

# **EQUINE WELFARE - EVENTING**



## CHAPTER 4

### EVENTING

#### Introduction

4.1 Eventing, also known as Horse Trials or Combined Training, comprises three disciplines, namely dressage, cross-country and showjumping.

- *Dressage* requires the horse to demonstrate a series of predetermined movements. A successful partnership of horse and rider will perform the test calmly and with little visible intervention of the rider.
- *Cross-Country* is the most demanding phase, requiring speed, endurance and skilful jumping over fixed obstacles. The cross-country course contains obstacles such as water jumps, drop fences, hedges and other obstacles.
- *Showjumping* is held before or after the cross-country phase and requires calm control to negotiate obstacles. Some horses that have been brought to the peak of fitness to perform cross-country or have just completed the cross-country find this phase exacting and difficult.<sup>1</sup>

4.2 Events are classified as One Day Events, Two Day Events and Three Day Events. Three Day Events also include sections on steeplechase and roads and tracks. In all events, the speed, distance and number of obstacles vary according to the level of training of the participating horses and riders. The standards for events range from novice to Olympic and World Championship levels.

4.3 The Equestrian Federation of Australia (EFA), is the controlling body for eventing in Australia. EFA adopts the rules of the International Equestrian Federation (Federation Equestre Internationale) for the Olympic disciplines of dressage, showjumping and Three Day Events, as well as national rules to suit local circumstances. Events conducted under the auspices of EFA are controlled by these rules.

4.4 In its submission to the Committee, the Equestrian Federation of Australia summarised its general policy on animal welfare. The Federation stated:

It is considered to be of paramount importance in all equestrian sports that there must be adequate supervision and maintenance of the health and well-being of the horses taking part.<sup>2</sup>

4.5 Dr Roderic Hoare, Vice President of the New South Wales Horse Trials Council, indicated that the sport of eventing "depends on harmonious partnership between horse and rider".<sup>3</sup> He emphasised the need to protect the welfare of the horse. He observed:

The horse has to endure the sport for there is little chance of being successful if the horse is in any way unwilling. A horse which is trained to jump out of fear will be unreliable in competition. Among competitors, there is a quiet peer pressure, an admiration of successful riders and a denigration of horse abuse. The formal sanctions of the sport are rarely required.<sup>4</sup>

4.6 Animal welfare organisations did not identify significant welfare problems with eventing. For example, in its submission to the Committee, RSPCA Australia stated:

RSPCA has no objection in principle to the use of horses in [these] events so long as no action by competitors leads to or causes cruelty during the preparation of the horse and during the course of the running of the event.<sup>5</sup>

4.7 The Australian Equine Veterinary Association did not identify any welfare problems with the dressage phase but maintained that showjumping and cross-country phases are commonly held without a veterinarian in attendance.<sup>6</sup>

4.8 Evidence on eventing received during the inquiry concentrated on Three Day Events. Indeed, some aspects of Three Day Events attracted criticism. Accordingly, the Committee reviews this evidence in the following section of the report.

## Three Day Events

4.9 To be eligible to compete in Three Day Events both horse and rider must have competed in at least two official One or Two Day Events or at a Three Day Event. The horse must have competed in at least one such competition in the current or preceding year.<sup>7</sup>

4.10 Three Day Events comprise three separate phases. These are as follows:

- Day One comprising a dressage test of 7½ minutes duration;
- Day Two comprising an endurance competition formally called a speed and endurance test. The four phases of this test involve two roads and tracks phases, a steeplechase phase and a cross-country phase. The roads and tracks phases involve horses trotting and walking around various roads or racetracks. The distance involved is between 7920 and 19800 metres. The steeplechase phase involves distances of between 2240 and 3450 metres and between 6 to 10 obstacles. The cross-country phase involves distances of between 3380 to 7980 metres and between 18 to 32 obstacles; and
- Day Three comprising showjumping. This aims to demonstrate that the horse is still supple and obedient after the exertions of the previous days' events. The distances involved in this event are between 600 and 900 metres involving 10 to 12 obstacles.<sup>8</sup>

4.11 In its submission, the Equestrian Federation noted that the rules governing Three Day Events include the following provisions intended to protect the welfare of horses:

