The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses and Ponies at Events

The British Horse Society











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The British Horse Society Guidelines for the Welfare of Horses and Ponies at Events

1 Preface

1.1 In these guidelines,"horse" refers to all equidae and should, where the context allows, be taken to mean"horse or horses".

2 Introduction

2.1 The British Horse Society Welfare Department receives a considerable number of welfare concerns regarding the conduct of competitors at shows. The main complaints received include the ill-treatment and management of competitors' horses. The governing bodies of the various equestrian disciplines have their own rules and guidelines regarding equine welfare. However, there has previously been no consistent framework for the organisers and competitors of local shows to adhere to.

2.2 These guidelines have been produced to provide advice, support and information to competitors, show organisers, stewards, judges, volunteer assistants and spectators.

Where a show (whether it be affiliated or unaffiliated) is run under the rules of a governing body, there may be differences between the rules of that discipline and the contents of this Code.

An example of this is that certain governing bodies place restrictions on the age of horses that may attend shows and these restrictions differ from the recommendations included here. Likewise, the governing body of a particular discipline is likely to have their own rules pertaining to the use of tack and equipment such as whips and spurs.
In all cases where there are differences between the rules of a governing body and the guidelines contained within this Code of Practice, the rules of the governing body take precedence and supersede this Code. However, in all cases the welfare of horses at events should remain paramount at all times.

2.3 On show schedules, show organisers are welcome to add that 'the show will be held in accordance withThe British Horse Society Guidelines for theWelfare of Horses and Ponies at Events'. Copies of the guidelines are available fromThe British Horse Society (www.bhs.org.uk) or a paper copy will be supplied by the BHS upon request.

2.4 Under the Animal Welfare Act (2006) and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 (hereafter referred to as "The Welfare Acts"), every horse owner, or those responsible for a horse, has a 'duty of care' to ensure the animal's well-being. Thus, causing suffering and ill-treatment are no longer the only grounds for prosecution under animal welfare law. It is now an offence to fail to take adequate steps to ensure a horse's welfare, even if the animal is not yet at the point of suffering.

2.5 The spread of equine disease is a perpetual risk when attending shows.Horse owners should act responsibly and not attend a show if there is a disease outbreak at their yard, even if the horse taken to the show does not appear ill.

2.6 Strangles, in particular, is a highly contagious equine disease. Horse owners should take simple steps to help reduce the spread of this disease. All horse owners and show staff are encouraged to read the 'Strategy To Eradicate and Prevent Strangles (STEPS)', available from the BHS Welfare Department.

3 Transport

3.1 Competitors need to be aware of The Welfare of Animals During Transport Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005. Anyone who transports horses over 65km and for up to eight hours in connection with an economic activity needs to apply for a Transporter Authorisation and have a Certificate of Competence.

3.2 Economic activity is not defined in the Regulations but would include those paid to transport horses to a show, and professional riders as this is part of their business. Those transporting horses in connection with an economic activity on short journeys (over 65km and up to eight hours) require Transporter Authorisation (from 5 January 2007) and a Certificate of Competence (from January 2008). Long journeys (more than eight hours) will require a long journey Transporter Authorisation and Certificate of Competence. An owner competing their horse for fun would not be covered by these requirements, even if they win a small amount of prize money.

3.3 General animal welfare provisions apply on **all** journeys. The horse must be fit to travel, provided with feed, water and rest stops as needed. The vehicle and loading/unloading facilities must be safe and designed to avoid injury and those handling the horse must be competent and not cause the animal unnecessary fear or distress.

4 Passports

4.1 Horses being transported to a show must be accompanied by their passport.

4.2 Competitors hacking horses to a local show are also advised to take the horse's passport.

4.3 Show organisers may request that horses attending the show are vaccinated against tetanus and influenza and may therefore wish to check the horse's passport.

