

# The British Horse Society

## Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses and Ponies at Shows or Events

adapted by



the showing council



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# Supported by the following Member Bodies of The Showing Council

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# **Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses and Ponies at Shows or Events**

## **1. Preface**

- 1.1 In these guidelines, “horse/pony” refers to all *equidae* and should, where the context allows, be taken to mean “horse or horses, pony or ponies or donkeys”.

## **2. Introduction**

### **2.1 General Conditions**

- 2.1.1 The British Horse Society (BHS) 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. This guidance has been developed by the BHS who have advised “The Showing Council” (TSC) in developing bespoke guidance for competitors/members competing in Member Body classes.
- 2.1.2 These guidelines have been produced to provide advice and support to members, competitors, show organisers, stewards, judges, volunteer assistants and spectators.
- 2.1.3 A copy of the original document, on which this is based, “The British Horse Society Guidelines for the Welfare of Horses at Events” can be obtained on the BHS website ([www.bhs.org.uk](http://www.bhs.org.uk)).
- 2.1.4 Under the Animal Welfare Act (2006), the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, (hereafter referred to as “The Welfare Acts”) every horse owner or those responsible for a horse have 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.
- 2.1.5 At all stages during the preparation and training of show horses, welfare must take precedence over all other demands. This includes good horse management, training methods, farriery, tack and transportation.
- 2.1.6 Horses and competitors must be fit, competent and in good health and condition before they’re allowed to compete. This encompasses medication use, surgical procedures that threaten welfare or safety and the misuse of aids.

### **2.2 Health and Hygiene**

- 2.2.1 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. This is because some diseases have an incubation period of 14 days.

- 2.2.2 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 website.
- 2.2.3 Water is available to horses on the showground. In order to prevent the spread of disease, horses should not share water buckets.
- 2.2.4 Competitors must be mindful of disease risk when stabling horses away from home and precautions taken i.e. removal of all bedding and use of disinfectant spray.

### **3. Transport**

- 3.1 Competitors need to be aware of The Welfare of Animals During Transport Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005. Anybody 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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 Where more than one horse is travelling in a vehicle, load the other horses first to encourage the difficult loader.
- 3.6 Only one person should lead the horse and, if possible, one person stand near to each side of the ramp. The horse could be encouraged in with food. 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.

- 3.7 Do not continue to try and load an extremely agitated, stressed or upset horse. Calm the horse down and then re-attempt to load. The horse must not be hit with excessive force or frequency with a whip or any other implement (see Discipline of the Horse).

#### **4. Passports**

- 4.1 Horses being transported to a show must be accompanied by their passport.
- 4.2 Some shows will require that horses attending the show are vaccinated against tetanus and influenza and will therefore wish to check the horse's passport. This applies to, but is not limited to, Horse of the Year Show and Olympia who require up to date influenza vaccination in accordance with each shows regulations.

#### **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 horse/pony 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. Water should be offered more frequently during hot weather. Some horses prefer to drink water 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 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 them from becoming bored and help to maintain a healthy gut.
- 5.2.3 If a horse is being allowed to graze, ensure there are no poisonous plants or rubbish that it could accidentally consume.
- 5.2.4 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.

- 5.2.5 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 horse/pony becoming distressed and must not be left unattended. Individual shows or show grounds do not allow horses/ponies to be tied to horseboxes or trailers and competitors should refer to the individual show ground rules.
- 5.3.3 Horses should not be tethered on the showground either to a structure or point in ground except in circumstances detailed in 5.3.2.
- 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. 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.
- 5.3.5 During cold weather, heavier, warm rugs may be needed, especially if the horse is clipped.
- 5.3.6 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. At the discretion of the judge, grooms may enter the ring to provide a waterproof sheet in inclement weather.
- 5.3.7 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.
- 5.3.8 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).
- 5.3.9 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. Overnight stabling is available at all Championship Shows, Royal

International Horse Show, Horse of the Year Show, Olympia and most County Shows.

