

The USET Supports Six Equine Disciplines

BY MARK LLEWELLYN AND ROBIN STANBACK

DRESSAGE

The lithe athlete reaches the pinnacle of his performance—the tour de force. The dancer plants his supporting leg, creates momentum with the remainder of his body, and whirls effortlessly through a series of brilliant pirouettes. This is no ordinary dancer; this one weighs three-quarters of a ton. Despite the sheer bulk of the stallion, he is an inspiring mix of fluidity, pride, discipline, and energy. He masterfully blends artistic expression with athleticism. He is a Grand Prix dressage horse.

Dressage (the French word for training) focuses on the development of strength and flexibility of the horse with the ultimate goals of self-carriage and categorical harmony between horse and rider. Dressage horses are praised for freedom and regularity of gaits, impulsion or drive from the hindquarters, and submission or obedience. They are typically brought along slowly, advancing through levels of gymnastic difficulty and never moving to the next level until all required movements are mastered. The work demanded of dressage horses in lower levels provides the necessary foundation for the haute école (high school) or Grand Prix movements. The most difficult movements demanded of Grand Prix dressage horses are the piaffe, a trot in place; the passage, an elevated and cadenced trot; the pirouette, a movement in which a hind leg remains in one place but active as the horse maintains a three-beat canter circle; and tempi changes, or flying changes of lead every three strides, every other stride, or every stride. These movements require a rare medley of strength, confidence, and keenness, and only a sprinkling of horses possesses sufficient talent to be competitive in world-class competition.

In a dressage competition, the horse and rider perform a test (a prescribed pattern) that demonstrates the quality of gaits, suppleness, and attentiveness of the horse. One or more judges evaluate the test from a vantage point outside the arena. Each test is divided into a series of movements, and each movement is judged independently of other movements. The judge awards a score of 0 (not performed) to 10 (excellent) for each movement by comparing it to a standard of perfection. Even in Olympic competition, a score of 10 is uncommon. At the conclusion of the test, the scores of the individual movements are totaled and divided by the possible score, arriving at a percentage.

The Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) added the musical freestyle or Kür to the Olympic schedule in 1996. The Kür begins and ends like a traditional dressage test - halt at X or center ring. What happens between the halts is left to the rider and the choreographer. Riders and music aficionados may spend hours selecting music that complements the rhythm and tempo of a horse's gaits and sequencing movements to accentuate the animal's strengths while downplaying its imperfections. The Kür is not completely without rules; horses are required to perform certain movements and are prohibited from executing others. The addition of the Kür to dressage competitions has increased involvement in the sport and remains a favorite among spectators.

Maureen Pethick, Director of Dressage for the USET, believes the newly formed alliance between the USET and KER will benefit both organizations. "The sponsorship will significantly help us when we travel to various parts of the world as we will be ensured of high quality feed and supplements for our horses," she commented. Such consistent quality has been an element of international equine travel

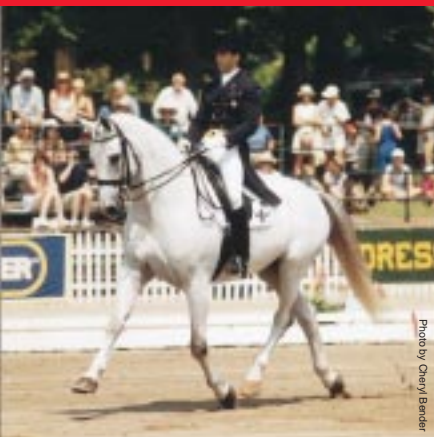


Photo by Cheryl Bender



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that has been hit-and-miss in the past. In addition, KER nutritionists will furnish USET riders, chefs d'équipe, and veterinarians with consummate equine nutrition and exercise physiology consultation. Reciprocally, Pethick asserts that KER will reap unprecedented exposure from its sponsorship of the USET, once again linking excellence with KER.

EVENTING

Riders in three-day event competitions must possess a combination of athletic ability and finesse akin to the human contestants in an Ironman triathlon. Their sport is a grueling one that requires a tremendous amount of stamina and skill. Their horses have to have those attributes and more, the indefinable attitude and chutzpah that horsemen refer to as heart.

Combined training or three-day eventing was recognized as a sport in the late 1940s, but its origins go back considerably further to military training exercises dating from centuries ago. It has evolved into an event comprised of three distinct tests. The first is the dressage test that requires the horse to demonstrate his ability to perform complicated movements in an enclosed arena. This segment of the competition illustrates the horse's ability to concentrate on performing the demands of his rider effortlessly. The training involved in this phase also provides conditioning that will prove essential for the subsequent tests. Each movement is scored, and the overall performance is taken into consideration. This is the only part of the three-day event that is scored subjectively by a panel of judges who total the marks given for each movement and then divide by the total possible score to arrive at a percentage.