- sampling for prohibited substances may be carried out at any time during the event;
- maximum distances for the phases and maximum numbers and dimensions of obstacles are laid down;

- technical delegates may require amendments to obstacles and action to be taken regarding unsafe ground. Veterinary delegates also have a duty to report to the technical delegates any features which are considered dangerous;
- in the event of more than one fall of a horse and/or rider, the combination is eliminated; and
- veterinary first aid services must be within quick and easy reach of all parts of the course.<sup>9</sup>

4.12 In Australia, detailed reports are submitted to the National Eventing Committee after each Three Day Event. All reports of tired or distressed horses are followed up and appropriate action is taken. Ms Pamela Walker, Secretary-General of the Equestrian Federation of Australia, told the Committee that two cases were reported in 1990. One case involved an inexperienced rider and the other a senior rider who was not permitted to complete the course.<sup>10</sup>

4.13 Evidence presented to the Committee during the inquiry was critical of some aspects of Three Day Events. For example, RSPCA (NSW) cited incidents at the Three Day Event held at Gawler, South Australia in 1987 and selection trials in Melbourne in 1990 for the World Games. According to the Society these incidents highlight "the potential for horse welfare problems". At the event in Gawler, a horse collapsed and died. In Melbourne, insufficient time was allowed to assess injuries sustained by horses. Veterinarians were not always in attendance and on some occasions they were competing and thus unavailable to provide emergency treatment if needed.<sup>11</sup>

4.14 Based on these and other concerns expressed in evidence, the Committee sought clarification of certain aspects of Three Day Events. In particular, the Committee was interested to receive further information on the following:

- jumps;
- steeplechase; and
- veterinary supervision.

These three matters are discussed in the following section.

## Jumps

4.15 The Committee questioned whether jumps in the cross-country phase of Three Day Events pose an unacceptable risk to horses and cause injuries.

4.16 Appearing before the Committee at a public hearing, Ms Walker of EFA, explained that jumps are constructed to "look very imposing". She continued:

A person would look at something that has a four or five foot gap in it and say, 'My goodness', but it is well within a horse's stride. So the course designers take quite a lot of pride in designing fences to terrify riders, but they are never intended - and seldom do they - terrify horses.<sup>12</sup>

4.17 Ms Walker added that over the last ten years only two horses have died in cross-country events held in Australia.<sup>13</sup> However, both the NSW Animal Welfare Advisory Council, and RSPCA (NSW) recommended that collapsible jumps should be introduced to safeguard the welfare of horses in Three Day Events.<sup>14</sup>

4.18 In response to questions from the Committee on the height of jumps in the cross-country phase of eventing, Ms Walker explained that the current height limits are not difficult even for the "most mediocre horses".<sup>15</sup> She noted that often the layout of the course rather than the height of the jumps determines the degree of difficulty.<sup>16</sup>

4.19 The Committee also raised questions on the safety of water jumps. Ms Walker assured the Committee that the water jump is "not in any way beyond a horse's ability"<sup>17</sup> and that it is not often that a horse will shy when going into a water jump.<sup>18</sup> According to Ms Walker, the rider rather than the horse comes off "second best" at these jumps.<sup>19</sup>

## Steeplechase

4.20 The Committee questioned whether the steeplechase phase of the endurance section could be equated with steeplechase events in flat racing. In response, Ms Walker pointed out that there are major differences between the two events. She explained:

Amongst the differences are that our horses are on the course singularly; there is only one horse on the steeplechase course at any one time. They are not racing; they are running within a time allowed. The time allowed for the steeplechase phase varies between 640 metres per minute and 690 metres per minute. I gather that the normal speed that a race horse travels at when it is going over jumps is in the range of 800 to 950 metres per minute, so our horses are going much more slowly. There is a maximum fixed height on our steeplechase obstacles of one metre. So there really is very little parallel between our steeplechase and that of racing.<sup>20</sup>

#### Veterinary Supervision

4.21 The rules of Three Day Events provide for two veterinary examinations. An examination take place on the arrival of horses at the stables and aims to establish a horses' identity, veterinary history and state of health. A second examination, conducted at the completion of the cross-country phase is also held and this includes treatment of injured or exhausted horses.<sup>21</sup>

4.22 The Rules also provide for three veterinary inspections. The first inspection is held before the dressage test, the second after the roads and tracks section and the third prior to the showjumping phase. At each of these inspections, an appropriate committee has the "right and the duty" to exclude any horse which is unfit, whether on account of lameness, lack of condition or exhaustion.<sup>22</sup>

4.23 At present, veterinarians do not have the authority to exclude a horse from competition. They may only act to prevent a horse from competing by advising the judging panel or Ground Jury as it is known.

