates workshops for other groups of riders.

Q. Is Pilates suitable for everyone?

The workshops I design for riders use specific exercises

People Gillian Greenwood



Although Gillian only took up riding ten years ago, she has quickly discovered the benefits that Pilates has had on her posture in the saddle.

taken or adapted from Pilates. You don't need to lie on the floor – we don't lie on the floor when we ride! And you don't need to be extra flexible – the Pilates will help you become more flexible as you practise. There's no limitations on age. I've had private clients who are older ladies or pregnant. One has MS and they're all very good at Pilates. It's a very adaptable form of exercise.

Q. So, tell me, what do you do on an average day?

I don't get up very early! I eat some fruit, then walk to a centre near my home to teach a group class at eleven. Then, I might design some new choreography or customise a workshop. After the class, I usually have a salad or soup, then I go to a client's home to teach a private lesson. I eat more fruit, then teach a group class or run a workshop, and often teach until 8.30pm. Every week, I attend a private lesson and a group lesson for myself. Then, I know I'm the best that I can be and, of course, it's useful to get someone else's perspective. And I don't want to be tempted to get a workout in one of my own classes. When I'm teaching, I want to be walking around, explaining rather than doing.

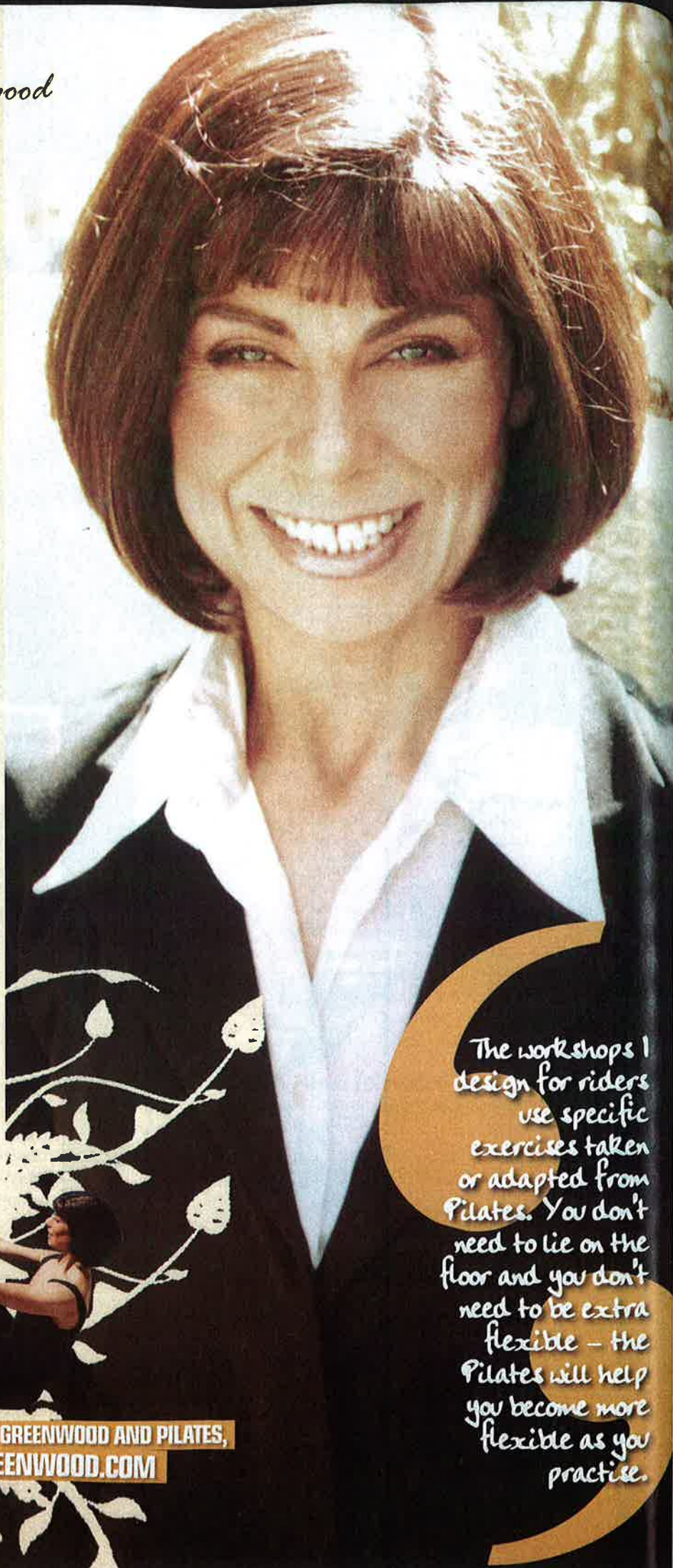
Q. You sound busy, but you still find the time to go riding.

I fit in riding twice a week. I make it a priority because I enjoy it so much. I also make time to see friends, go out for dinner, drinks, coffee and socialising, though my friends have to put up with me answering an enquiry or a message for a client even if we're out clubbing!

Q. And, lastly, I have to ask, does riding help your Pilates?

Yes, actually, I've found that, as I've improved my riding, my Pilates practice has improved as well!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON GILLIAN GREENWOOD AND PILATES,
LOG ON TO WWW.GILLIANGREENWOOD.COM**



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