5 Welfare of Horses

5.1 Responsibilities of Owners/Keepers/Competitors

5.1.1 Overall responsibility for the horse lies with the individual who has charge of the animal on the day of the show. This may not be the animal's owner. However, all of those involved with the horse have a duty of care to ensure its welfare.

5.1.2 No horse should be ill-treated in any way on the showground.

5.2 Provision of Feed and Water

5.2.1 The horse should be offered water regularly throughout the day but not immediately prior to a class. Water should be offered more frequently during hot weather. Some horses prefer to drink water only from their own yard. It is therefore a good idea to bring water from the yard in containers to prevent the horse from becoming dehydrated.

5.2.2 The horse should not be offered ice-cold water to drink.

5.2.3 Long intervals between classes can mean horses waiting for long periods for their next class. Allowing the horse to graze in-hand and/or providing hay/haylage will help keep the horse occupied, prevent it from becoming bored and help to maintain a healthy gut.

5.2.4 If a horse is being allowed to graze, ensure that there are no poisonous plants or rubbish that it could accidentally consume.

5.2.5 If a horse is tied-up to graze, it should be supervised. The lead-rein used to secure the horse must not be too long, potentially allowing the horse to become tangled up and panic.

5.2.6 If a concentrate feed is provided, the horse should not be asked to work strenuously for a minimum of one hour after completing the meal. Concentrate feeds should not be provided to a horse immediately following strenuous exercise.

5.3 Welfare of the horse while not competing

5.3.1 No horse should be left unattended unless they are in the horsebox/trailer, and known to behave sensibly when ordinarily left in such a situation.

5.3.2 For safety reasons a horse should only be tied to a horsebox/trailer if it can be quickly and safely released in the event of an emergency, or the animal becoming distressed.

5.3.3 Horses should not be tethered on the showground.

5.3.4 The weather conditions will affect the welfare requirements of the horse. In hot weather use any shade available to keep the horse out of direct sunlight.

5.3.5 Once the horse has finished competing in its class it may need to be washed down. Appropriate rugs may also be needed, for example a sweat rug or cooler rug.

5.3.6 During cold weather, heavier, warm rugs may be needed, especially if the horse is clipped.

5.3.7 During wet weather, waterproof sheets could be worn while warming the horse up and kept over the horse's hindquarters until they enter the class.

5.3.8 During hot weather, plenty of water should be available to wash down a hot horse. If there is access to shade, keep the horse in that area and begin washing the horse down with cold water. Packs of ice should not be used to cool the horse.

5.3.9 During summer weather, horseboxes and trailers can get very hot. If the horse is kept in the horsebox/trailer ensure any windows and roof vents are left open and the ramps are left down to maximise air flow (ramp side gates should be kept closed).

5.3.10 Competitors who hack to the show should have made prior arrangements if the horse is competing in classes for much of the day, or is likely to be there for more than two hours. Water, hay, additional tack and/or equipment should either be taken to the site before the show or arrangements made for them to be taken to the showground during the day of competition.

5.3.11 No horse should be ridden all day without sufficient breaks, watering and feeding.Children should be supervised by a responsible adult to ensure that the horse receives adequate rest time.

5.4 Stabling

5.4.1 Under no circumstances should any horse be kept stabled in a trailer or horsebox overnight. Prior arrangements should have been made if stabling is required. In the event of an emergency, show organisers may be able to assist the competitor in finding suitable stabling in the area.

5.5 Age and Gender of Horses

5.5.1 Horses under four years of age should not be ridden on the showground.

5.5.2 Mares shown with their foals should be kept in a quiet area of the showground. Ideally, there should be a minimum of three competent individuals accompanying a mare and foal to a show. Once in the class there should be one handler for the mare and one handler for the foal, unless otherwise specified by the show organiser.

5.5.3 Young horses are often taken to shows to gain experience and to take in the show atmosphere without entering any of the show's classes. Handlers should ensure that such horses do not get in the way of competitors, especially if they are having difficulties controlling the horse.

5.5.4 Stallions may not be permitted to attend the show. It is the competitor's responsibility to check individual show rules.

