

To Whom it may concern.

January 2018

Following extensive discussion and consultation, this group of in excess of 7,000 people would request that the F.E.I. as the ruling body of horse sport internationally please read and act upon the following statement:

Over a decade ago the equestrian world began to raise concern about methods of training competition horses, particularly but not exclusively dressage horses, that deviated from classical principles. Although international rules for dressage, as laid down by the F.E.I., work extensively with the classical systems, it became apparent that people were achieving success on the world stage using methods that caused many observers to raise questions, particularly in relationship to horse welfare.

The F.E.I. began to address the concerns. Various meetings were held and press releases published. Terminology was established and rules were developed.

Over the following ten years further meetings produced changes in terminology and adaptation of rules. Further Guidelines and training for officials was instigated and is ongoing. (See annex A)

The F.E.I. as the International Governing Body clearly has to consider all stakeholders when making rules and must work consistently for the ongoing development of equestrian sport, as well as upholding their self proclaimed remit: ***to ensure the welfare and humane treatment of horses at FEI competitions, including the training areas and stables is paramount.***

Whilst this remit is commendable, it is imperative that it is recognised that F.E.I. competitions, as the pinnacle of competitive achievement, have a huge influence on the welfare and treatment of horses globally.

With the objectives and influences of the F.E.I. in mind it is critical that the following facts remain to the fore when considering further development and adaptation of rules:

- The ongoing status of "Olympic sport" for equestrianism is not at all secure. The ever increasing disquiet within the viewing public, who have ever increasing access to knowledge, and ability to share their thoughts, will become a huge influence on the longevity of top level competition.
- Practitioners of non classical training methods not only influence other trainers and riders by demonstration both in public at competitions and in their results, but also in their teaching. Many top competitors either have to teach to earn a living or teach through popularity based on performance results. Many of the pupils of top riders also in their turn teach, so a cascade system clearly exists. Sadly the lower down the cascade generally there is less quality horse power and far less rider skill.
- Ambiguity in rules defining acceptable practice allows for misinterpretation and facilitates extremists who either through opinion, evidence based knowledge or personal frustration wish to influence as larger audience as possible.

We would therefore ask the F.E.I. to implement the following actions:

- **Through ongoing education more clearly define the difference between forced hyperflexion and classical training systems and their influence on the quality of performance and on the longevity and the well being of the horse. (See Annex B & C)**
- **Remove all ambiguity from rules and guidelines to eradicate the use of forced hyperflexion both in training and in competition.**

Annex A

In 2006 a statement from the FEI read:

"A most productive workshop was held on 31 January 2006 at the Olympic Museum and jointly organised by the Dressage and Veterinary Committees. The point of this meeting is to reassure the "Dressage Community" that the controversial issue of "Rollkur" (overbending) is being addressed by highly experienced experts from the equine world. The workshop included presentations and reports on this controversial training technique and its possible side-effects that may affect the welfare of the horse. It also included a review of the need for applied research.

Approximately 60 participants, including riders, trainers, stewards, veterinarians, and members of the Dressage, Veterinary Committees and Welfare Sub-Committee attended the workshop.

*Further to presentations of different preliminary research projects in the field of exercise physiology, radiology, biomechanics and schooling, the meeting reached the preliminary conclusion that, when applied by skilled trainers, there was no scientific evidence that this training method was abusive to the horse. There was no clear evidence that structural damage is created by this training exercise, when used in the right way by expert riders. **However, the use of that technique by inexperienced people was a possible threat to the welfare of the horse. The role of top dressage riders as role models in the sport was underlined.***

Most of the participants agreed that the terminology "Rollkur" was not comprehensible and decided it would be better to use a term which could be understood by riders, trainers and the general public. After an extensive discussion, it was proposed that the draft wording might be "hyperflexion of the neck" and a draft definition to this was established as follows:

Hyperflexion of the neck is a technique of working/training to provide a degree of longitudinal flexion of the mid-region of the neck. Hyperflexion cannot be self-maintained by the horse for an extended period of time.

As far as the FEI is concerned, the welfare and humane treatment of horses at FEI competitions, including the training areas and stables is paramount."

On the 8th February 2010, the FEI published:

"Following constructive debate at the FEI round-table conference at the IOC Headquarters in Lausanne today (9 February), the consensus of the group was that any head and neck position of the horse achieved through aggressive force is not acceptable. The group redefined hyperflexion/Rollkur as flexion of the horse's neck achieved through aggressive force, which is therefore unacceptable. The technique known as Long, Deep and Round (LDR), which achieves flexion without undue force, is acceptable.

The group unanimously agreed that any form of aggressive riding must be sanctioned. The FEI will establish a working group, headed by Dressage Committee Chair Frank Kemperman, to expand the current guidelines for stewards to facilitate the implementation of this policy. The group agreed that no changes are required to the current FEI Rules.

The FEI Management is currently studying a range of additional measures, including the use of closed circuit television for warm-up arenas at selected shows.

The group also emphasized that the main responsibility for the welfare of the horse rests with the rider.

The FEI President HRH Princess Haya accepted a petition of 41,000 signatories against Rollkur presented by Dr Gerd Heuschman."

