

PRE AND POST COMPETITION TRAINING TECHNIQUES

Position of the Horse's head – stretching

1. Background

The use of correctly executed stretching techniques, both before and after training and competition, is recognised as an important and long-established practice in almost every physical sport. In equestrian sport it is used for the on-going suppleness and health of the equine Athletes.

2. Permitted stretches

Stretching principally involves the lengthening of the Horse's ligaments and muscles (soft tissue) and can be done at the halt (statically) or in motion (dynamically). Athletes should aim to stretch all the relevant groups of muscles within the Horse's body, especially the muscles involved in hind leg locomotion, but the part that will be most visual to both stewards and the public will most likely be the Horse's neck.

Neck stretches may take several different forms. 'Long, deep and round' (see diagram i) and 'low, deep and round' (see diagram ii) and 'long and low' (see diagram iii) are just three commonly used examples but there are other variations involving both longitudinal and lateral flexion which result in different neck positions.

3. Variation of stretches & neck positions

Stretches of the Horse's neck maybe specific and appropriate to each Horse and equestrian discipline, but no single neck position should be maintained which may lead to tiredness or stress.

4. Method of achieving stretches

It is imperative that stretching should be executed by unforced and non-aggressive means. By 'unforced' it is meant that the Athlete is not permitted to use rough, or abrupt aids or apply constant unyielding pressure on the Horse's mouth through a fixed arm and hand position. It is the responsibility of the steward to intervene if these requirements are not respected.

5. Action by the Steward in the case of incorrect behaviour of Athlete in relation to flexion of the head and neck

The steward will intervene should they observe;

- Neck stretching achieved through forced, or aggressive riding;
- The use of extreme flexion if it does not comply with the above;
- An Athlete deliberately maintaining a sustained fixed head and neck carriage longer than approximately ten minutes;
- In cases when the Horse is in a state of general stress and/or fatigue.

The steward may also ask the Athlete to walk for a certain period in situations where the Athlete's stress may cause undesired riding.

6. Maximum duration of pre-competition warm-up and post-competition cooldown periods

Only in exceptional circumstances and with the permission of the Chief Steward, may a training session exceed one hour. The training session must include a number of relaxation periods. Riding the Horse at the walk whether prior to, or following the training session, is not considered to be part of the one hour training session. There should be at least one hour break between any training/warm-up periods.

Repetition movements carried out in the practice arena, following a rider's performance in the competition arena, may not exceed a period of ten minutes.

7. Exercise / Training arena

All training sessions, including pre-competition warm-up, may only be performed in the official training arena while under the supervision of stewards. Use of a training arena outside the official training period, and/or in an unsupervised arena, may at the discretion of the Ground Jury lead to the rider's disqualification.

During competition preparation periods, and the duration of the competition itself, the Chief Steward must be present in the training arena, or be in a position to observe the training arena at Events where numerous training arenas are in use.

If the Chief Steward is unable to be present himself/herself, it is their responsibility to ensure that a steward with the required experience and knowledge is appointed to supervise the training arena.

8. Revision

These directives may be subject to review and Stewards are advised to check for periodic updates.