5.5.5 Veteran horses must be in good health and condition, and fit enough to cope with the demands of the show day (including travel to and from the venue).

5.5.6 Pregnant mares should not be permitted to compete under saddle without the prior agreement of a veterinary surgeon. No mare should be ridden under any circumstances after six months of gestation. Mares with a foal at foot should never be ridden at any show.

5.6 Control of Horses

5.6.1 Young horses will require quiet, confident handling. The show atmosphere may prove to be of great excitement for the young, inexperienced horse. Shouting and hitting the horse in most circumstances will make the situation worse and could be classed as excessive use of the whip (see Discipline of the Horse).

5.6.2 Young horses should preferably be accompanied to the show by an older, known experienced horse from which to gain confidence. To ensure the safety and welfare of both the horse and handler it would be a good idea to also have an assistant to help in getting the young horse ready and when entering into the show ring.

5.6.3 Horses often build strong bonds with other horses. Thus, some animals may become distressed/upset should accompanying horses leave their field of vision. A distressed horse may become a danger to its handler and other competitors. Where there is a danger of this occurring, trial separations should be carried out in the safer home environment before the animals are taken to a show.

5.6.4 It is good practice to lead horses using a bridle as the bit affords the handler more control than a headcollar alone. Horses whose behaviour is unpredictable, or animals to which the handler is not accustomed, should always be led in a bridle.

5.6.5 Horses that are known to kick should have a red ribbon displayed in their tail to warn other competitors.

5.6.6 If stallions are permitted at the show, they should be handled and ridden by experienced persons only. The temperament of the stallion must be taken into consideration and he should not be taken to a showground if he is likely to be a danger to anyone present. When being led, stallions must be led from a bit with reins or with a lead rein of a minimum of 2.5 metres in length. If it is the opinion of the show staff that the stallion may cause an accident to any person or horse at the showground, the stallion will be disqualified and asked to leave the showground. Any appeals should be made to the show secretary/ organiser once the horse has been safely loaded.

6 Conduct and Responsibilities of Competitors

6.1 Competitors must consider the Health and Safety of other competitors, spectators and those working or assisting at the show.

6.2 When riding outside of the warm-up arena and show arena, competitors should remain in walk or trot, even if they are running late for a class. Cantering or galloping past other competitors' horses may cause these horses to react and lead to injury to a horse or rider.

6.3 No competitor should behave in an aggressive or offensive manner.

6.4 By entering a class at the show, the competitor has agreed to abide by the rules and guidelines set by the show organisers.

6.5 Under Welfare Acts the parents/guardians of under 16-year-olds are responsible for the welfare of their children's animals.

6.1 Conduct and Responsibilities of Competitors in the Warm-up Arena

6.1.1 Riders with young horses being introduced to the show atmosphere should ask permission prior to entering the warm-up arena.

6.1.2 Riders who are at the showground only to exercise their horse should be asked to leave and should be strictly excluded from the warm-up arena.

6.1.3 Horses should only be present in the warm-up arena when preparing to enter the show ring or cooling down following their time in the show ring. No horse should spend excessive amounts of time in the warm-up arena.

6.1.4 Riders should adhere to the rules of working in an arena while warming up, for example passing left-hand to left-hand.

6.1.5 Lungeing of horses must not interfere with other competitors. If the warmup arena is too small to accommodate lungeing horses, permission should be sought to lunge in another suitable area of the showground. This must not be in the vicinity of the car or lorry parks, or close to the show arenas or spectators.

6.1.6 Riders should recognise potential problems and keep a good distance from any individual having difficulties controlling their horse.

6.1.7 Galloping is prohibited in the warm-up arena.

6.1.8 Show jumps should not be moved without the permission of the show steward.

6.1.9 When jumping, in either the warm-up or show arenas no horse should be rapped, jump a fence in the wrong direction or jump a pole or obstacle being held by hand. Rapping is the practice of raising a pole by hand as the horse jumps, with the intention of striking the horse's legs using the pole.

