

Guide to the Veterinarians Role **At Endurance Rides**

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Introduction

In endurance riding the horse's welfare is paramount and is the foremost determining factor in assessing the horses fitness to remain in the competition.

At the end of each phase there is a compulsory halt for the veterinary inspection called a Vetgate, and a predetermined hold time to allow the horse to rest, eat and drink.

Each horse must be presented for examination within a set time after finishing each lap/loop. The veterinarian will check the horses' heart rate, gait and overall physical condition and assess its fitness to continue in the ride.

Horses that do not pass the vet checks within the stipulated time are eliminated from the race as being 'Not Fit to Continue'.

It has become a highly competitive and professional sport and the role of the veterinarian

is vital in allowing each combination to compete to the maximum of their ability while maintaining the welfare of the horse.

Who's Who

The welfare of the horse is paramount and all decisions should be based on this while trying to provide fair and equal opportunity for all competitors.

The ride is organised by the local club - OC (organising committee).

The TD (technical delegate) approves the track and facilities prior to the start of the ride and on the day the GJ (ground jury) officiate to ensure that the rules are complied with and the ride is run fairly.

The Veterinary Commission has a head Vet and the rest of the panel. At FEI sanctioned rides there is also a Foreign Vet on the panel. The Vets are responsible for the operation of the vet ring and to ensure all horses/riders have a fair and equal opportunity to complete the ride. Vets should ensure that they refer to the GJ any issues of concern such as horses in metabolic imbalance.

A treating vet should be available to assist out on the track and outside of the vet ring.

The Vetgate

The purpose of the Vetgate is to allow time to assess the horses "fitness to continue" and to enforce a compulsory rest time.

After the horse and rider cross the line at the end of the loop, they have 20 minutes to present to the vets with a heart rate (HR) of 64 or below for all loops except the final loop (finish line) when they have 30 minutes. The riding time does not stop until the point when the rider calls 'time' and presents to the vet.

In a competitive ride the horses will be presenting soon after crossing the line and will still be in recovery mode with the heart rate at 60 to 64. It is likely the horse will still be producing heat and lactic acid.

Count the HR over 15 seconds. If it is clearly going to be 64 or below then that is all that is required. If it is counting at above 64 after 15 seconds, then count out the whole minute. The HR is recorded in the logbook.

If the HR is over 64 then the rider and horse leave the vetting area and the ride time continues. In most rides they have one more chance to re-examine but there is no limit on the times they may represent under FEI Rules. The number of represents allowed is normally announced at the briefing.

Once the HR is taken and is 64 or below then the horse is trotted out. This should be about 40 metres and should take about 30 seconds to go back down and back.

The second HR for the cardiac recovery Index (CRI) is taken 60 seconds after the start of the trot.

The second HR (cardiac recovery Index) only needs to be taken over 15 seconds. It is an indicator of lack of recovery or of pain.

In a recovering horse the second count will usually be the same as the first or within 4 beats

A count of over 64 at the second HR is not cause for a Vet-out.

An increase of 8 or more from first HR to second HR is an indicator that something else may be amiss. It is recommended that horses with a CRI of 8 or more, but with everything else OK, should be asked to return to the Vet Gate for Requested re-Examination 15 minutes prior to the start time for the next leg of the ride.

This allows the horse time to fully recover and so be allowed to continue or allows time for it to become more clear as to why it had a poor CRI. eg. developing lameness, muscle tie-up.

While waiting from the end of the trot until the second CRI HR (about 30 seconds) the other parameters of the clinical examination can be assessed.

If they are not all checked in this time-frame then continue after taking the second HR. Try and be consistent in taking the second HR 60 seconds after the start of the trot out.

Parameters

Over recent years the parameters recorded during the examination of horse at the Vetgate have been refined. An attempt should be made to use objective measures such as time and description, rather than subjective gradings of A to C.

A number of indicators have been used in the past but do not really relate to any meaningful physiological change in the horse. These may still be in logbooks but are meaningless and do not need recording eg. anal tone, jugular pulse. In New Zealand respiration and temperature are not normally checked.

The following information should be recorded:

Heart rate

- counted over 15 seconds and multiplied by 4.
If the count is close to 64 bpm then count for the

full minute.