4.24 The Equestrian Federation of Australia noted that during the World Equestrian Games in 1990 an open meeting canvassed opinions on changes to the veterinary rules. It is anticipated that new rules for Three Day Events will provide for more direct control of the welfare of horses by veterinarians.<sup>23</sup>

4.25 Although not referring specifically to eventing, the Australian Equine Veterinary Association maintains that veterinary officials should have total

control over all matters relating to the health and welfare of horses during equine competitions. Furthermore, veterinarians should be able "to advise elimination of horses at any time during the event and not just at official veterinary examinations".<sup>24</sup>

### *Conclusions*

4.26 The Committee considers that an official veterinarian should be in attendance during the cross-country and showjumping phases of eventing, and in particular, when these are conducted as part of Three Day Events. Furthermore, the Committee supports the introduction of rules that provide for more direct control and supervision of the welfare of horses in eventing by veterinarians.

### **Other Concerns**

4.27 Some welfare concerns were raised in a number of submissions and during the course of the inquiry. These concerns relate to:

- course design;
- drugs and drug detection; and
- rider education.

### **Course Design**

4.28 Some evidence presented during the inquiry suggested that course designers construct courses that are hazardous for horses. This is particularly the case with amateur course builders who design courses for One Day Events.

4.29 The Rules of the Federation prescribe maximum heights and spreads of obstacles and specify lengths of courses.<sup>25</sup> The Federation also has procedures for the training and accreditation of course designers to ensure that horses are not put at risk in these events.

4.30 Ms Walker told the Committee that the accreditation system is adequate. She explained that the system involves more than the accreditation of course designers. In addition, all branches hold seminars and workshops for course designers, including briefings on the latest overseas developments. She expressed the view that the program of seminars and workshops could be extended.<sup>26</sup>

4.31 The Committee questioned Ms Walker on problems associated with amateur course builders. She conceded that often inexperienced course designers build the courses for novices and juniors. She observed:

I feel that the most experienced people we have should be building for our starter riders because they are the ones who are in the greatest danger. The inexperienced riders just do not know how to ride something which might be quite straightforward. The only way we can overcome that is by increasing the process of osmosis from the really good experienced people through to the learners to ensure that they are obtaining as much information as possible about the effects of their courses.<sup>27</sup>

4.32 The Australian Equine Veterinary Association raised with the Committee one general matter relating to course design in equine events. The Association maintains that ground conditions and prevailing climatic circumstances should be taken into account when courses are designed. Adverse conditions, such as high temperatures and humidity, may compromise the welfare of horses and organisers should be prepared to amend courses or completion times. If warranted, organisers should also be prepared to cancel events.<sup>28</sup> The Association recommends that organisers seek veterinary advice on the suitability of courses.<sup>29</sup> RSPCA (NSW) also noted that events should not be held when visibility is inadequate or the ground surface unsafe.<sup>30</sup>

### *Conclusions*

4.33 The Committee is of the view that courses, whether for advanced level competition or novice events, should be designed to safeguard the welfare of horses. While courses should be designed to test the skills of horse and rider, the Committee considers that they should not place unfair or unreasonable demands on the horse.

4.34 To achieve this objective, the Committee encourages the Equestrian Federation of Australia to ensure that all courses are designed by experienced personnel. The Federation should also promote seminars and disseminate information on appropriate course designs.