The horses enter the second part of the three-day event with the first of four phases that test their stamina and athletic ability to the highest degree. This series of tests also challenges the rider physically and mentally, as he or she must pace the horse accordingly and know every nuance of the horse's athletic ability. The day begins with a

warm-up period known as roads and tracks in which the horses perform a brisk trot across a specific distance that can be up to two and one-half miles. This leads directly into the steeplechase phase where the horses are ridden at a strong gallop over a set of brush and rail fences. The third phase is another version of roads and tracks that allows the horse the opportunity to relax and recover from the steeplechase. Typically the pace is a bit slower. A ten-minute rest following the third phase allows the horse to be examined by a panel of veterinary experts to determine his level of fitness before he is allowed to continue on to the fourth and most demanding phase of the day's competition. The cross-country phase is comprised of a series of up to 36 fixed, solid obstacles that can be as high as four and one-half feet and as wide as eight feet. The course can cover a distance of up to four miles and must be completed in a set period of time. This series of tests pits the horse and rider against the clock, the obstacles, and exhaustion - a certain factor at the end of the day. Penalties are assigned for time faults, falls, and refusals.

The final day sees the competitors entering the show jumping arena in reverse order of standing. The winner may be determined by a single time fault incurred by the last horse to enter the arena. The show jumping test is designed to, in the words of the Fédération Equestre Internationale, "...demonstrate that, on the day after a severe test of endurance, the horses have retained the litheness, energy, and obedience necessary for them to continue in service." This test requires the horses to negotiate up to 15 obstacles of differing heights, widths, and difficulty within a specific amount of time. Penalty points are assigned for falls, refusals, knockdowns, and time faults. The final score is added to the horse's score for the first two days and the winner of the event is the horse with the lowest total score.

Jim Wolf has served the USET as the Team Leader for eventing since 1994. He maintains that this level of competitive effort requires a horse to be extremely fit, which



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Photo by James R. Vais



Photo by Cheryl Bender

demands a nutritional program that will support its efforts. Mr. Wolf stated, "The USET eventing riders will have the benefit of KER's many years of experience when developing and maintaining the nutritional program for their equine partners. They will also benefit from having the input of the KER staff when planning trips in regard to the logistics of shipping feed to various competition venues. KER's feed supplements are some of the best in the industry. It will be a great benefit to our riders to be able to supply their horses with these products while they are on USET tours. The USET represents excellence at the highest levels. KER has shown that it is a company that strives for excellence in the equine nutrition market."

E N D U R A N C E

There are few equine endeavors that better epitomize the unique connection between a rider and a horse than the sport of endurance riding, where a cohesive team must work together to cover long distances over sometimes grueling terrain. The sport may have had its beginnings in the Arabian deserts as nomads traveled the desolate land to find the nearest oasis.

To qualify as an endurance ride the distance covered must be at least 50 miles in one day. The most prestigious rides are 100 miles in length. The terrain can be any combination of mountain trails, deserts, forests, beaches, and even city streets. The only qualifications for the animals are that they be at least five years of age and fit. The horse and rider must follow the specified course and pass all vet checks and control points.

Fitness is a key ingredient and every endurance ride will have one or more veterinarians on hand to perform numerous checks of the horses throughout the ride. A veterinarian must check all horses within one hour of crossing the finish line. The horses are expected to reach a reasonable pulse recovery rate based on ambient conditions within 30 minutes of arrival time at all control points during the ride. Respiration rate is evaluated and the horse must be metabolically stable. Gait analysis must indicate that the horse is sound at the trot or an equivalent gait.

While each ride has a designated time in which a horse must complete the course, there is no minimum time. Excessive speed can mean stiff penalties for the riders if it is determined that they have overextended their horses. The goal is to pace the speed so that both the rider and the horse can complete the ride in good form. Riders are permitted to dismount and run alongside their horses if they deem it necessary. The goal for every race is to bring in all the competitors sound and within the time frame. The first horse and rider to cross the finish line and pass the veterinary inspection is the winner. An award is also given to the horse that is in the best condition and is as

highly coveted as the win itself.

The USET approved this discipline in 1993. Director of Endurance Mary Lutz has been with the USET almost as long. She has worked with dressage and driving teams and was the director of the endurance team in 1998 when USET riders won the individual gold medal and the team silver medals at the World Championships held in Dubai. She explained, "Because this sport is extremely taxing on the horses' reserves, the balance of proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals, especially selenium, is of paramount importance. These concerns are just one reason why the USET's association with KER is so fabulous. Dr. Pagan and his staff are available to answer questions and to support the riders' efforts."