6.1.10 Any horse that falls in the warm-up arena should not be allowed to compete without the agreement of a veterinary surgeon.

6.2 Conduct and Responsibilities of Competitors in the Show Ring

6.2.1 Every competitor should keep a safe distance away from other horses.

6.2.2 Competitors should follow instructions from the Show Steward and Judge. Other competitors may advise you if their horse kicks should you ride too close.

6.2.3 Competitors should ensure that their horse is wearing no prohibited tack.

6.2.4 Riding around a show ring may cause horses to become strong and overexcited. If the horse's behaviour becomes dangerous the horse may be required to leave the class. Examples of dangerous behaviour may include bolting, extreme bucking or rearing.

6.2.5 Competitors should advise the Show Steward if they have a young or inexperienced horse.

6.2.6 The Judge's decision is final. No competitor should argue with the Show Steward or Judge. The show should have an appeals process that may be followed after the class.

6.2.7 Blatantly dangerous and irresponsible riding or handling of the horse may result in the competitor being eliminated from the class.

6.2.8 The amount of work the horse undertakes should be in accordance with his age, experience and fitness. Should the horse become tired, the competitor should be prepared to retire from the class and any further classes as necessary.

7 Discipline of the Horse

Any method used to discipline the horse should be proportionate and applied at the correct time.

7.1 Use of the Whip

7.1.1 There are two reasons why a rider may use a whip:

1 – As a method to encourage the horse forwards if it is not listening to the rider's seat and leg aids;

2 – To reprimand the horse.

7.1.2 A whip should only be used to reprimand a horse where there is a valid reason.The whip must be applied at the appropriate time, in the correct place and with the correct severity.

7.1.3 The timing of the whip's use is important: it should be used immediately when the horse has been disobedient. For example, a horse that has refused a fence should not be reprimanded once he has turned away from the fence or, where the animal has run-out rather than refused, more than a couple of seconds after the rider has regained control.

7.1.4 Riders using the whip to reprimand the horse should not bring their arm above shoulder height.The whip should land on the rump of the horse and not the flanks.

7.1.5 As an aid to go forward, riders may use the whip down the shoulder of the horse (to help stop a horse napping) or behind the rider's leg.

7.1.6 The force with which the whip is used must always be proportionate and reasonable. Whip use that leaves a mark or breaks the skin is not acceptable. It is the competitor's responsibility to know if their horse has sensitive skin and moderate their whip use accordingly.

7.1.7 The following actions are not acceptable in any circumstances:

- Disciplining the horse for its behaviour in the show ring after it has left the ring.
- Carrying and using a whip with a hard point at the end.
- Carrying and using a weighted whip.
- Using any whip substitute. Whips should be designed specifically for their purpose.
- Hitting the horse in an attempt to pre-empt poor behaviour – at the start of a show jumping round, for instance.
- The competitor venting their anger and frustration by hitting the horse.
- Use of the whip around the horse's head and neck. If reprimanding the horse it should not be hit on the shoulder.
- Hitting the horse once the rider has dismounted.
- Use of the whip after elimination is declared.
- Using the whip at every show jump.

- Hitting an obviously tired horse.
- Using a whip to punish a horse for a rider's mistake or poor riding.
- The whip should not be used more than twice for any incident. Anything above this would be counted as excessive.
- Excessively using the whip in order to load a difficult horse.

7.1.8 Should any competitor, in the opinion of a judge, steward or show volunteer misuse the whip within any area of the show ground, the competitor may either be orally warned, or disqualified and reported to the show secretary/organiser. Legal action could be taken under the Welfare Acts.

7.2 Use of Spurs

7.2.1 Riders wearing spurs should understand how to apply and use the spurs correctly.

7.2.2 Spurs should not be used to reprimand the horse.Any such action will result in the rider being disqualified and reported to the show secretary/organiser.

