

BASIC SKILLS AND TRAINING FOREWORD

The purpose of this booklet is to provide some basic guidelines to those of you who are already making your way up the endurance riding ladder and to those coming into this intriguing sport, whether from other branches of equestrianism or as a first timer. It is not meant to be a gospel, but rather an outline to be built upon by your own experiences with your own horse. I hope that my experiences, which have been the basis of making up this guide, will enable you to progress quickly and without too many tears through the training process and have a sound, happy horse at the end. When the Highland Long Distance Riding Club first took shape, those of us who were involved at first did not have anyone to turn to for advice, and everything had to be learnt by trial and error. It was only after a few years of struggling along on our own that we started to venture down to England and got in touch with those who were to help us along the road to bigger things. One of the people whom I must pay tribute to in this respect is retired vet Jim Kerr, who took the Scots under his wing during the Windsor to Paris ride of 1987 and helped us to join the wider world of endurance riding. Subsequent trips to the Golden Horseshoe and Summer Solstice brought a wealth of experience back to Scotland to be combined with our rapidly expanding, homegrown experiences. Hopefully, some of this is passed on in this publication. Shared knowledge has to be the strength of our Club and our sport. Many people are embarrassed to ask for advice, although this is quite unnecessary as most endurance riders are quite happy to talk interminably about their sport! Similarly, offering unsolicited advice can often be interpreted as being bossy or interfering, despite the best of intentions. I would like to see riders and crews being much more relaxed about asking for advice. Conversely, it should be natural for those with more experience to offer constructive suggestions (tactfully if possible) and for those to be received with good grace. We are all on the same learning curve - it will seem less steep if we don't try to climb it alone.

CANDY CAMERON

FITTENING

You and your horse will get much more from your endurance riding if you are both reasonably fit, even for the shorter distances.

STARTING A NEW SEASON Time spent in judicious preparation now will have its rewards throughout the year. If your horse has been laid off for two or three months after the end of last season, or has never been properly fit, it is important that you do the initial several weeks' walking conscientiously. Walking should be gradually built up from half an hour on level ground to an hour and a half with plenty of hill work. If possible, try to stay off rougher ground and make good use of roadwork to harden up the legs. Progress to trot work in the next couple of weeks, again building the length of the trotting periods up slowly. By the fifth or sixth week, you can start to introduce some canter work and possibly enter a pleasure ride of up to 20 miles at a steady speed. If your horse has only had 4 - 6 weeks off work, you should be able to get away with just walking for the first week and then carry on as above. We know from equine research that a horse will hold its fitness for about five weeks, unlike a human athlete. If this is at least the second season of training for your horse you should notice how much quicker he becomes fit than last year. At this stage it is best if you are able to work your horse 5 or 6 days a week. What is required now is steady, stamina-building work with just the odd fast workout to improve his cardiovascular system. Take advantage of facilities near you such as forestry or beaches to vary your training regime and accustom your horse to differing terrain and conditions. This also has the advantage of re-acustoming your horse to travel without the pressures of competition. Also make sure your horse is as familiar as he can be with the sorts of things you might meet while on a ride: e.g. flowing water, wooden bridges, farm vehicles, livestock, bicycles, wheelie bins, dogs.

PLANNING YOUR RIDE CALENDAR At the beginning of the season, you should sit down and carefully study the list of rides on offer for the season and make a plan for your horse. Horses have a habit of not going according to plan but it will at least give you distinct goals and a reason to get out there and train. Do not get despondent if things go wrong - sit down and make a new plan in another direction. You should be aiming to complete your rides, at least for the first part of the season, at a speed just above the grading speed you need, allowing you time for any problems that might occur and a cooling off period on the way home. Try to include 2 day rides, which are excellent for building fitness, or you could possibly do a trail ride for several days (either joining up with a commercial concern or planning your own holiday). This is a good way of getting some steady mileage under your belt without any pressure and it also brightens up horses that are bored with their home training routes. Remember, the grading system is not the be-all and end-all. Longer rides require a major effort from the horse and should be spaced out by at least three weeks, to allow time for a mini-holiday after the ride and to build up reserves.

DURING THE SEASON If a horse seems to be becoming jaded with the longer distances, you could take him on an easy shorter ride and let him go faster and really enjoy himself. Taking part in other equestrian disciplines is also a good thing. It usually means that you will have to spend time schooling on the flat or over fences which will do you both some good and the change of scene will maintain the horse's

mental well-being. You can also fine-tune skills such as leg yielding and rein-back which are extremely useful when coping with, for example, gates. You should only need to be working your horse two days a week at this stage. The other four days should be easy exercise. Total mileage for the week should not exceed 70 miles. If you have a competition at the weekend, the rule of thumb is 'one day off for every ten miles ridden', so a 20-mile ride deserves two days off. In the middle of the week you could do a training ride of around 15 miles with some speed bursts or serious hill work at a faster overall speed than the longer competition. If you have a suitable place for interval training, you could do this instead but the work days should be three days apart. Two days' exercise could be given over to schooling on the flat and over fences and some correct lunge work. You can vary your routines by building in stretching and massage sessions for your horse. Do get advice from an expert before you embark on massage (plenty now advertise in the equestrian press) but simple stretching exercises for legs and neck can be found in many books and magazines. In-hand work over ground poles can also be beneficial. Think about doing something similar yourself.

BASIC FITTENING RULES Give yourself and your horse plenty of time – you can't rush fitness. Start slowly and gradually increase distance, speed and difficulty of terrain. Don't sicken your horse – do other things such as flatwork and inhand work. Start taking your horse's heart rate early in the fitness programme. Know what his resting heart rate is. Make sure that tack fits well – and continues to do so as he gets fitter and changes shape. Listen to your horse – if he's tired, don't push him. Help your horse by training him to be economical in energy use – light on the forehead, using his hindquarters, well-balanced. You are aiming to produce a horse that within 30 minutes of finishing a competitive ride at whatever speed category you have chosen will have a heart rate of 48 or below to achieve Gold. An eight-week fitness routine, riding four or five days a week, for one to two hours a day, covering between 5 and 10 miles, should ensure the average horse is fit enough to complete a 20-30 mile ride at between 6-7.5 mph. Once you are regularly riding in competition, say once every two to three weeks, you will be able to ease off on the fitness training.