- Cardiac recovery Index (CRI) - a second count 1 minute after the horse has started a 30 second trot.
A rise of 8 or more is an indication that the horse has not yet fully recovered.
- Hydration (skin recoil) - measured in half seconds at the point of the shoulder.
- Capillary refill - measured in half seconds in the gums above the teeth.
- Mucous membranes - assess colour and moisture in the mouth and conjunctiva
A - pink, wet and glistening
B - pink and tacky
C - injected and tacky
D - injected and dry
- Heart Sounds - note any murmurs, especially pre-ride
- Gut Sounds (GIT) - listen to all 4 quadrants (2 upper OK if good motility)
N – normal activity
arrow up – a lot of activity
arrow down for occasional sounds
0 if no sounds over 30 seconds – horse should be asked to re-examine
- Back/Girth/Legs Assess if the gear is rubbing and causing pain or the rider's weight/style is causing a problem.
Look for redness or new hair loss.
Look for leg wounds, boot rubs or striking.
Palpate the back only using a flat hand (avoid using fingertips)
Record as N for normal or describe your findings.
Old injuries are of no concern if the horse trots sound.
It is not acceptable to flex a joint and it should

not be necessary to lift a leg

Lameness

- A - free even trot
- B - tied and occasional uneven stride
- C - assessed as lame and eliminated

Consistent lameness should be eliminated. Consistent does not mean it has to be every stride but it needs to be seen regularly.

A rule of thumb is to ask yourself “is the horse lame enough to be able to perform a nerve block and be able to see an improvement.”

It is important to differentiate between unusual or tied gaits and actual lameness. At the pre-ride it is useful to note any unusual gaits.

If you see a lameness at the trot then complete the examination but inform the rider that you will be re-trotting the horse.

The horse is then re-trotted with 3 vets watching.

They independently vote “pass/fail” without discussion and hand the voting paper to the GJ member who tells the rider the result.

The Vetbook

Fill in the Vet Card and assume that someone else may see the horse next time so they should be able to understand the picture of the horse that you have just seen.

For elimination’s the reason should be written in the logbook. It is useful for developing the history of the horse to note which leg was lame. Do not make a diagnosis. The FEI recommended terms for failure to complete are attached.

The Metabolic Picture

The metabolic parameters are a part of building up a picture of the horses’ physiological state. Heart rate and lameness are reasons for elimination. The other parameters on their own are not but build a picture of the whole horse.

If all parameters are rising (3’s and C’s) then there must be concern for the horse.

Consider:

- 1 How quickly has the horse ‘vetted in’.
- 2 What is the riding speed of the horse.

3 What stage of the ride is it at. How long is the next leg.

A horse should not be vetted out on metabolic grounds at the initial examination into the vetgate unless its condition is severe. Horses showing signs of excessive fatigue, heat load, thumps, colic, myopathies or dehydration must be eliminated.

If in doubt then allow the horse its rest time and call it back to the vet gate for a Requested Recovery-examination before departure onto the next leg. Consider its improvement over the rest time and discuss with the rider how the horse has been and if it is eating and drinking.

If there is still concern then you may elect to have three vets examine the horse and vote pass or fail on metabolic grounds.

At re-examinations, competitive experienced riders may warm their horses up before presenting. This may mean that HR is high but the CRI should still work. A HR of over 64 at this stage is not a reason for elimination but it may indicate a horse that has not really recovered in the hold time, especially if the CRI is elevated.

When vetting a horse out on metabolic grounds consultation with the Ground Jury is strongly advised.

Note: The suspension level vet out level of 70 beat per minute has been removed from the rule book. This allows veterinarians to look at the whole metabolic picture rather than a single parameter. If the HR is 70 it may trigger concern, but if all other parameters are fine, follow the above recommendations.

Recovery Examinations

In longer distant rides this is being used more and more and 3 star rides now have a Compulsory Recovery examination during at least one hold-time.

It should be conducted about 15 minutes before the horse is due out on the next loop.

The Vet commission should announce before the ride if it is to be done with or without the saddle. It is often easier to assess the horse without the saddle.

A full examination including the CRI should be carried out. A HR of over 64 is not an automatic elimination but cause for a close look at the overall metabolics

Variations and Tips

The vet-in time from crossing the line until presenting to the vet is now 20 minutes at the vet gates and 30 minutes at the end of the ride. The Ground Jury in consultation with the Veterinary Commission may vary this depending upon the conditions of the ride. The HR for all rides is now 64.

When voting on a trot-up a vet can vote 're-trot' if it is difficult to clearly assess the gait. This can only be done once. At the third trot (one for the lane vet, one for

the three vet panel and then requested for a third giving the benefit of the doubt to the competitor), but if the three vet panel is still unable to conclude based on three attempts (one by the original examining veterinarian and twice by the panel) that the horse is fit to continue, whether it is because of a presentation failure or according to veterinary criteria, the horse will be eliminated.