## Drugs and Drug Detection

4.35 EFA Rules prohibit the use of performance enhancing drugs before or during an event.

4.36 Substances that cannot be used include:

- substances which act on the nervous, cardiovascular, respiratory, alimentary, urinary, musculoskeletal and immune systems;
- antibiotics, antibacterial and antiviral substances;
- antiparasitic substances;
- anti-pyretics, analgesics and anti-inflammatory substances other than phenylbutazone and oxphenbutazone (for which there is an allowable concentration of 2 micro-grams per millilitre of plasma);
- endocrine secretions and their synthetic counterparts;
- substances affecting blood coagulation; and
- cytotoxic substances.<sup>31</sup>

4.37 The Australian Equine Veterinary Association also supports the prohibition of drugs that influence the performance of horses during competition.<sup>32</sup>

### *Drug Detection Procedures*

4.38 Random drug testing is carried out at many events in all disciplines. Samples are tested at laboratories accredited by the International Equestrian Federation. Ms Walker explained the policy of the Equestrian Federation of Australia on random drug testing in the following terms:

We have been swabbing for many years and the policy has been that you swab the placegetters. You tend always then to get the same people and we know the people who are always clean because if they have been swabbed 15 times and they have always come up clear, there is not a lot of point in swabbing them for the fifteenth to twenty-sixth time.

A lot of our branches are doing far more random testing. Sure, they still do one of the placegetters but they might pick someone who came twenty-fifth just for the sake of the exercise. The veterinarians have always got the right to say, 'I want that horse', if there is one that is looking, in the vet's opinion, different from how he should look.<sup>33</sup>

4.39 Ms Walker noted that the main problem facing the Federation is the cost of drug testing procedures. Currently, it costs between \$60 and \$300 per swab, depending on whether the test is for a specific drug or a broad spectrum of drugs.<sup>34</sup>

4.40 The AEVA endorses the random testing of horses at these events but recognises that economic constraints may confine drug testing to major competitions.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Penalties*

4.41 A rider may be disqualified from an event if a prohibited drug is used on the competing horse. Any subsequent penalty is discretionary, depending on the intent of the competitor and the severity of the offence.<sup>36</sup>

4.42 The Committee questioned the Federation as to whether the penalties for drug abuse are severe enough to prevent cheating. Ms Walker argued that the penalties are a sufficient deterrent. She elaborated in the following terms:

One of the things in the hack world and the dressage world which causes riders the greatest distress is the publication of the finding [of drug abuse]. We found that is almost more abhorrent to them than any other penalty we can offer. I have had a number of people say to me, 'I will pay the fine, I will not compete, but do not publish it'. It is our policy that all such penalties are published.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Use of Prohibited Drugs*

4.43 The Committee received anecdotal evidence that prohibited drugs are used in equine events.<sup>38</sup> For example, Ms Walker told the Committee that rumours about drug use are rife in the hacking and

dressage competitions, but less so in eventing and showjumping. She observed that these rumours are usually "stable talk" and are not based on knowledge or facts. She assured the Committee that the "vast majority of competitors do not use [prohibited] drugs" on their horses.<sup>39</sup> According to Ms Walker, most competitors believe that their reputations would be irreparably damaged by the publication of a finding of use of a prohibited drug.<sup>40</sup> Ms Walker, however, conceded that not every horse that competes is drug free.<sup>41</sup>

4.44 The Committee understands that the policy of the Equestrian Federation of Australia is to discourage drug use. Ms Walker explained that the aim of the Federation "is not necessarily to catch people using drugs [but rather] to stop people using drugs".<sup>42</sup> According to evidence presented during the inquiry only a few cases of prohibited drug use have been reported. The Committee was told that two cases, involving the use of phenylbutazone, were reported in New South Wales. In both cases, the rider was disqualified from the event.<sup>43</sup> In addition, a showjumping rider in New South Wales was suspended for six months after the competing horse returned a positive swab.<sup>44</sup>

4.45 As an indication of compliance with rules relating to drug use, it was drawn to the Committee's attention that all horses swabbed in South Australia in 1990 returned a negative result.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Permissible drugs*

4.46 The Committee sought clarification of the Federation's policy on the use of permissible drugs. For example, an allowable limit of 2 micrograms per millilitre of plasma is established for phenylbutazone, an anti-inflammatory drug. Ms Walker likened the allowable limit of phenylbutazone to the use of aspirins for a headache for human use.<sup>46</sup> She, however, expressed the view that a zero level would be preferable.