FEEDING HAY Make sure your hay is the best quality available. Feeding poor quality forage is a false economy, especially when the horse is on smaller amounts when in hard work. Dust spores will damage the lungs and soaked hay is not the answer— when the hay dries out the spores are still there. Harder hay is preferable to soft hay and gives the gut more to work on, keeping the digestive tract in good order. Never feed less than 10 lbs (22kgs) of hay per day, though most endurance horses will be on a larger ration. Divide the hay into 3 or 4 lots per day, or feed ad lib. The horse is a grazing animal and requires to eat little and often.

HAYLAGE This is ideal for endurance horses. Large bales need to be used within 3 or 4 days of opening. Make sure that big bales have been made especially for horses: i.e. made earlier in the season and the grass will have been cut slightly higher off the ground to ensure that soil and dead animals have not been mixed in, which might promote botulism. This organism can be fatal to horses. Smaller bales of differing protein levels are available commercially and are a better bet for the one horse owner. Haylage is great for a horse with an allergy or if your hay is not too good. It is also the best thing for travelling, as horses are susceptible to dust spores when in the confines

of a lorry or trailer. When feeding haylage, you should feed more in weight than you would of hay, since you must allow for the higher moisture content.

SUGAR BEET Sugar beet is very useful to the endurance horse. It is an excellent source of sugar (immediate energy), fibre (helps to maintain the gut in good order and prevent colic) and fluid. Sloppy sugar beet (beet tea) is very good to give during rides and can disguise the taste of 'foreign' water, if your horse is not drinking very well away from home. You should get him used to drinking beet tea at home so that it is not strange when you offer it at a competition.

CONCENTRATES Straights such as oats and barley are variable in quality and unless you can get a consistent, good quality supply you would probably be better off using a proprietary brand of concentrate. Concentrates supply higher levels of carbohydrates, which are necessary for increased work, than the forage part of the ration. The type of ration and the amount that you use will depend to a large extent on the temperament of your horse. You also need to take into account the amount of work your horse is doing. Always keep the work ahead of the feed, i.e. feed tonight for the work you did this morning. In this way you will not run into problems if you cannot put in the work you expected to. Feed according to maker's instructions. These compound feeds are nutritionally balanced and should not have other feedstuffs mixed with them, apart from chaff. Use a reputable brand of feed and one which has been "guaranteed bonded" (i.e. free from illegal substances). Top feed manufacturers will also have a qualified nutritionist available at the end of a help line for you to speak to about your individual requirements.

SUPPLEMENTS Even if you are using a compound feed, you may want to use half quantities of a general supplement unless your hay is very good. If you are feeding straights, then feed supplements according to the maker's recommendations at full dose. Use only one general supplement. A horse that has the correct balance of minerals and vitamins will thrive and make best use of the food it is given.

SALT When the horse is in hard work he will need 2 - 4 oz of salt per day. He may not take enough from a salt lick, so it is more reliable to supply it in the feed. Some vets advise mixing ordinary salt with low-sodium salt in a 2:1 ratio. If you feed electrolytes do not give ordinary salt at the same time, as there should be sodium, in the correct proportions, in the electrolyte mix.

OIL Horses digest fats very efficiently – it gives them slow release energy for prolonged exercise. It doesn't have to be special oil – vegetable will do. Some oils will separate and go cloudy in low temperatures – try to keep at room temperature. Large catering drums look tempting but can go rancid if fed to only one horse. Oil is extremely energy dense: 200ml (7 fl oz) oil produces the same energy as half a kilo of oats or barley. Introduce oil gradually up to ½ pt per day, but be aware that if you do feed that level you may have to boost the Vitamin E and selenium intake.

ELECTROLYTES These can be fed according to the manufacturer's instructions for a few days prior to a demanding ride or a stressful journey. Also they can be given during and after a hard competition. They should only be given during a ride once the horse is drinking plain water well. Plain water should always be available to the horse

as well and they must be given as advised by the manufacturer. **ELECTROLYTES AN KILL!**

GENERAL HINTS The horse has a relatively small stomach, about the size of a rugby ball, capacity 2.5 to 3 kgs. This is the maximum size of feed that should be offered at one time. The horse is a grazing animal and should be fed little and often; this also helps to relieve boredom and lessens the likelihood of developing stable vices. After a full feed you should allow one and a half to two hours for digestion before you exercise, but there's nothing to stop you feeding half before exercise and half afterwards. Digestion stops when exercise begins. Small amounts of about 0.5 kgs should be fed during a ride of more than 30 miles. All feed should be of the best quality available. Old or musty feed should be disposed of. Bagged feeds should be kept for about 2 to 3 months from the time of manufacture – check the Use By date. This year's hay should not be used until around Christmas if at all possible, but certainly not until all chance of the heat in the bales has gone. Protect feed from rodents generally and in particular from rat's urine, which can cause Weil's disease, which affects humans. If you are riding in a competition where there is the possibility of being dope tested, keep a sample of the feed that you are giving so that if there is a problem with the test, it can be decided if the feed was to blame. Keep your feed containers clean. Make sure that there is always a plentiful supply of fresh drinking water in the stable and the field. Try to find out how much your horse normally drinks during a 24-hour period. This will be a useful point of reference if he is off colour. A performance horse should receive between 2.5 and 3 percent of its body weight in feed each day. This means that a horse weighing 500 kg should get between 12.5 and 15 kg of food per day, divided between concentrates and forage. It is thought that endurance horses perform best on a high fibre, low protein ratio but the fibre must be of good quality. All feed changes should be made gradually, over about five days. This also applies to supplements. If you feed vegetable oil, make sure that you introduce this very slowly or your horse will scour. Once you are doing the longer distance rides, you will have to carefully regulate the amount of grass that your horse has. Large amounts of poor quality grass will remain for several days in the hind gut, where it is digested and the horse will not be able to perform well. Too much succulent, spring type grass will tend to make your horse put on too much condition for performance and will also make him scour, being about 80% water.