7.2.3 Spurs of excessively severe design must not be worn including:

- Spurs with necks set on the inside of the heel.
- Spurs with roughened or cutting edges and serrated spurs, with or without necks.
- Spurs with rowel diameters in excess of 1cm.
- Spurs with necks in excess of 3cms length.

7.2.4 Spurs are to be worn in the traditional, correct manner only. The curve of the neck of the spur must be directed downwards.

7.2.5 Only metal spurs may be worn.

7.3 Use of Tack

7.3.1 Under no circumstances should competitors use the action of a bit to reprimand a horse. Such action is excessive and unnecessary and risks the competitor being disqualified and reported to the show secretary/organiser.

7.3.2 No item of saddlery should be misused or used to reprimand the horse, or intentionally to cause pain or discomfort.

8 Loading Difficult Horses

8.1 Some horses can be difficult to load. There are a variety of methods to safely load a difficult horse. All partitions and ramps should be open to make the horsebox or trailer look bigger and add more light. For added control the horse should be loaded in its bridle to prevent it from breaking loose.

8.2 Where more than one horse is travelling in a vehicle, load the other horses first to encourage the difficult loader.

8.3 Only one person should lead the horse and, if possible, one person stand near to each side of the ramp. The horse should be encouraged in with food. For stubborn horses lunge lines can be used by crossing them behind the horse's hindquarters and then adding pressure to encourage the horse to load. Only experienced persons should assist to ensure the lines do not become tangled up with the horse's legs.

8.4 Do not continue to try and load an extremely agitated, stressed or upset horse. Calm the horse down and then re-attempt to load.

8.5 The horse must not be hit with excessive force or frequency with a whip or any other implement (see Discipline of the Horse).

9 Saddlery and Equipment

9.1 Different disciplines and competitions have their own set of regulations concerning saddlery and equipment. The rulebook of the discipline's governing body should be referred to for information, even when the show itself is unaffiliated.

9.2 Competitors must ensure that the tack being used on the horse is correctly fitted and safe.

9.3 The use of string, fine cord, wire or twine in or around the horse's mouth is strictly forbidden.

9.4 Only horses being driven are permitted to wear blinkers.

9.5 Saddles must be worn when the horse is ridden on the showground.

9.6 The bit used should be appropriate to the requirements of the horse. Bits must be used in their manufactured condition without any addition or modification to, or on, any part.

9.7 Unless the show organiser specifies otherwise, the use of draw, grass, running, check and bearing reins of any kind are not permitted.

9.8 Side reins may only be worn when lungeing the horse.

9.9 Training aids, such as the chambon or de gogue, are only permitted when warming up a horse.

10 Responsibilities of Show Organisers

10.1 Organisation and Health & Safety

10.1.1 The show organisers are central to the success of the show day. Poor planning, lack of organisation and inadequate overall control may lead to accidents occurring and the welfare needs of horses not being met.

10.1.2 From the start, show organisers should set rules and regulations that must be strictly adhered to. All show stewards, judges, staff and volunteers have a role in ensuring the conduct of competitors is acceptable.

10.1.3 Show schedules should clearly state the basic rules of the show and can be written in accordance with these guidelines.

10.1.4 The health and safety of all who attend the show ground is vital. A risk assessment should be carried out and evaluated. Any reported problems on the show day must be dealt with promptly and in a safe manner.

10.1.5 All precautions should be put in place to prevent or reduce the risk of an accident.

10.1.6 Adequate insurance cover must be purchased.

10.1.7 All accidents should be reported to the show organiser and an Accident Report Form must be completed.

10.1.8 The condition of the ground can cause many problems. Wet, boggy ground can cause vehicles to become stuck and prove too dangerous for competitors to ride or show their horses.

10.1.9 Hard ground may also have consequences, particularly in show jumping classes. Provision should be made to have a soft surface for horses to land on after jumping, for example putting sand down after each fence.

