

Managing Expectations

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Managing expectations of physical performance in strength, cardio and agility.

Often times it's easy to overdo a ride or training session, especially in the show or clinic environment, in an effort to increase our knowledge level and achieve the next level of our sport.



The amount of physical muscle tone a horse has will be a key factor in how he is able to perform new activities. Consider also that we may not be doing a new movement or exercise, but simply more repetitions of our current level of work. The addition of multiple repetitions is also a factor in a horse's fatigue, body soreness and ability to recover from extra exertion.

Once a horse is fit for a certain level of activity, it is up to the rider to build consciously to the next level. This step is often missed. Riders often hurriedly jump up to the next level without careful consideration if the horse has the right level of fitness for the extra exertion required. Each change requires more from the body.

With increased demands at a higher training level, there will be increased forces acting within and on the horse's body. Riders must increase conditioning to cope with the new demands. Conditioning consists of strength, cardio, and agility components, which must be taken into account when creating the training program.

A complete conditioning program is often missed. It is easy to do the same ride every day without pushing the horse to the next level until we decide to do those

extra classes at the show. This is where a lot of riders get confused, because their horse performed well at the show with the increased demand. The horse stepped up and did the next level and was super. It's not until a few weeks later some soreness creeps up and riders don't often equate it to the extra exertion the horse had experienced at the show.

It is difficult to separate regular work into true strength and cardio days. These days will have a different focus, a different number and length of breaks, and a different warm-up and cool-down to be able to perform with ease. If speed exertion is required in a particular sport, then sprint work needs to be worked into regular work as well.

Listening to the horse is the primary way to determine the effectiveness of a conditioning program. Riders may



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ignore small signs from the horse, or equate some of the small signs to misbehavior. Some horses may fatigue much faster than others, and this can be disconcerting to a lot of riders. Those riders may think that the horse just doesn't want to work after a certain time, when in fact they are asking for help in achieving those goals.

It can be hard for horses with insufficient muscle tone to be able to change the way they are able to perform exercises, and show the rider that they are up to this next level of exertion. This situation requires investigation into the strength program, as the type of work and exercises might need to be changed to build appropriate muscle tissue for the desired level.

Being an investigator will go a long way to understand what the horse is trying to communicate. Investigation leads to the information needed the change and adapt training and conditioning programs to allow the horse to make the step up to the next level of fitness.

A wellness team plays a key role in this investigation; veterinarians, body workers, and farriers all have expertise and are key pieces of the puzzle that will complete the horse's picture. 

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at this year's series



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