



Letters To The Editor - 08/15/08

A Horse Show Intervention

First, I want to salute and support Danny Warrington, author of "No One Can Fix Eventing Except The Riders," (May 9, p. 44), for his courage and conviction in addressing the topic of responsibility in eventing. The issue lurks out there. Somebody has to say, "The emperor has no clothes." He's inspired me to address another topic regarding responsibility, this time in hunter/jumpers—the ring hold.

The length of the horse show day has become way too long—not because of too many entries or lengthy or over-demanding courses—because of dead time in the ring. Trainers and exhibitors blame show managers. Show managers blame trainers and exhibitors. Blame accomplishes nothing but lack of resolution, anger and ill will. We must all be responsible for change.

Owners and riders should arrive earlier and watch a bit of the show or schooling ring. If you are making a commitment to horse show, try to schedule other things on your agenda for another day.

Know the specifications of your class—does it have a flat phase or a jog? Schedule accordingly. Be at your ring with your horse tacked up as appropriate and ready for the task.

The show secretary works for the horse show management. This should imply that he or she is not your personal secretary. Check in at the show with the necessary cards, Coggins and payment check to speed the process.

We know that trainers are busy and want to make the best use of their time. But they have a responsibility to plan ahead (as in before the show day starts) as to conflicts, multiple rides, etc. They should go to the in-gate people at any ring and ask them to radio a scheduling conflict around so everyone is aware of the conflict. Trainers should apprise their clients of their responsibilities too (see above).

Show managers should enforce the rules in the U.S. Equestrian Federation Rule Book. They serve as a viable guide. In fact, everyone should read the USEF Rule Book—it's available online and in hard copy. I can think of no worthwhile endeavor in which success is usually achieved without knowledge of some framework or some rules. I run a small business as a high school math tutor. Perhaps math is the purest example of success correlating lock step with knowledge, retention and correct application of the rules. You have no excuse, no plea of ignorance. We are all busy.

Show managers, your exhibitors deserve trained personnel—not just some horse person's kid looking for a part-time job. Good communication between the in-gate, the barn and the judge makes all the difference. Enabling behavior that adds wasted time to the horse show day is no more productive than enabling a substance abuser. Enabling, by definition, does not "fix" the behavior but provides an environment for it to flourish, and contributes to legitimizing irresponsible behavior in the perpetrator.

I participated in my first recognized horse show in 1964. I feel as passionately about the sport now as I did then. That's why I feel compelled to stage this "intervention" as an act of concern for something I hold dear.

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An Epiphany

I had the privilege of attending my first CCI*, long format event at the Virginia Horse Center (June 13 p. 40). The event was well orchestrated and safely run by Penny and Brian Ross.

Being a former hunter/equitation competitor, I admit to highly negative preconceptions to the long format. After experiencing the CCI*, however, my impression has been radically altered to respect these competitors as I've developed an understanding of the incredible benefits for both horse and rider.

I experienced at least two months of uncertainty, being quietly concerned, and upset when it was decided by our trainer, Doug Payne, that it would be a great thing for our preliminary event horse, Rocket, to compete in a CCI*, long format event.

My perception of the long format was that it was cruel to the horses, pushing them to exhaustion and thereby making it impossible to jump safely in the cross-country and stadium phases. I couldn't understand how our trainer, and eventers in general, would consider doing this to the horses they claim to love and spend so much time and effort with. I thought Doug was an adrenaline junkie thinking of himself and not my horse, but I was proven wrong.

I have prodigious new respect for eventing and especially the long format—the benefits for the horses are amazing.

In my former discipline, it wasn't uncommon for horses to be "conditioned" on a horse treadmill—not out cross-country having fun experiencing the countryside. The time and dedication that went into preparing my horse was extensive and extremely beneficial to his condition and emotional well being.

In addition to his regular program, he was galloped in beautiful fields and trotted up and down hills. Having known him in his former "jumper" life for years, I couldn't believe how happy he was getting to gallop and jump over the steeplechase course—you could see it in his expression and eyes!

I was shocked when he came in for the vet check and cool down prior to cross-country to see a horse that was ready to go, perfectly prepared, excitedly happy, and so well conditioned. Having a double-clean cross-country, I was even more surprised that he had incredible energy for the stadium jumping the next day, jumped clean, and never jumped better.

I now fully support, and hope the long format will continue and be mandatory to prepare the horses we so love to be the best competitors they can be. Perhaps other equestrian disciplines can learn from the benefits of the long format.

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