The Stewards manual and subsequent Annexe was updated to read:

“Page 26

In case of abuse or maltreat: no excuse

Where there is an abuse or ill-treatment of horse: act immediately with discretion and tact; Immediately put a stop to the abuse and explain to the rider the reason for the intervention; Inform the President of the Ground Jury of the incident and of the action taken; Draw the attention of the Treating Veterinarian (define exactly the circumstances) to the incident (injuries, irregular breathing, excessive sweating, general health problems); Carry out the decision of the President of the Ground Jury. The Steward must understand the difference between “abuse” and “correction”. The Steward must be able to go into the schooling area and stop rough riding, rough and discourteous behavior. Always immediately act in cases of exaggerated sweating, irregular breathing (take into account the weather conditions). Always immediately act in case of overriding, signs of exhaustion (if necessary ask the assistance of the Treating Veterinarian). Long, deep and round riding is accepted, unless used excessively or prolonged (hyperflexion of the neck). There is a danger when copied by unskilled riders. There is a fine line between training and overtraining!”

FEI Manual for Dressage Stewards – Annexes I-XIII

The manual has undergone a number of iterations, the wording remains the same and additional elements have been included:

“Edition 2009 – Updated 18.08.2016.

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ANNEX XIII – NEW. PRE AND POST COMPETITION TRAINING TECHNIQUES Pre and Post Competition training techniques – position of the horse’s head – stretching”

This section includes a number of diagrams to help the steward understand different stretching techniques including, on page 29;

“Extreme flexion In assessing the position of the head carriage the Steward will be mindful of each horse’s natural conformation, especially in relation to native breeds or ponies, and will therefore use discretion in determining this.

Deliberate extreme flexions of the neck involving either high, low or lateral head carriages, should only be performed for very short periods. If performed for longer periods the steward will intervene.

*Movements which involve having the horse’s head and neck carriage in a sustained or fixed position should only be performed for periods **not exceeding approximately ten minutes without change**. Change may constitute a period of relaxation and lengthening or a movement which involves stretching the head and the neck of the horse.*

It is the steward’s responsibility to ensure that riders respect the above procedure and intervene if required.”

Annex B

Statement from The Fellows of the British Horse Society.

The Fellows of the British Horse Society are opposed to all forms of training of horses that involve sustained force. All Fellows promote ethical and humane training methods and would wish to promote greater understanding of the implications of the position of the head and neck in the performance horse.

Full Statement:

Currently there is much discussion on the head carriage of horses in competition, with many people being critical of all horses who appear “Behind the vertical”

The Fellows of the BHS would support the following:

- There are a variety of reasons why at any moment in time a horse may appear behind the vertical, some are natural, others are manmade, and some a combination of both.

Common Natural reasons are: Conformation, strength, lack of energy, state of balance, adrenaline and instinctive tension. (Horses loose in the field will often appear behind the vertical for these reasons)

Common Manmade reasons are: restrictive riding, incorrect biting, poor training philosophy and a lack of control.

These often combine, for example a well trained and well ridden horse in a new environment may temporarily feel insecure, produce adrenaline and become a potential danger causing the rider to become restrictive to maintain control and stay safe.

- Training horses is about improving, developing and sometimes changing the horses natural balance. Throughout this process different horses of varying conformation types and temperaments will alter the degree to which they instinctively use their heads and necks to find their balance, causing a variation in the angle of head carriage. Some horses at times are more comfortable with the nose slightly behind the vertical.
- The trained horse, for maximum marks, must, amongst many other facets, maintain an outline that, based on the suppleness of the back and active engagement of the hind quarters, remains in front of the vertical. This element of performance, like many other facets of the desired end result, can at times be less than excellent, hence contributing to marks of less than 10.
- If it were possible for all the required elements of performance to be trained and ridden to a point of excellence, whereby all horses could gain a “10” for all movements, there would be no point in competing. It is the variation in rider skills and the degree of the horses confidence and training that produces the placings in a competition.

Horses who are repeatedly restricted by being forced to work clearly behind the vertical, either ridden or on the lunge, often with a very shortened and low position of the neck and with little relationship to the way the horse works as a whole, by people ignorant or uncaring of the physical and mental damage caused **ARE BEING TRAINED IN AN UNACCEPTABLE MANNER THAT SHOULD BE CONDEMNED BY ALL EQUINE SPORTS NATIONAL GOVERNING BODIES.**

These horses are frequently unhappy and tense, working with an unnatural way of going that produces physical stress and damage resulting in a shortened useful life.

Judges, Stewards and other officials receive training towards being able to clearly understand the correct training of horses. The Fellows of the British Horse Society would encourage all Governing bodies to include L.D.R. and its implications in all future seminars.

It is vital that all other interested parties, prior to condemning and criticising, have a clear understanding of the classical training of horses, and therefore do not react to evidence of superficial symptoms seen in a moment of time.

Annex C

"In 2015, at the 11th International Society of Equitation Science (ISES) Conference, held in Vancouver, the results were presented of a review of 55 scientific articles dealing with the effects of head and neck position on various types of horses' welfare and/or performance. The review was carried out by Uta Koenig von Borstel, PhD, BSc, a professor at the University of Gottingen's Department of Animal Breeding and Genetics in Germany, and Paul McGreevy, BVSc, PhD, MRCVS, MACVS (Animal Welfare), Cert CABQ, animal behaviour and welfare science professor at the University of Sydney.

The review authors concluded that although some hyperflexion can lead to more expressive movements "the presumed gymnastic benefits are by far outweighed by both reduced equine welfare and undesired gymnastic effects."

88% of these studies indicated that hyperflexion negatively impacts welfare via airway obstruction, pathological changes in the neck structure, impaired forward vision, and stress and pain due to confusion caused by conflicting signals and the inability to escape pressure."