Ms. Lutz stressed that endurance enthusiasts are research oriented and constantly look for competitive advantages. She stated, "KER can expect the endurance riders to provide a flood of requests for specific research projects. These ideas may help KER develop new products and learn new information about horses that will help equestrians throughout every discipline."

S H O W J U M P I N G

The chestnut gallops fearlessly toward the towering stone wall. Ears are pricked and eyes are intense — quintessential concentration. In a split second, the horse coils its loins, bunches its muscles, and thrusts off the ground, soaring over the obstacle. A hoof strikes the rail that tops the obstacle; it bounces, wobbles, and teeters but remains suspended in the shallow steel cups. The horse lands and charges through the timers. A clear round with no time penalties. Victory!

Show jumping combines speed and spirit, bravery and brawn, power and pure athleticism. Faced with a winding path punctuated by formidable and sometimes unforgiving obstacles, the show jumping horse must be willing to leap high and wide. No ordinary horse will do in the elite echelons of the sport - the Grand Prix events, the Olympic Games, and the World Championships.

The heart of any show jumping competition is the course. A professional course designer typically begins planning for a show jumping class months prior to the event. The designer is faced with a double-edge sword: he should challenge the horses and riders but not create a course that is unnecessarily difficult or unsafe. A course is composed of various obstacles, usually 15 to 20, that must be jumped in a particular order. Obstacles can usually be classified as one of the following: verticals, which test the horse's ability to jump high; oxers, which test the horse's ability to jump high and wide; walls, imposing, solid-appearing fences that will tumble easily when struck; water, a 12' to 16' broad jump with no significant height

C O M B I N E D D R I V I N G

element; and combinations, series of two or more fences with a limited number (one, two, or three, for instance) of strides between them. Fence heights range from approximately 4'3" to 5'6". Aside from the jumping efforts, course designers are mindful of striding questions and giving riders optional paths to the same fence.

As with other equine sports, show jumping is riddled with rules; however, a healthy dose of distillation yields this basic principle: jump clean and fast. Faults are awarded to horses that dislodge any part of an obstacle that lowers the original fence height. Such penalties are called knockdowns and each knockdown adds four faults to the final score. Disobediences constitute the other major faults and include refusal of a horse to negotiate an obstacle, circling on course when not specified by the course designer, and loss of forward motion. The first disobedience costs a horse three faults, and the second adds another six faults to the score. A third disobedience is cause for elimination, as is a fall of the horse or rider or deviation from the prescribed course. In addition to jumping faults, horses may accrue time penalties. The course designer sets a maximum time in which the course should be negotiated. If a rider

The USET's combined driving teams have been extremely successful in international competitions thanks in large part to their ability to combine athleticism with absolute accuracy - a unique feat when one considers the sport is similar to dancing a tango without ever being able to make physical contact with one's partner. The only communication between the driver and his horses comes from voice commands, hands on the lines, and cues with a whip.

Combined driving is a three-phase sport in which a driver and one or more horses must complete three days of very exacting tests that challenge their combined abilities to communicate, maneuver through obstacles, and stretch their physical strength to the limit. Drivers may compete in this test of skills with one horse, two horses called a pair, or four horses known as a four-in-hand or a team.

Whichever the combination of horses being driven, the competition begins with a dressage test that demonstrates suppleness and responsiveness. A set pattern is designed that provides the driver with the opportunity to display the rhythmic movement of his horse as well as the correct and

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lollygags, or “takes the scenic route” as jumper riders often call it, he will be penalized, usually one-quarter time fault for each second over the allotted time. Course designers typically assign generous maximal times in the first round. Horses that complete the first round without jumping faults or time penalties advance to the second round of competition, known as the jump-off. In this round, horses must jump an abbreviated course, not only against other competitors but also against the clock. Only the horse that accumulates the fewest faults in the least amount of time can claim triumph.

Sally Ike, the USET Director of Show Jumping Activities, stresses the importance of KER as the official equine nutritionist of the USET. She comments, “We expect the horses to be competitive, so we must provide them with consistent, high quality feeds no matter where they’re competing. If you put cheap gas in an expensive car, it’s not going to run well.” KER is one of only a handful of equine-related businesses that sponsors the USET. Ike, a member of the 1968 three-day eventing Olympic squad, finds the collaboration with KER particularly exciting because the work KER does “directly benefits the horses.”

accurate transition from one speed to the next. Emphasis is placed upon effortless transitions that seem to require little direction from the driver. Judges place subjective values on each movement, and a final score is tabulated by subtracting the entry's score from a perfect total score and multiplying the result by .80.

