

27 *Working for a show*

Your team (and their parents) should realize how much work is involved to get a good show on the road, and they should know what is expected from them in terms of help. These related chores are not necessarily the job of the trainer! And they can be very time consuming. . .

First the show has to be booked: this should preferably be done at the beginning of the year or at least of the season. You should have the show confirmed six weeks in advance in order for there to be time for proper training. You may have to inspect the facility. You have to ask what kind of footing the ground offers (whether your horse needs shoes or not), whether you show indoors or out.

One week before the show you must confirm and make sure that you will be able to put on your music: do they offer a sound system or do you have to bring a cassette player — how can you wire up?

Someone has to arrange for the sponsoring for the transport, unless your club is willing to show at their own expense. Arrange when the cheque will be handed over, made out to whom. Someone has to arrange for the transport and reconfirm before the show. Especially in the summer, when all the riders are driving to shows, it can be very difficult to find transport, unless you have your own trailer.

It will be your job to arrange for the farrier, if the horse has to be shod, to design the preliminary show, pick exercises, time, etc., train for the show, time again, make changes if necessary, search for and compile fitting music (here the vaulters can help).

The team's job will be to spend one hour together cleaning

bridle, surcingle, and side reins thoroughly. Someone must take the show wraps, the lunge and the pad home for washing – with enough time to let it dry before the show.

The day or the morning before the show the horse should be prepared: that is, the tail must be washed, mane plaited, etc. The older team members should help to get the horse ready for travelling and help loading him. It may take quite some time to assemble the equipment – if you have to go ‘Canadian distances’ for a show, make sure you carry a second surcingle and bridle. (Borrow from another club. . .). Find out in time, if you have to take your own feed, and even if feed is offered, make sure it is up to your standards. We usually carry our own hay in any case. Don’t forget the fly-spray, if showing in mosquito areas – if your horse is not used to the flies, it can really kill your show! Carry a fly-mask for the rest periods. Take coolers or blankets if needed. For your vaulters bring some ‘sticky spray’ for the croup for your standing exercises if the horse tends to get wet and slippery.

Transport

It is a good idea to have someone follow the horse-box or trailer in a different car, depending on the remoteness of the area. If you get a flat tyre, you may need someone to get help and carry messages. (If your trailer has a flat tyre, never try to unload your horse on a busy freeway. Wait for help with a jack to lift trailer and horse, or help to stop traffic.) For long trips, philosophies greatly differ: make sure the horse gets enough stops to drink; all else depends largely on the horse and what he is used to.

Arrival

Don’t let the horse stand in the trailer any longer than absolutely necessary: unload promptly and walk him. Especially after long trips (and we have travelled up to ten hours to shows) it is very

important that the horse can move and stretch his limbs. You can't vault on him if he is stiff from a long trip. Let him sniff at his new surroundings and if at all possible let him check out the ring before the show.

Assemble the team, find a good meeting point and assemble your equipment (at the stall, or whatever place you have been assigned). Now tell your team members their respective jobs: who will take care of the horse until when (and what this means: grooming, walking, lunging etc.) who will babysit the smaller team members (and how). If you want to involve the parents as well, be very specific. Make sure your team understands that, once arrived, the main concern is not beautifying themselves, but getting the horse and the team into shape in a disciplined and calm manner. Because now you'll have other things to do...

Before the show

You'll have to check the run-in path (if you haven't seen the facility before) and speak to your tallest vaulter (first in line) about the line-up. Get the music to the sound booth and see who is responsible for putting the tape in: if nobody, assign one of the parents and give him or her very clear instructions. Find the announcer and find out what and how much he intends to say: jot down a brief outline (this is your chance to promote the sport) so the correct things will be mentioned. Don't forget to note the sponsors, if you had any! Thank the organizer of the show (make sure this goes over the speakers) for inviting you (and paying for the travelling, if they did...)

Check who the 'whipper-in' is at the show and arrange for a runner (of your team or somebody else, preferably) to let you know, ten minutes and again five minutes before the show, when your turn comes. Because directly before the show you should lunge your horse for the warm-up, and you should be able to do so in a relaxed manner, being sure that ample notice will be given. Your nervousness will transfer directly to the

horse! So try to avoid unnecessary troubles.

Introduce yourself also to the chief steward or the host of the show, if you have not met them personally. It is very nice to establish a personal relationship before you are showing (you want to be invited back), and at a horse show it can easily take half an hour to track such a person down...

You must be back in time to tack up the horse (with your team's help, of course), say ten minutes in total. To warm him up (I always prefer to do that personally), ten to fifteen minutes, if you want to be able to calm him down. Don't lunge him till he is tired because you're afraid of the horse acting up. A tired vaulting horse will not make for a good show. (And won't promote the sport either...) The warm-up should be walk and trot as usual – to take the 'beans' out of him, he mainly needs a chance to check out the strange new surroundings. (If your vaulters have taken him for a good long walk to sniff at everything beforehand most of the calming down will have been done for you. So make sure that the team and horse arrive well in advance of the show at the premises – an hour is not too long!) The team should do their usual warm-up routine: assign somebody to supervise that this is done properly. (Make sure the team is at the meeting point at the prescribed time, rather than running all over the place showing off.) You may hand the horse to an experienced (and calm) helper ten minutes before run-in and briefly talk to the team. Check their uniforms. Check the tightness of the surcingle again personally. Line up for the run-in, when you get the five-minute warning from the runner.

Now the show should be a success!

After the show

After the run-out see to it that the team stays disciplined until their jobs are done. The horse must be taken care of first. The team must immediately take off the side reins, loosen the surcingle and then reward the horse with a treat. Then take the blanket

off, offer him water, and walk him until he is cool. Cool his legs with water and rub them with a water-camphor-mix (sixty/forty per cent) or similar substance. Don't let the vaulters run off before the equipment is re-assembled, cleaned and packed. The trainer's presence should not be necessary during this time: you will retrieve the music from the sound booth and do some more thanking and promoting. See if the local newspaper is present: hand the reporter your name and address, and tell him that you could provide him with pictures if his did not turn out. Or ask him for a copy of his, if they did – because you can use them for more promotion. Straight after the show is the best time to hand out your card with the phone number where you can be reached for further bookings (promoters of other shows are most likely present), as well as for contacts with interested prospective vaulters. So you must find the time to be approachable – rather than being left stranded with the horse while the vaulters are basking in their glory!

But they deserve the glory too, so try to relieve them as soon as possible after they have prepared the horse for travelling, if this happens straight away. The trainer should be present for the loading of the horse – hopefully somebody else might do the driving if the horse has to go home promptly, so you can do some more socializing with the promoters and your team, before everyone goes their own way. A show should be more than just a job to the team, and should always end on a nice and festive note, with good memories to prepare for the next one.

After a strenuous day at a show or competition the horse should *not* remain standing the next day. He should be walked or taken into the countryside in walk to reduce lactic acid and avoid muscle soreness – just as you would treat any other athlete. If your horse did the full fifteen minutes canter at a competition or show, he has covered a distance of approximately seven kilometres (almost four and a half miles), which corresponds to an eventing performance. The same applies if he has been on a long trip in the horse-box, as mentioned on the trip to the show.