Pull out stables on lorries, temporary pens etc are not permitted. Competitors must abide by the Codes of Practice for each show and or showground.

- 5.4.2 No horse should be kept tied up overnight or have water withheld.

## **5.5 Age and Gender of Horses**

- 5.5.1 Horses under four years of age should not be ridden on the showground at any Show.
- 5.5.2 Stallions are permitted to compete in certain classes. A stallion disc must be worn on the bridle and the rider/handler must have the correct age to compete or strip the horse/pony in the ring and or lunge or note in accordance with the current and relevant Member Body Rule and Hand Books.
- 5.5.3 Pregnant mares are not 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.
- 5.5.4 Mares with a living foal at foot, born during the current year may not be shown in ridden classes.

## **5.6 Control of Horses**

- 5.6.1 Young and inexperienced horses will require quiet, confident handling. 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, experienced horse from which to gain confidence. To ensure the safety and welfare of both the horse and rider it would be a good idea to also have an assistant to help in getting the young horse ready and when entering in to the show ring.
- 5.6.3 Horses often build strong bonds with other horses. Thus, some horses 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 horses/ponies 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/ponies whose behaviour is unpredictable, or horses/ponies to which the handler is not accustomed, should always be lead in a bridle.

- 5.6.5 Stallions 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 a minimum of 2.5 metres in length. If it is the opinion of the relevant Member Body 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.

## **6. Conduct and Responsibilities**

### **6.1 Conduct and Responsibilities of Competitors**

- 6.1.1 Competitors must consider the Health and Safety of other competitors, spectators and those working or assisting at the show.
- 6.1.2 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 of the horse or rider. Where available, horses/ponies must be ridden in designated 'horse walks' only; grooms, spectators must enter or walk in the designated pedestrian walk way.
- 6.1.3 No competitor should behave in an aggressive or offensive manner to their horse, event staff, members of the public or other competitors.
- 6.1.4 By entering a class at the show, the competitor has agreed to abide by the Rules and guidelines set by the relevant Member Body or Show. NB when competing in Horse of the Year Show (HOYS) classes HOYS Rules will take precedent.
- 6.1.5 Under the Welfare Acts the parents/guardians of under 16-year-olds are responsible for the welfare of their children's horses/ponies.

### **6.2 Conduct and Responsibilities of Competitors in the Warm-up Arena**

- 6.2.1 No horse should spend excessive amounts of time in the warm-up arena. The Member Bodies will monitor how horses are warmed up at the relevant shows.
- 6.2.2 Riders and handlers should adhere to the rules of working in an arena while warming up, for example passing left-hand to left-hand.
- 6.2.3 Lungeing of horses must not interfere with other competitors. Lungeing will only be permitted in another suitable area of the showground; ideally avoid the vicinity of the car or lorry parks, or close to the show arenas or spectators. No child, 12 years of age or under, may lunge a pony/horse. Stallions can only be lunged by a person over 12 years of age or in accordance with age for riding a stallion if older in accordance with the relevant Member Body Rule and Hand Book.



- 6.2.4 Riders and handlers should recognise potential problems and keep a good distance from any individual having difficulties controlling their horse.
- 6.2.5 Galloping should be avoided in the warm-up arena.
- 6.2.6 Practice jumps should not be moved without the permission of a show steward.
- 6.2.7 When jumping, in either the warm-up and show arenas no horse should be rapped, jump a fence in the wrong direction or jump a pole or obstacle being held by hand. NB: 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.
- 6.2.8 Any horse that falls in the warm-up arena should only compete after the agreement of a veterinary surgeon.