TACK FITTING The importance of correctly fitted and comfortable tack cannot be underestimated in endurance riding. As your mileages increase then any ill-fitting tack will cause pain and damage to the horse, which may take some time to rectify. Use the following as a guideline to making sure that all your tack is up to a good standard and fitting correctly. Know how to clean your tack correctly.

SADDLES Recognise inferior foreign saddlery Different types of endurance saddles, including western types and synthetics, and their fitting Know how to test for a broken tree Pull numnahs well up into the arch to prevent rubbing Check girth straps and stirrup leathers for safety Recognise different types of girths and how to prevent galling Be aware of different types of girth sleeves Know why nickel stirrup irons are unsuitable - how to recognise them. Know about safety irons and specialist plastic stirrups with and without cages

BRIDLES & BITS Suitability of different bits to specific mouth conformations
Correct sizing of bits and points of wear Correct fitting of snaffle (single, double and mullen mouth) and curb bits Correct fit of a hackamore or other bitless bridle Correct fit of different nosebands e.g. flash, grackle, combination, cavesson Synthetic
bridlewear (webbing, biothane etc) - how to check for soundness, including fittings
Advantages for endurance of combination bridles Check stitching and fittings on
bridles and reins

OTHER SADDLERY Correct fitting of different types of martingales Correct fitting of breastplates Types and ways of attaching numnahs Use of exercise sheets Correct fitting of lunging tack, including cavesson, roller, side reins and boots Correct fitting of all different types of boots and bandages, including for travelling Fitting of headcollars Proper attaching of saddlebags.

EQUIPMENT LIST The equipment listed below is a guide to what should be taken on pleasure and competitive rides of up to Bronze Final level. The Logbook is not essential for pleasure riders, but is useful to monitor your horse's progress. Tack - either traditional leather or the modern, hi-tech synthetic type - must be well maintained, clean and a good fit. It is essential that the tack used on the day should have been well tried out on your horse at home. The day of the ride is not the time to try out a new or different saddle, bridle or bit. There is no longer a compulsory tack inspection at SERC rides but there will be random spot checks, so don't be tempted to cut corners.

HORSE RIDER Headcollar & rope Hat & silk Travelling bandages/boots/rug Boots & chaps (if used) Saddle & bridle Whip (max 30") Numnah, girth, stirrups Gloves Martingale/breastplate (if used) Waterproofs Boots (if used) Jacket Shoof (or similar) & sponge Map/instructions Spares: shoes, reins, leathers Membership and medical cards Heart monitor (optional) Vet sheet & log book Cooler rug Sponge bag & towel Woollen rug First aid kit Surcingle or roller Change of clothes Turnout rug Watch Grooming kit Folding chair Feed & bucket Food & drinks Filled haynet Carbo-boost (optional) Sloppy beet pulp (in container with lid) First aid kit Baler string/hoof pick Calculator Fly repellent in summer Coloured pens/pencil Brush, shovel & bag for muck & rubbish Mobile phone

CREW Crew map/instructions Stethoscope Thermos of boiling water Filled water containers (1 with hot water if very cold weather) Buckets, slosers & sponges Filler for refilling water containers and slosers Sweat scraper & towels for horse Mobile phone

ROUTE PREPARATION GUIDELINES FOR NOVICE RIDERS On receiving map and talkround from the ride organiser: •

Read all instructions carefully and make sure they correspond to the map. It is a good idea to purchase an O.S 1:50,000 map and copy the route onto it. This can also be done for the crew, with rider and crew routes identified with different coloured marker pens. • Check that the **distances on the map** correspond with the distances on the talkround. Complaining after the ride is no use! • Try to recognise **features on the map** that may help you. Pay particular attention to contours, indicating climbs, and note any water on the route. Check that the start, finish, checkpoints and, if

applicable, any vet halts or gates are marked. • Make a note of any **danger areas**. Where not to ride may be under penalty of elimination or may be dangerous to do so. Also, note any places where the crew is not allowed to go, e.g. forestry/private roads. The rider may be eliminated if the crew does not stick to permitted crewing places. • **Work out the times** for your selected speed category - the minimum and maximum times - e.g. 20 miles route at 6 and 6.99 mph for speed category 3. Work out the times at which you should be at the checkpoints and write them on your talkround so you can monitor your speed during the ride. • **Buy a map case** to put your map and instructions into, which you can wear during the ride. In wet conditions your map and instructions will become illegible without protection. • If possible **research the route** prior to the ride. It may be possible to go to various points along the route with your crew prior to the ride but make sure you are not straying onto private ground where you should not be, apart from during the ride itself. • Make sure you have a note of **your vet and start times**.

ROUTE MARKING • **At turns/junctions** – two markers are placed side by side – but not touching – approximately 20/30 yards before the turn, to indicate a turning coming up. One marker is then placed immediately after the turn within sight of the junction, with a marker for reassurance 50 yards further on. • **At route divergence/convergence** – letter boards [A-Z] will be used. • **On wooded tracks** – markers should be visible from each other and can be tied around the tree trunks. • **Gates** to be left open will have a single marker on the LEFT HAND POST. Gates to go through and close will have a **single** marker towards the CLEET/LOCKING END. • **Open hill** – markers, usually cane flags, should be 50-100 yards apart – each one visible from the previous one.