The next phase of competition involves the marathon, a taxing cross-country course with challenging obstacles. There are five divisions to the marathon, including three trotting sections separated by mandatory walks. The first trot is designed to warm the horses and allow them to develop a rhythm for the course. This is followed by a brisk walk and a short rest stop. A speed trot is the next part of the test, and it too is followed by a brief walking period and a ten-minute stop. Horses receive a veterinary inspection at this time, and the ground crews make a sweeping check of the harness and carriages before the teams continue on to the most grueling part of the event. The final part of the marathon section is a fast-trot cross-country course with natural and man-made obstacles that must be negotiated at speed. The term fast-trot is a misnomer, as the horses will often be travelling at a canter or gallop to make time through the course. As scores are based upon the

length of time spent in an obstacle, time is of the essence.

Like the stadium jumping phase of the three-day event, the cones course is the final phase of the combined driving test. The course is designed to demonstrate how well the horses have recovered from the physically and mentally strenuous marathon test. This challenge of precision driving and timing requires the drivers to steer their horses through a course of tightly spaced pairs of cones while staying within the time frame allotted to them. Each competitor's wheelbase is measured and then the sets of cones are placed so that each entry has the same wheel clearance. Every cone is topped by a ball that will topple should it be struck by horse or vehicle. Penalty points vary according to the degree of the fault. The winner of the event is the driver with the lowest score at the end of the competition.

Because of the difficult nature of competitive driving competitions, these equine athletes require a specific nutritional program designed to keep condition and stamina at optimum levels. Unlike other disciplines where the equine competitors are fairly similar, combined driving horses can range from ponies to warmbloods in size. This diversity could present an interesting challenge for equine nutritionists. Dr. Joe Pagan stated, "Designing a nutrition program for any active competitor requires looking at that animal's individual needs. KER has extensive experience in developing programs for every type of equine athlete. We will draw on this experience to help the wide variety of horses that compete in combined driving."

REINING

The newest member of the USET's stable of equine disciplines is reining, a sport designed to show the athletic ability of a ranch-type horse within the confines of a show ring. It is a twist on the equine ballet that is dressage, but it is similar in that there are distinct patterns that the horses are required to perform that include circles, lead changes, and displays of control. The differences between the two, however, are as distinct as the differences in the clothing worn by their respective riders and the tack carried by the horses.

Reining patterns include small slow circles, large fast circles, flying lead changes, rollbacks over the hocks, spins, and exciting sliding stops that are the hallmark of the sport. Judging an equine event that combines technical and stylistic elements with consideration for "degree of difficulty" is a challenge. The National Reining Horse Association (NRHA), the standard-setting body for the sport, has done well and their system is recognized as a leading format for many equine competitions.


Each horse is judged individually as it performs one of ten specific patterns. Judges score each horse between 0 and infinity, with 70 denoting an average score. Each horse



Photo by James R. Wares

begins the pattern with a score of 70 and points are added or subtracted in half point increments according to the judge's viewpoint. Up to 1½ points may be added or deducted for every maneuver. Penalties can be allocated for small deviations from the pattern; more serious errors can result in elimination. Credit is given for smoothness, finesse, attitude, quickness, and authority when performing the various maneuvers. The greater the degree of difficulty, the higher the score so that horses performing at a controlled but faster speed through a maneuver will receive a higher score.

Control is the key in reining. The NRHA, established in 1966, first defined the sport in its original handbook, stating "to rein a horse is not only to guide him, but to control his every movement." This vision of a powerful horse performing difficult movements at speed has captivated audiences and horsemen since the first competitions in the 1960s. The last decade proved to be the largest in growth for the NRHA that began the 1990s with 3,850 members and ended with 10,250 members worldwide. The number of approved shows grew from 100 in 1990 to 345 in 2000 when the sport became the first western discipline recognized by the USET.

Reining is a sport that is very strenuous for horses. Proper nutrition is essential to keep these athletes in their best condition, and consultation with Kentucky Equine Research should be of great value to trainers and riders. Wendy Wares-Cooke is the team leader for both reining and competitive driving. Ms. Wares-Cooke stated, "Although the equestrian sports of combined driving and reining could not be more dissimilar, proper nutrition for the equine athlete is important to both. I'm pleased that the USET and KER have joined together to help our equine athletes to become the best they can be. KER's research, guidance, and supplements will be valuable tools for our teams." 

The proof is in the performance.



These amateur riders received no remuneration for participating in this advertisement.

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Olympians David and Karen O'Connor have a discriminating eye for detail – a feature which has helped propel them to stardom in international three-day eventing circles. The O'Connors rely on Kentucky Equine Research supplements to achieve the highest caliber performances.

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A unique mix of antioxidants for horses experiencing muscle soreness and stiffness associated with exercise.

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A one-of-a-kind formulation that replaces essential electrolytes lost in the sweat of intensely worked horses.

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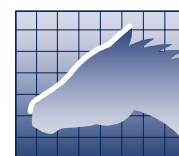
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