



Jumping Tips

A WEEK IN TRAINING

By Paul Darragh, in association with Club55

A horse's working week consists of six days and not seven, as I rest them usually the day after the show. This rest day will preferably include a hand walk or free in grass paddock. I dislike horses being left in their stalls for forty-eight hours. And while it is probably a good and necessary practice for the horses to have this included in their program, in Europe we depend to a very large extent on girls in the grooming profession. If their day off was during the weekend, their shopping capabilities would be reduced, and so we find it a popular choice to allow them that day off during the normal working week. Further, as we normally show through our weekends, it would be impractical to be without a full compliment of staff at the most crucial time -competition. This is the examination of how we have studied (our training/schooling). In the case of Egypt, I imagine that this easy day would be Saturday, as Friday is your primary rest or sports day, or Sunday in case of a two day show.

Sunday

This is the first training day of the week, and I prefer not to jump the day after rest. A fit horse will probably be a bit above himself and play around, so for this I concentrate on my jumping dressage routine, followed by a hack out the farm, or even a mild canter on the gallops. In the afternoon, a forty five minute exercise program on the walker, which includes walk and trot, reversing direction at regular intervals.

Alternatively, the treadmill. These machines will be included in the program every day.

Monday

Day two, I like to dedicate to again my jumping dressage routine, followed by some gentle gymnastic exercises, normally in the form of a line or a grid. A typical grid for me would comprise of two to three trot poles, at about 2.7 m to a cross pole, 3 m to a bounce, 6 m to a vertical, 6.5 m to an oxer, 6.75 m to a vertical, 6 m to another vertical and perhaps 9.5 m to a final oxer. Finishing with a three minute 'trot down' on a loose rein for the horses muscles.

Tuesday

Day three, I like to take their minds away from the artificial environment of the indoor and outdoor maneges. Either myself or my groom will take the horse out across the farm trotting and cantering on the lanes and gallops. In a nice, but free manner with an appropriate outline. I dislike "draw reins" as I believe them to be extremely difficult to use properly. So if a horse will need a device with a groom riding, I will use a loose Gogue.

Club55

A New World Of Exclusivity

Wednesday

Day four is realistically my last jumping opportunity prior to the show day, as I prefer not to jump the day before a show, to avoid injury, strain or just fatigue. So after doing my flat routine to ensure that the horse is properly warmed up, I will have a small course of seven to eight fences, to include a combination and a double, with related distances and broken lines. I rarely jump too high, but with my open jumpers, probably not more than 1.35 m. I am really looking for them to be confident, careful and rideable.

Thursday

Day five, particularly after the course jumping of the previous day, I will again concentrate on my jumping dressage to make sure none of the 'nuts and bolts' have been loosened. Weather permitting, a short hack around the farm, maybe a little open canter on the gallops.

Friday

Day six and show time! If stabled away from home I will take them out early in the morning to 'take the top' off them to encourage them to be more concentrated for the competition. If they are shipping the same day, the journey will probably do that. I always allow enough time to warm up, which is going through the same routine I do at home prior to beginning my jumping preparation. From experience, this will take about twenty five minutes, plus eight more for jumping warm up, two walking for recuperation of the breathing and then bingo - we are in the ring.

I find it useful to use a routine - you will know how long it takes, which helps to calculate the time to start your warm up, simply by working out the time it takes for one horse to complete the course and dividing that into say 40 minutes - e.g. 3 minutes per horse = approximately 14 horses before.

One of the most important activities that we have to do on show day is, walk the course. I have always found that I tend to walk a course with the horse I am riding very much in mind. His peculiarities, his stride length, his abilities over certain technical difficulties and fences, such as a water tray etc..

When I eventually find the first fence, amongst the maze of fence material on display, I will take a moment to plan my route from the in gate to the first fence, including my salute. This is an important strategy to ensure that under pressure, I do not put myself in an awkward position to approach it. Remember that one must get a fluent, rhythmical and forward approach to the first fence, and when one does, the rest seem to come up smoothly. The reverse, a choppy beginning (to what is today just a series of related distances), the good course designers will punish for this offence, often by the third or fourth obstacle.

When I have decided on my stride patterns, I will put them in my personal computer - the brain - perhaps walk some of the distances again, especially those that I may have a slight doubt about and in a jump off class, walk the jump off. This is very important, as often the designer will leave out a part of a combination, originally on a related distance which can change everything for the rider. So to avoid 'hit and miss' situations, always walk the jump off course - walk the lines, see the turns from inside the ring, not from the stand !

Last but not least, I will take note of the time allowed and try to compare this with the early competitors to know if it is generous or short.

My warm up routine is very much related to my jumping dressage routine at home. I try to do this religiously, knowing from experience how prepared my horse is for the tasks I am about to ask of him. In general, I do not jump too many, or too big. Remember, it is a limbering up, not a training. Quite often, I notice riders doing too much outside - leaving the class in the 'warm up' ! The training is done during the week, not five minutes before your performance. I detest to see riders trying to 'catch' their horses before they go in. For me, it is a cheap shot and shows that the correct preparation has not been done at home. I really admire those that do a sympathetic warm up and allow their partners a few minutes to recuperate before entering the ring. These are generally horsemen. And eventually, the winners. "