VETTING PROCEDURES - COMPETITIVE RIDES PRE RIDE VETTING

Prior to arriving at the ride, fill in the vet sheet. Only note down any of the following that you want to draw the vet's attention to. He will note anything else that he considers important. - Current lesions and any existing bumps on the saddle and girth areas - Old scars that might get the tops knocked off - Gait irregularities and any muscle wastage in quarters - Chronic cracked heels or overreaches - Any bruising to mouth (if this exists, you may need to use a hackamore in order to be fit to start). On arrival at the venue, after getting your number bib and handing in your mileage card(s), go and look at the vetting and trot up areas. Familiarise yourself with the layout of the venue and know where the farrier and start are. Now unload your horse, remove all bandages and massage the legs to restore circulation, but keep rugs on, especially if it is cold and wet. Warm the horse up by brisk walking in straight lines and circles - remembering to change the rein regularly. Finally give him a short trot on both reins. Check that the horse is clean and tidy, with all mud and stable stains removed, and pick out feet - do not put on hoof oil. Present to the farrier, if there is one, before vetting. He will inspect your horse's shoes and, if they pass, will sign the vet sheet. Horses should be fairly recently shod before a ride; the farrier will attend to minor running repairs such as tightening clenches, but do not expect him to re-shoe your horse to enable you to start (unless you have pre-arranged this with the farrier before the ride). Present to the vet with your number prominently displayed. Horses can be presented in headcollars or bridles (but no saddles or boots) but must be under control at all times. A vet may ask for the bit to be removed to inspect the mouth. Be careful when waiting for vetting that you do not get too close to other strange horses as a kick may mean that you don't even get to start! On presentation to the vet, the

resting heart rate will be taken and noted on the vet sheet. The vet will then inspect the horse, noting any lumps and bumps that may be problematic during the ride, and check its general appearance. He will also look at the mouth, the feet and legs in particular, and maybe do a pinch test for dehydration. You will then be asked to trot the horse up over 60 metres (30 metres away from and 30 metres back to the vet). This is in order to establish the horse's normal gait and whether it is sound. All being well, you are passed fit to start. If the vet is not sure about your horse, he may ask you to trot up again. If still unsure, he may ask you to go a third time and ask another vet, if possible, to give a second opinion. If the vets cannot decide after three trot ups, the horse is given the benefit of the doubt and may start.

MID RIDE VETTING Be familiar with the rules. A vet halt is normally 30 minutes long but may be shortened or lengthened on veterinary advice, in very cold or hot weather conditions. When you arrive at the halt area, you will be given a card by a steward with your time of arrival on it, the maximum time within which you must present for vetting (this will be + 20 minutes from your arrival time) and your time of departure from the vet halt (this will be + 30 minutes from your arrival time). Go straight to your crew, untack your horse and put a rug over his loins and rump unless it is a very warm day. Offer him a drink but no food at this stage. Take his pulse and sponge him down with cold water along the underside of the neck and between the back legs where the main arteries are located. Sponge off the saddle, girth and belly area, scrape them off and dry well with a towel paying particular attention to the elbows, which can easily get chapped and sore. Keep monitoring the pulse rate, applying cold water to the neck and between the back legs as necessary. Intersperse this with walking the horse and keep the back end covered and warm so that the muscles do not cramp and stiffen, unless the horse is likely to overheat. When the pulse rate is below 60 and dropping, you are ready to take him to the vet. Pick out his feet and check the shoes before you go. Disconnect any heart rate monitor before presenting for vetting. You may present any time within 20 minutes of arrival at the halt but you must present when the 20 minutes are up or you will be eliminated. Only one presentation is allowed. Present as soon as you feel confident so that there will be some time left to feed the horse and yourself before you start out again. When you are ready to present, go to the vet steward with the horse and your card. Your time of presentation is noted so that any undue delay in being called to a vet is credited to you. The heart rate is taken and providing this is 64 bpm or less, the minute or Ridgeway test is used, i.e. at the start of the trot up the vet starts a stop watch: a second heart rate reading is taken one minute from this time. During this minute the horse trots up over the 60 metres and the vet spends the rest of the time checking for lumps and bumps and doing another pinch test to check for dehydration. In a fit horse the second heart rate should be lower than or the same as the first. A rise of more than a couple of beats is a warning indicator to the vet and rider. If the second heart rate reading is above 64 bpm the horse will be eliminated. Following a successful vetting, collect your card from the vet steward. Once through the vetting, offer the horse more water and a small feed and let it relax. Meanwhile, change numnahs, girths, maps, instructions, socks, boots and gloves too if necessary. Feed the rider. Keep an eye on the clock and be ready to go to the starter on time. If you are late in presenting to leave the vet halt, it is your own fault and your start time will remain unchanged unless you have been given a time allowance for any reason.

POST RIDE VETTING On arrival at the finish, you will be given a card that will give your maximum time to vetting - 30 minutes from your arrival. The care regime is the same as described above. But remember that your aim now is to achieve a heart rate of 48 bpm or below. When you feel that you have achieved a steady heart rate at the lowest level you can, pick out the feet again and present with your horse and your card to the vet steward. Keep cooling the horse all the way to the vet as pulses can start to creep up if the horse builds up heat again. You may present at any time up to the 30 minutes but again you only get one chance. If it is a cold, blustery day you are better to go sooner rather than later so that the horse doesn't stiffen up. If it is a hot day you may well want to wait the full 30 minutes, trying to keep the horse in the shade with its head into any wind and using copious amounts of cold water, scraping it off in between applications to have the optimum effect. Heavier types of horse hold the heat more in their larger muscle mass and need more cooling. Encourage the horse to urinate as this will help him relax. The vetting will be the same as at the vet halt with the minute test being used if the first heart rate is 64 bpm or below. On this occasion the pulse should be as low as possible before you present to vet, as your final result depends on this. Awards are made on the second recorded heart rate - for a Gold award you require to have a final pulse of 48 bpm or less; 49 - 56 bpm will achieve a Silver award and 57 - 64 bpm will achieve a Bronze award. A heart rate of over 64 bpm will result in elimination, as will lameness. For other than minor injuries, i.e. bruised mouth, cuts or abrasions or dehydration, the vet may give penalties.