### **6.3 Conduct and Responsibilities of Competitors in the Show Ring**

- 6.3.1 Every competitor should keep a safe distance away from other horses.
- 6.3.2 Competitors should follow instructions from the Show Steward and Judge. Other competitors may advise you if their horse kicks should you ride too close.
- 6.3.3 Competitors should ensure their horse is wearing no prohibited tack. Competitors can only work-in, when ridden, in tack permissible to be used in accordance with the relevant Member Body Rule and Hand Book.
- 6.3.4 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 at the discretion of the judge. Examples of dangerous behaviour may include bolting, extreme bucking or rearing.
- 6.3.5 Blatantly dangerous and irresponsible riding or handling of the horse may result in the competitor being eliminated from the class or removed from the show ground.
- 6.3.6 The amount of work the horse undertakes should be in accordance with his age, experience and fitness. Riders working in ponies for other competitors or children must be the correct size for the pony and suitably mounted. Any rider working in a horse/pony to excess or deemed too heavy for the horse/pony will be required to dismount and rest the horse/pony, failure to do so may result in disciplinary action and elimination from the class.
- 6.3.7 No one under the age of 12 years of age may enter the ring to groom, strip or handle the pony/horse.

## **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 horse or pony has run-out rather than refused, more than a couple of seconds after the rider has regained control.

7.1.4 Riders and handlers 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 or using the whip handle.
- 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 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 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 verbally warned, or disqualified and reported to the relevant Member Body Head Office. Legal action could be taken under the Welfare Acts.

## **7.2 Use of Spurs**

7.2.1 Riders should understand how to apply and use the spurs correctly. Spurs cannot be used to work a horse/pony if they are not permitted in the class it is competing in.

7.2.2 Spurs should not be used to reprimand the horse. Such use is always excessive, as is any use that results in a horse being marked by a spur. 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, unnecessary and risks the competitor being disqualified and reported to the relevant Member Body Head Office.

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

## **8. Saddlery and Equipment**

- 8.1 The relevant Member Body Rules concerning saddlery and equipment that can be used when competing in relevant Member Body classes must be adhered to.
- 8.2 Competitors must ensure that the tack being used on the horse is correctly fitted and safe for use.
- 8.3 The use of string, fine cord, wire or twine in or around the horse's mouth is strictly forbidden.
- 8.4 Saddles must be worn when the horse/pony is ridden on the showground.
- 8.5 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 and conform to the requirements of the Class. The bit must never be used to reprimand the horse. Such use is always excessive and will render the rider liable to disciplinary action.
- 8.6 Horses and ponies may be worked when ridden in tack allowed to be used in the show ring.
- 8.7 Side reins may only be worn when lungeing the horse/pony.
- 8.8 Training aids, such as the chambon or de gogue, are only permitted when warming up a horse on the lunge.

## **9. Responsibilities of Member Bodies**

### **9.1 Organisation and Health & Safety**

- 9.1.1 The Member Bodies 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. The relevant Member Body Rule and Hand Book for the year must be adhered to.
- 9.1.2 Show schedules clearly state the basic rules of the show.
- 9.1.3 The health and safety of all who attend the show ground is vital. A risk assessment is carried out and evaluated at relevant Member Body Shows. Any reported problems on the show day must be reported to the Show office and will be dealt with promptly and in a safe manner.
- 9.1.4 All precautions are to be put in place to prevent or reduce the risk of an accident.
- 9.1.5 The Member Bodies should have adequate insurance cover, competitors are advised to ensure they have adequate personal, vehicle and animal insurance.

- 9.1.6 All accidents should be reported to the relevant Member Body Office and an Accident Report Form must be completed.
- 9.1.7 The condition of the ground can cause many problems and weather may change dramatically during a show. Competitors must abide by the instruction of officials in parking vehicles, working in areas etc.
- 9.1.8 All show staff must know what actions need to be taken in the event of an accident or fire. Competitors must abide by instructions. No smoking is allowed in stable areas.

## **9.2 Provisions for Veterinary Treatment**

- 9.2.1 The relevant Member Body carries out a risk assessment with specific regard to the provision of veterinary care.
- 9.2.2 At some events 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).  
Most Championship Shows have:
- