Lambourn earmarked for a hi-tech revolution in pre-training

A Turkish industrialist plans to change the way horses are trained with his innovative system that looks like a rollercoaster

A group of two-year-old horses in training using the Kurt Equine Training System, in Istanbul. Photograph: handout from Kurt Systems

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Change tends to come slowly in the Lambourn Valley, where both Flat and jumping thoroughbreds have been trained in much the same way for as long as anyone can remember. Lambourn's trainers could soon have an entirely new way to prepare young horses for their life in racing, however, as Mehmet Kurt, a Turkish industrialist, presses on with plans to install his patented "Kurt System" at the village's Kingwood Stud, which he bought this year.

Kurt's System is something of a cross between a mini-racecourse, a horse-walker and an upside-down rollercoaster. It allows horses that are as young as five-months-old to walk, exercise and even canter while harnessed into a hi-tech "car", attached to an overhead rail, which can monitor information such as their heart-rate and breathing.

The theory is that by carrying out the pre-training of horses without jockeys, horses can develop at their own pace and without the added burden of a human on their back. This is intended to bring about significant reductions in tendon and muscle injuries, while the mechanical nature of the Kurt System also means that Flat horses should need little introduction to starting stalls when their racing careers begins.

The exerciser that Kurt wants to install at Kingwood will be a smaller version of the original, which has a circumference of about a mile – roughly the same size as Chester racecourse – that has been built at his Turkish base not far from Istanbul over a period of seven years.

"This version will be significantly more advanced," Tony Lodge, the spokesman for Kurt Systems, said on Thursday. "When you show people a photo of it, they say it's like something out of Star Trek. It's technically very smooth, it's not jerky at all, and allows horses to get up to cantering speed.

"It's designed to help with pre-training of horses, and it significantly reduces the stresses and injuries that can occur in pre-training. It is gentler on the horse, and removes the possibility of jockey error as there isn't a jockey. Horses can be brought on steadily over a period of time before they get to the point where a jockey is involved in riding work at a later stage."

Kurt's scheme to install his new system at Kingwood has yet to be granted planning approval, and will take about a year to build if it is given the go-ahead. He hopes to persuade local trainers of its likely benefits, while also re-assuring work riders that they are not being phased out entirely.

"This is not going to result in lots of stable hands being sacked," Lodge says. "There's a myth that it's one person with a computer system watching everything on a screen, but the horses can be some distance away and you need people to be travelling on the system as well as monitoring on TV. This is not a replacement for stable staff."

Quite what some of the more conservative elements of Lambourn's training fraternity will make of Kurt's invention remains to be seen, but racehorses are frequently never more valuable than when they are young. If the results match up to the promises in terms of keeping them fit and sound, his development will be difficult to ignore.

"Obviously the establishment in racing can be very conservative," Lodge says, "but when Mr Kurt took on Kingwood, he was introduced to a number of top trainers in the area, who were initially fascinated [by the system] and then very supportive after seeing it.

"This is not about making money. Mr Kurt is determined to train racehorses in a better, more visionary and less injury-prone way, and he hopes this will be a little bit of a legacy. He is setting it up at Kingwood because he wants it to be a piece of equine training technology that could eventually be used around the world."