AFTERCARE OF HORSE AND RIDER Once your horse has been vetted the rider's job is done - not so the crew! When finished with the vetting offer the horse another drink and give him a feed. Let him relax with a hay net but keep an eye on him in case he becomes too hot, too cold or breaks out in sweat. Clean the horse off, removing all sweat and dirt by sponging with warm water and horse refresh wash or by grooming if the horse is dry. Prepare him for travelling and let him have unlimited hay both at the venue and while travelling. Re-pack the car, sweep up hay, droppings and rubbish, load up and go home. At home unbandage the horse and change his rugs for dry ones. If possible turn the horse out, even just for an hour, to roll, stretch and relax. If stabled, apply support bandages and if he is prone to filled legs, hose with cold water for about 20 minutes or apply an icepack or cooling gel to reduce swelling. Muscle massage may also help prevent stiffening. Ensure that the horse has plenty plain water and sloppy beet pulp as well as hay. You could give him another small feed, even if this is given in the field. Check constantly that he hasn't "broken out" in a cold sweat, which can happen if he has not been sufficiently cooled after strenuous exercise (which includes travelling). If this happens gently dry the ears with a towel and towel dry any other wet areas. Keep changing damp rugs for dry ones and walk him 5 minutes every half hour until he is completely dry. Hand walking every couple of hours can help prevent the horse stiffening up if he has had a hard ride, but make sure he gets some peace! Look after the rider too; a quick wash, change of clothes, plenty food and drink will keep the energy levels up for the journey home, when a hot bath is usually the order of the day.

THE NEXT DAY Trot the horse up to check for lameness. Check the legs for swelling, heat or bruising. Hose or icepack them again if necessary. Check the back and mouth for sores. Remember the horse could feel as stiff as the rider. If possible, turn him out for the day to wander round, relaxing muscles and grazing. Remember the rule of thumb: one day off for every ten competitive miles ridden.

WEIGHT LOSS Most horses may look "tucked up" after a ride. This is fairly common and weight should be gained within a day or two. Some highly-strung horses, however, suffer considerable weight loss after competition, mainly due to stress as some horses drop weight just at the thought of competition. Provided the weight is gained again within the week following the ride there is probably not much to worry about. If he does not regain condition, seek veterinary advice.

RIDER AND CREW TRAINING WHY HAVE A CREW? WHAT DOES THE CREW DO? Although many people successfully compete in up to 40 and 50 mile rides without a crew, practical experience has shown that it is much less stressful on both the horse and the rider if they have some form of back-up help. • A crew is there to assist the rider prior to the ride • A crew will meet you on the route to offer refreshment to rider and horse. • A crew will assist you in half way and final vettings. • A crew, if disaster strikes, will usually rescue you and your horse. • A crew will help you with the after-care following a ride. **Remember your crew is there voluntarily, giving up their time to run after you. Be nice to them at all times!**

CREWING DURING THE RIDE The **crew vehicle** should contain everything that the horse and rider may need during the ride and at any half way vetting, if this is away from the venue. The crew ideally should pack the vehicle, so they know where everything is. Packing the vehicle in the same way each time means it is then automatic to go to a certain box/place for things. The crew should always carry a penknife and a hoof pick in their pocket. On a ride without a vet halt, the car should be equipped with the following: • filled water containers, sloshers, filler, sponges, towels, water bucket, sloppy beet pulp, first aid kits for horse & rider, rugs & headcollar, spares, food, drinks, mobile phone. On a longer ride with a half way halt, the vehicle should also carry: • sweat scraper, stethoscope, thermos of hot water, dry clothes & boots, sponge bag & towel, waterproofs, feed, clean numnah and girth. Crew and rider should have worked out **where to meet** and, if possible, have reconnoitered the route to find the best places to stop and to time how long it takes to drive from Point A to Point B. (Sometimes the horse travels between two places faster than a car.) Also check for places to replenish water supplies - garages, streams, farmyards with taps etc. Ideally crew points should coincide with tough sections of a ride - e.g. at the top of a steep hill or after a rough hill area—where horse and rider will welcome a friendly face and a drink. If your rider is riding with a companion, try to park your vehicle next to that person's crew, as the horse will settle better to drink and eat if his companion does not disappear. Before your rider arrives, have ready, outside the vehicle, sloppy beet pulp, plain water in a bucket and a couple of uncapped sloshers.

You should have a drink for the rider plus an apple or banana. The first aid kit should also be within easy reach. A deep-pocketed jacket is a useful thing ! If there are two crew, one can take a slosher a short way up the track so that the rider can slosh the horse before arriving at the drinking water. It can then drink in peace. On a very hot day encourage the rider to slosh him or herself as well. A headscarf worn under the riding hat can shield the back of the neck from the sun or on a cold wet day can prevent earache and headaches. The crew should also be paying attention to the **riding time**. Tell your rider what speed they are doing - whether to slow down or speed up. Remember also that time at crew points is part of the riding time so do not

detain horse and rider longer than necessary. If the horse does not drink do not waste time trying to force this. Most horses do not start drinking until about 20 miles and thereafter they drink fairly frequently. All horses are different in this respect and regular crewing of the same horse will get you to know their preferences. The rider should have a good idea of when their horse usually starts to drink. Once horses are drinking well, and only then, they can be offered **electrolyte drinks**, but this isn't usually necessary for rides below 40 miles. They must be offered plain water at the same time. Riders and crews may also benefit from these drinks under the same circumstances. Giving either horses or humans electrolyte drinks before the body needs them can induce thirst and in horses can cause severe metabolic problems. If the rider has any requirements for the next crew point, e.g. dry gloves or a cup of coffee, they should tell the crew now so that it will be ready the next time they meet, saving time and tempers. The rider carries a mobile phone for emergencies and should not be wasting time phoning for more trivial matters. The rider must also take in **fluids and food**. Dehydration and exhaustion can come on quickly and most riders forget about themselves through concern for their horses. Crews should also remember to eat and drink throughout the day - they are under as much stress as the rider and are using as much energy. Get into the habit of **checking the horse's shoes and legs** every time you see him. Also do a general check over for any wounds or rubs: the rider cannot see the horse's legs from on top! Once the horse and rider have been crewed, refill sloshers from unused drinking water and tip any other unused water back into the container. **DO NOT WASTE WATER** – you may need it later. Replace the gear in the car and go to your next crew point where the whole process is repeated again **AND AGAIN**.

INTRODUCTION TO LONGER RIDES FOR SILVER AND GOLD SERIES

RIDERS To help riders progress through the grading system, most branches try to organise training along the lines given below, for those who have reached Bronze Final level. This is an outline only and there to be amended as seen fit by the trainers.

ADVANCED TRAINING Riding Once the rider gets to longer rides, it is important that they strive to achieve a correct position on the horse. This will make it easier for the horse to successfully complete the distance without undue discomfort and to remain sound through the grading system. The rider will also benefit by becoming less tired and sore. A balanced rider also presents a more aesthetically pleasing picture and gives the sport a better image. Training should continue along the lines set out above and be built on. It would also be a good idea for riders at this stage to learn how to correctly lunge the horse for work (if they do not already know) so that they can use this technique if the horse cannot for some reason be ridden and also to warm it up before competitions if required. Skill in endurance riding depends on the expertise of the rider and is the one element of training that must not be overlooked.

Feeding Feeding is a subject in which the basic principles can be stated but all horses are individuals and no hard and fast rules can be laid down - what works for one horse will not necessarily work for another. However, what is generally accepted is that the more energy that is required for work, the more calories must go into the horse to provide that energy.

Fitting At this stage of the horse's training, we are looking for progressive stamina building. For many horses going into Silver series, this will only be their second season of competitive endurance riding and if they are only 6 years old, their frames are not fully matured. We know that it is not the distance that does the damage but rather being ridden at unsuitable speeds over varying terrain - some of it not the easiest. Riders also need to have an extra level of fitness now; especially

stronger legs, and they should find a way of achieving this that suits them personally.

Crewing and equipment By this stage riders really need to have a competent crew who can take full charge of the horse if necessary. It would be preferable for the crew to attend all relevant training sessions. The equipment required is the same as outlined earlier with a few extras. Take advice from your vet or more experienced riders before deciding to give the horse electrolytes as wrongful use can be dangerous.

Feet and shoeing "No foot - no horse." This saying could not be truer than in endurance riding and every effort must be made to have as part of the team, an experienced, understanding and knowledgeable farrier. The rider should also be aware of what a correctly shod foot should look like and what can be done to ensure that the type of shoes match up to work required of them. Daily hoof management is also of paramount importance and a lot can be done to make sure that the farrier has a decent foot to work with.

Race rides Tactics for competing in race rides should be understood before entering one so that you do not endanger your horse. See page 23 for a brief outline.

Vet gates During the Silver and Gold series, horse and rider may be involved in a race ride and have to cope with a vet gate. There is no great mystique about this and all should go well if rider and crew have been trained properly in how to tackle it. It would be a good idea to arrange a mock vet gate at a training session, but the procedures are outlined below.

VET GATE PROCEDURES WHAT IS A VET GATE? A vet gate is a veterinary control through which you must pass during a race ride. These usually occur about every 20 miles, with often an extra one closer to the finish of the race. The procedure is as follows: Your arrival time is recorded in hours, minutes and seconds by the vet gate timekeeper. Horses must be presented for the veterinary inspection within 30 minutes of arrival at the gate. Crews may attend to the horse and rider during this period. You stay in the marked arrival area until you are ready to present your horse to the vet. Time taken to prepare the horse for vetting is still part of the riding time. If the horse passes the vet's inspection (usual parameters are a pulse of 64 or less, and "fit to continue"), the hold time will start at the time at which the successful veterinary inspection was requested (sometimes the horse moves into a special hold area). The hold time is usually 30 minutes but can be varied at the vets' discretion according to weather conditions on the day. If the horse does not pass the inspection, it may be presented once more within the 30 minutes. (This rule may change with different societies - so check.) Horses that do not pass vets' inspection within 30 minutes of arrival at the gate are eliminated. It is now quite common for vets to ask all horses that pass the vetting to present for a re-check within 10 minutes of their departure time. This is to satisfy the vets that the horse is truly recovering from its exertions. The horse is not allowed to leave the vet hold until its hold time has expired.

APPROACHING THE VET GATE Races can be won or lost at vet gates. Bring your horse into the vet gate as relaxed and as cool as you can. Try and drop down to a slow jog or walk, but do not let the horse jog to try to keep up with horses ahead as this will not help to get the pulse down. Try to find the key for switching your horse off - perhaps something as simple as loosening the girth. You can dismount and lead into the vet gate. Sensible riding throughout the course is the key to successful vet gates. Horses that are overridden will have high heart rate problems at the gates and those that have been ridden within their limits will be able to make up time here. Balanced riding will also make a difference. Horses ridden in balance will not have to

use so much energy and their heart rates will be lower. Discomfort and pain cause higher heart rates. This can be brought about by badly fitting tack.

CREWING AT THE VET GATE The crew should try to lay out the gear as near to the entrance to the vetting area as possible, within the arrival area. Cars may have to be parked some way away, so make sure that all you might need is to hand. While waiting for the riders, find out if the horses are to be inspected with or without saddles. Make sure that any helpers know exactly what their job is. Otherwise, even with several people at the vet gate, the most obvious areas may be overlooked. Either the rider or crew must pick up the time card from the timekeeper when the rider enters the gate. In the arrival area, the amount of cooling you need to do will depend on the weather, but unless it is very warm put a rug over the horse's hindquarters. Offer the horse a drink but do not let it eat before vetting, under normal circumstances. Check for cuts or sores and inspect the feet carefully. Once the horse's pulse has steadied at 60 or under, present the horse for inspection. If it is not quite down to 60, do not go just because another horse is presenting. You may end up blowing it and have to wait 10 minutes. You could easily make up a couple of minutes on a horse in front, but making up 10 minutes is much more difficult as it will be out of sight. Once the horse has passed the vet he moves into the hold area (if separate) and can have a small feed, and the rider can get some food and drink. You will have to carry any equipment from the arrival area to the hold area. Check carefully in both places when tidying up, as this is generally where things get left behind. Extra rugs may well be needed at this stage, especially if there is a longish hold. Keep the horse moving about regularly so that he does not stiffen up. Make sure that you are tacked up and ready to start when your hold time is up - there is no point in losing ground now.