4.47 Other substances, such as theobromine, salicylic acid and arsenic, also have allowable limits.<sup>47</sup> Ms Walker explained to the Committee the reasons for establishing allowable limits on these drugs. She stated:

They are found in prepared feed mixes. It is not really an issue here in Australia because we do not feed a lot of that prepared stuff, but in Europe, where they do not have access to good lucerne hay and so forth as we have here they use

a lot more of the prepared foodstuffs, and those three I mentioned do occur in traces in those prepared foodstuffs.<sup>48</sup>

4.48 Ms Walker conceded that it is difficult to police an allowable level. She added:

The level is such now that most of our competitors say that there is no way they could give their horse a sachet of bute the night before and not be swabbable. I am told by competitors that bute, phenylbutazone, is virtually not used in eventing and show jumping now because it is just not worth it - even the therapeutic dose which they used to consider was acceptable.<sup>49</sup>

### *Conclusions*

4.49 The Committee endorses the view of the Equestrian Federation of Australia that performance enhancing and painkilling drugs have no place in equine events. The Committee considers that every effort should be made to eliminate the use of these drugs. To this end, the Committee encourages the Equestrian Federation of Australia to increase the number and overall coverage of random drug testing. The Committee considers that current penalties for using prohibited substances are not a sufficient deterrent and calls on the Equestrian Federation of Australia to reconsider the appropriateness of these sanctions.

### *Rider Education*

4.50 Evidence from several organisations, including RSPCA (NSW), NSW Animal Welfare Advisory Council and the Equestrian Federation of Australia, suggests that the education of riders can be improved.<sup>50</sup> In particular, it was noted that education programs for competitors should place more emphasis on the need to improve the fitness of horses.

4.51 Ms Walker told the Committee that not enough is being done in Australia to enhance rider education. She explained:

Traditionally, most of our riders have come through the pony club system and the pony club has a very great deal to give but, as with all things, some pony clubs are better than others

and some concentrate on horsemanship whereas others would concentrate on fun and games.<sup>51</sup>

### *Conclusions*

4.52 The Committee considers that the welfare of horses participating in events will be improved greatly if riders are properly trained and educated in the care and handling of horses. The Committee encourages the Equestrian Federation of Australia to promote programs designed to increase rider education. These programs should emphasise the need for horses to be properly prepared and conditioned for participation in equine events.

## ENDNOTES

1. *Evidence*, New South Wales Horse Trials Council, p. 612.
2. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 424.
3. *Evidence*, New South Wales Horse Trials Council, p. 615.
4. *ibid.*
5. *Evidence*, RSPCA Australia, p. 127.
6. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 4.
7. Equestrian Federation of Australia, *Rules for Official Horse Trials*, January 1989, p. 41.
8. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 443.
9. *ibid.*, p. 426.
10. *ibid.*, p. 449.
11. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 331.
12. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 446.
13. *ibid.*
14. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 332.  
*Evidence*, New South Wales Animal Welfare Advisory Council, p. 275.
15. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 441.
16. *ibid.*
17. *ibid.*, p. 448.
18. *ibid.*, p. 447.
19. *ibid.*, p. 448.
20. *ibid.*, p. 444.

21. Federation Equestre Internationale, *Veterinary Regulations*, Sixth Edition, Switzerland, 1990, pp. 144-46.
22. *ibid.*, pp. 144-48.
23. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 426.
24. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 9.
25. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 425.
26. *ibid.*, p. 441.
27. *ibid.*
28. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 10.
29. *ibid.*
30. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 332.
31. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 425.
32. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 9.
33. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 433.
34. *ibid.*
35. *Evidence*, Australian Equine Veterinary Association, p. 9.
36. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 440.
37. *ibid.*, p. 438.
38. *ibid.*, p. 433.
39. *ibid.*, p. 438.
40. *ibid.*
41. *ibid.*, p. 433.
42. *ibid.*, p. 434.
43. *ibid.*, p. 436.

44. *ibid.*, p. 437.
45. *ibid.*
46. *ibid.*, p. 435.
47. *ibid.*
48. *ibid.*
49. *ibid.*, p. 436.
50. *Evidence*, RSPCA New South Wales, p. 332.  
*Evidence*, New South Wales Animal Welfare Advisory Council,  
p. 275.  
*Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 452.
51. *Evidence*, Equestrian Federation of Australia, p. 452.