10.1.10 Careful consideration needs to be made to the layout of the show ground in respect of where the lorries and trailers will be parked and the siting of the visitor car park, show arenas, warm-up arena, showstands and facilities. Horses can become spooked if arenas are sited too close to stands with generators for example.

10.1.11 The warm-up arena should be of a sufficient size to accommodate potentially large numbers of horses. Having a separate warm-up arena for show jumping is advisable.

10.1.12 In the event of adverse weather the show may have to be cancelled.

10.1.13 All show staff must know what actions need to be taken in the event of an accident or fire.

10.2 Provisions for Veterinary Treatment

10.2.1 The show organiser should carry out a risk assessment with specific regard to the provision of veterinary care. This will vary according to ground and weather conditions. The following points should be considered:

- What is the likelihood of severe injury occurring?
- What facilities are provided on the showground for reasonable treatment of simple injuries?
- What arrangements are there for the provision of removal of casualties to an appropriate facility?

10.2.2 At low risk events, where a veterinary surgeon may not actually be in attendance, the show organiser should ensure that a veterinary surgeon is available 'on-call' and within a reasonable driving time (suggested 20-30 minutes maximum). Arrangements should be made in advance with the veterinary surgeon concerned as they may wish to establish:

- Emergency lines of communication.
- How to ensure proper access to the site and the ability to bring in equipment directly to the patient as efficiently as possible.
- Facilities available for dealing with simple injuries, for example a clean stable or other covered well-lit area and the availability of clean water.
- How animals are to be transported to a referral facility if necessary.
- Where and how euthanasia is to be carried out if necessary.

10.2.3 Show organisers should establish who is responsible for the animals taking part in the show. Under the provisions of the Welfare Acts there is a degree of joint responsibility with organisers, but nevertheless the owner or keeper of an animal has prime responsibility for its welfare. It follows that the owner or keeper of an animal:

- Should be clearly identified on the entry form.
- Should provide details of how they may be easily contacted in an emergency on the day of the event.
- Should provide information on who has responsibility for making decisions about that animal with regard to provision of emergency treatment, removal to a surgical facility and euthanasia.

10.2.4 The show secretary and organiser should hold an up-to-date list of local farrier contact details.

10.2.5 Water should be available to horses on the showground if requested. In order to prevent the spread of disease, horses should not share water buckets. Communal water troughs are not ideal and taps should be provided where possible, as some disease-causing organisms are able to survive for long periods in water.

11 Responsibilities of Show Stewards

11.1 Show stewards are responsible for managing the entrances to the warm-up and show arenas. The gates must be held fully open to allow the horse through. Competitors waiting for the next class must not be allowed to congregate near the show arena entrance. Spectators must also be kept clear of all entrances.

11.2 A judge may require a steward to assist them. The steward must carry out all instructions given by the judge.

11.3 In the show arena the steward must immediately raise any concerns to the judge and/or show organiser regarding safety or horse welfare.

12 Responsibilities of Show Judges

12.1 Any horse exhibiting signs of ill-health or lameness should be disqualified from the class and a veterinary surgeon (if present) called.

12.2 Any competitor ill-treating a horse should be eliminated.

12.3 Any competitor misusing the whip or spurs should be eliminated. Children who overuse the whip should have the whip taken from them and the decision discussed with a parent/guardian.

12.4 If a rider is not capable of riding correctly in spurs, the judge should request that the spurs are removed.

12.5 A horse that has fallen should not be allowed to continue in the class, and attention from a veterinary surgeon should be sought before the animal is allowed to compete in a further class.

13 Conduct and Responsibilities of Spectators

13.1 Spectators should not obstruct the entrances to arenas or impede the progress of a horse at any location on the showground.

13.2 Unless spectators are assisting with horses they should not enter the lorry and trailer park.

13.3 All children must be fully supervised.

13.4 Dogs must be kept on a lead, away from horses and wear a muzzle if necessary.

13.5 Spectators should not run, shout or cause excess noise around the horses or arenas.

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