RACE RIDE TACTICS When you are tackling your first race rides, your main aim must be to ride your own ride and not to get towed along with faster horses. If you are taking part in a mass start, you must warm up your horse well (for about 20 mins before the start) as the pace will be faster from the beginning than you would normally go on a competitive ride. You can set out after the others are out of sight and this may be preferable if your horse is excitable. Even if your horse settles well with other horses, think about having a stronger bit on him if only until the first vet gate - you must have him under control at all times or it could be dangerous for both you and other riders. Taking the ride at a steady pace until the first vet gate will pay dividends if you are able to present to the vet more quickly than those who have raced in. Check the rules carefully to see if you need to average a certain speed to the vet gates or just over the day's ride. Try to have some time in hand over the maximum in case you lose a shoe or have some other disaster which can be dealt with if you have time on your side. Study your map and instructions well in advance and know on which parts of the course you can make up time and where you have to slow down to make steep climbs or walk through fields of sheep or caravan parks, etc. To check how much fuel is in the tank, every so often you could put a bit of leg on your horse and see if he responds. If he does, then slow up and resume your steady pace knowing that you have plenty in reserve. If you carry a whip, only use it for negotiating obstacles or down the horse's shoulder to prevent shying—never use it to drive the horse on faster. If you do, he will probably stop altogether in the end. If the horse says he does not want to go any further, you must dismount and lead (if necessary for a few miles) until he gets his second wind, which he usually will. Check that he is not sore in his loin and hindquarter muscles, which would indicate tying up, in which case

he must not be moved but kept warm and transported home. It is most usual for horses to tie up early on in a race ride, either when going fast or up steep hills. There are many reasons for this but most are associated with management. If the horse becomes dehydrated, he will slow down and feel as if he is drunk. Dismount immediately, keep him warm and reassure him. After a rest you should be able to lead him to a suitable place for transporting back to the venue, where he may need to be given fluids.

CARE OF THE ENDURANCE HORSE'S FEET ROBIN PAPE, DWCF

The endurance horse is a finely tuned being who relies on his feet and limbs being well cared for in order to produce his very best, plus a little more, and still recover to within the required veterinary parameters. These horses provide me, as a farrier, with the ideal medium on which to practise farriery and see the results of my endeavours over a period of time. This is the only equestrian activity where the horse may be required to compete for up to eight hours (and sometimes longer) at a time over varying terrain and ground conditions. Because of this, it is particularly necessary that the horse be shod for comfort and safety, not only for his own well being, but also for the well-being of others using the course at the same time. 23

Tending the feet, limbs and shoeing of the endurance horse is a year-round occupation. It requires communication between the rider, the farrier, the horse and, on occasion, the vet. Suppose it is March and you, the rider, are already two months into a fittening programme. You can help the farrier, and consequently the horse, by being observant about your horse's gait and temperament. Listen to his footfalls on hard surfaces, under saddle and in hand. Is he stiffer to one side than you remember him last season? Is he happy to go on? The list is endless - keep a diary of your progress, and then use it for reference. If you are just considering starting endurance, tell your farrier - we cannot read minds! He may alter his choice of shoe to achieve greater wear or grip. At the sharp end of the sport, when the season is under way, shoes can wear through at an alarming rate, sometimes only lasting a week or ten days when a major competition is entered. During normal training, two to four weeks is usual. As I said earlier, shoeing for comfort and safety is particularly important for the endurance horse. Let us start with comfort. Remember that a farrier does not shoe the foot, he shoes the limb - and, therefore, an appreciation of how the horse "goes" is useful. This will necessitate the horse being trotted up, observed from behind, from in front and from the side, as well as being studied at rest, standing squarely. (A note here, or indeed a plea, not just from me but also from the vets - please, please, when trotting up the horse for inspection, do not drag him behind you by his lead rope. Rather run at his neck, about 18" from him, thereby leaving his head and neck free to move. Turn the horse away from you, keeping him between you and the observer, at the end of the trot up area. This is the only way we can see the horse's true action.) However, I digress. When the horse is trotted up for me, I am looking at the flight pattern of the foot and limb and how the feet land on the ground. The ideal is to have the foot landing flat on the ground, i.e. both inside and outside of the foot meeting the ground at the same time - landing level, as we say. The other important factor is the hoof pastern axis (HPA). This is the angle of the hoof capsule in relation to the pastern when viewed from the side. The ideal is when an imaginary line bisects the pastern equally and continues at the same angle to the ground. The feet are then trimmed accordingly and we can turn our thoughts to the type of shoe to apply. Shoes of use for endurance work are of two basic types - concave, which is used on most horses in Britain, and three quarter fullered, which are generally flat steel with a crease on each

side to accommodate the nail heads. There are various things to consider before deciding on the shoes to be used - the breed and build of horse being paramount, followed by the sort of terrain and road surfaces encountered, the type of foot (shape, horn consistency and rate of growth). A very fine Arab with 4 inch feet cannot be expected to carry the same weight of shoe as a big Standard bred or a cob with 5 inch feet. The shoe has to offer support and protection to the horse and consequently has to be at least wide enough to cover the outer perimeter of the foot and long enough to cover the point of the heel, if not extending beyond it, thereby offering support to the limb. It is quite in order, occasionally, to shoe a horse "tighter" for competition and I sometimes do this prior to a major event, and depending on the horse (and the rider) it is sometimes beneficial to shoe to the outline of the foot and not beyond. This helps to ensure, as far as one can, that all four shoes will remain on the horse for the duration of the competition. In my opinion, however, there is no place in the sport for a horse consistently having to suffer being shod short at the point of the heel, or being shod too tight, i.e. with the hoof wall overhanging the outer rim of the shoe. Both these conditions have a detrimental effect on a horse in normal riding, never mind under the additional stress of endurance work. Short-shoeing leads to collapsed heels, corns, non-specific heel lamenesses, sore legs and even sore backs, because the horse will compensate by using himself differently, in order to alleviate associated pain. In an endurance horse this all adds up to stress, and stress at a vet gate causes high pulse rates, leading to re-presentations and time losses. Suddenly you're trailing at the "blunt" end of a ride instead of being up at the "sharp" end because your horse has sore feet. Hind shoes can also be left a little longer. This has two consequences: first, it offers support to the joints higher up the leg, and second, it slightly retards the action of the hind leg, helping to prevent overreach and forgeing. Watch out in a mass start situation, however, as it is possible for another horse to tread them. One last word on comfort. Great benefit can be derived from rolling the toes of the front shoes. This eases the break over (the point at which the foot leaves the ground) and allows the horse to lift his front foot off the ground with the minimum of effort, reducing the danger of an overreach. The portion of the shoe to be rolled should be the point of natural break over for the individual foot. I very often use a clipped shoe and just tip the toe up. This has the added benefit that the clip offers a bit more security and relieves some of the stress on the nails. Safety basically comes down to anti-slip devices, assuming that you can avoid treading on a lost shoe in a muddy hole! I try to use a combination of stud nails and plugs with a tungsten core. Studs are bad news for the endurance horse, unless fitted for a section of ride known to be slippery. This is because the constant concussion which the stud causes to a small portion of the foot will soon affect the growth of horn around the site of the stud. This must be like having a stone in your own boot, but the horse cannot take it off. Even stud nails can cause the wall around the nail to split more readily, so now I tend to use a blind nail hole and the heads of the stud nails only. Horseshoe borium is now available in Britain again. These are crystals of tungsten carbide which can be applied to the points of hardest wear. The finer grades appear to extend the life of the shoe similarly to hard facing weld, but without the slip. Coarser grades have real anti-slip properties and can cause concussive strain injuries if not applied judiciously, because the leg stops dead as soon as the hoof hits the ground. A number of horses need to be shod with pads. These are worthwhile aids when used for a particular competition, or to allow a horse to recover from a bruise or some other solar injury. When pads are used, the cavity under the pad must be filled with silicon or some other non-absorbent substance, in order to prevent foreign material from entering and becoming trapped.

Prolonged use of pads can do no good, as the natural resilience of the sole diminishes if it is continually protected. If a horse had to be shod all the time with pads, I would find myself questioning whether this horse can really "endure". It is quite in order to have full pads put on for a competition and, afterwards, to cut out the centres. This leaves what is known as a rim pad, which is useful in reducing concussion caused by prolonged work on unforgiving ground. There is an old saying "no foot, no horse", and endurance riding is particularly good at finding the weak link in the chain. The use of feed additives to enhance the growth and quality of horn can be beneficial, though the first consideration should be a properly balanced diet. The effect of additives will only be seen four to six months after the start of feeding. Liquid hoof dressings, in the form of hoof shield, hoof bond or periople replacers, are very useful, in that they provide a tough layer of material that not only helps to fill in old nail holes and cracks, but also helps to retain important natural hoof moisture. Shoeing the endurance horse can be a pain, but there are rewards as well. It is the "appliance of science" - engineering, mechanics, geometry. As I said at the beginning - if you want to get it right, communication is the name of the game. Of course, a farrier's time costs money - he is a professional. In people terms again, you don't put foreign remoulds on a racing car and expect to win, so don't do it to your horse. The consequences can be even more costly. Enjoy your sport, have fun and listen to your horse

GOOD MANNERS – A REMINDER

Endurance riders form only a small percentage of the users of the countryside. We can pursue our sport only through the goodwill of land managers. We will be more welcome if we respect others' rights to be in the same place at the same time, and we must also be courteous to fellow riders. PLEASE:

- When approaching or passing pedestrians or cyclists, remember they might not be familiar with horses and may well be frightened of them. **Slow down to a walk** and give them plenty of room. Say Thank you if they step aside for you, restrain their dogs or open gates.
- **Don't obstruct traffic.** You can ask drivers to slow down, but don't ride in such a way that they can't pass you when it is safe to do so. **Always thank drivers** who slow down and pull over for you.
- When coming up behind another rider or group of riders, don't canter past - **slow down and ask whether it's OK if you pass.** They might be riding a young horse or one that kicks. If necessary wait until the track widens - don't push past. The same applies if you meet riders coming the other way.
- Equally, if you are asked by riders behind whether they can pass, **don't obstruct them.** Tell them if you have a young horse that might be upset, or one that could kick (there should be green or red ribbons in the tail too). Pull in to the side.
- If another rider opens a gate for you, **wait for her/him** to remount or close the gate before you move on. Their horse might not take kindly to being left behind.
- If you open a gate and then see that there is another rider fairly close behind you, **don't shut the gate in their face** unless there is livestock between you and them. Make sure they acknowledge that, although you are leaving the gate open for them, it must be shut behind them.
- At the venue, **don't take up the farrier's time** and hold up other riders by asking him to shoe your horse. You should have had that done in good time for the ride.
- If your horse is vetted out, **don't argue with the vet.** He/she will in any case usually ask another vet, if present, for a second opinion. Remember there is always another day. If you want, and the vet is willing, you can wait until vetting has finished and ask the vet to have a closer look at your horse (but this is for your horse's sake and will not change your result).
- Finally, **don't go straight from the vetting to harass the admin people** for your results. They will be processed as quickly as humanly possible - usually within 20- 30 minutes. Take the time to make your horse comfortable and pack away your gear.