The Final Inspection is to determine whether the horse is still fit to continue, to be ridden after a normal rest period for another full phase and it will be performed in the same manner as previous inspections with the same control and criteria as the inspections during the course with the exception that only one opportunity to qualify for presentation is allowed. Each horse shall also be checked against its vet card.

Ensure the vet writers understand your decision. Make sure the log books do not have an A for gait and impulsion when the horse has vetted out lame.

At the end of the ride, the heart rate must be 64 or under within 30 minutes.
Elimination (vet out) - the reason should be recorded in the logbook eg: lameness, metabolic, etc See below for FEI terminology.

At the pre-ride inspection it is not necessary to do a second heart rate or a CRI.

At the end of the ride it is a good idea for three vets to vote on the first trot-out, at least for the place getters.

If a lot of horses call time at once then one vet should drop back and just do HR's as they call time. If there is a shortage of vets then a GJ member may do this but a vet should do the count if the GJ member gets a count of over 64.

Avoid clinically examining horses outside of the Vet ring.

If they need medical attention, eg. tendon injury, and the treating vet is not available then it is acceptable to provide first aid.

If the rider wants a diagnostic lameness examination then suggest they see their own vet at a later date.

The Head Vet should liaise with the OC to have arrangements in place to refer medical cases to a local practice.

Behaviour in the Vet Ring

The Ground Jury control the vet ring. The Vetgate Steward manages the order of vetting, directs the competitor to the vet lane and manages disputes. Competitors are expected to behave with decorum but occasionally under the stress of competition they do not. Unless this behaviour continues it can be overlooked. But any serious misbehaviour by competitors or their supporters should be reported to the Ground Jury.

Only the rider and their strappers should enter the vet ring. Friends and other supporters should remain as spectators.

Conflicts of interest: If you have a conflict of interest, for example, a family member participating you should declare this.

Other Resources

Web sites - FEI - www.horsesport.org

Endurance – Rules – Rulebook

Veterinary – Rules – vet regs and annexes

Equestrian Sport New Zealand - www.nzequestrian.org.nz

EBNZVA publication – Veterinarians Officiating at Equestrian Events
The Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinarians (Veterinary Council of New Zealand)

The FEI

This body is based in Switzerland and administers equestrian sports worldwide. New Zealand has adopted the FEI Rules for Endurance so all our rides are run under these rules but not all our rides are officially sanctioned by the FEI in their annual calendar.

The FEI runs a registry of Endurance Veterinarians and gives each Vet a star rating.

To become an FEI Veterinarian you need to be proposed by Endurance New Zealand, and to have attended an Official FEI Seminar for Endurance Veterinarians. You will need to have officiated at Nationals rides or observed at FEI rides, ideally initially, working beside current FEI Vets. The criteria are listed on the FEI website under Star Rating of Endurance Officials

Endurance New Zealand hopes to keep a New Zealand register so that New Zealand Vets ride history is recorded and can be used to help them attain an international star rating.

Dictionary of Terms for non completions

NEW TERMS ADDED by FEI

la – this is to be used when a horse is eliminated due to lameness reasons

me - This is to be used when a horse is eliminated for metabolic reasons but receives no veterinary treatment. This could be due to a high heart rate, or any other metabolic reason

tr - This is to be used if a horse has been eliminated for metabolic reasons and has received veterinary treatment.

ret - This is to be used when a horse passes the veterinary check at a vet gate but the rider chooses not to leave onto the following loop. A horse/rider can only retire at a vet gate and only if they have passed all veterinary checks at the specific vet gate

el --This is to be used when a rider is eliminated perhaps due to error of course, or if the rider weighs under weight when arriving at a vet gate etc.

pr – This is to be used if the horse fails the Pre-Ride veterinary examination.

ab– This is to be used if the whole event is abandoned, perhaps due to severe weather conditions.

np– This is to be used when a horse/rider makes an entry but fails to turn up for the ride.

dis– This is to be used if a rider is disqualified, perhaps due to abuse of an official or due to horse cruelty etc.

If a horse or rider stops or is stopped on course it must be marked as elimination at the following vet gate as the horse has failed to complete the next loop. Please provide details as to why the combination have failed to reach the next vet gate.

For example, if a horse falls on the course on the second loop and is lame following the fall and stops, it must be marked at 'el-la' at the third vet gate.

If the horse is stopped by the vets on loop 4 as it is too tired to continue, and the horse receives treatment, it must be marked as 'el-tr' at the fourth vet gate.

If a horse is eliminated for more than one reason, ie the horse is lame and also has metabolic problems then all causes of elimination should be marked ie la/me or la/tr

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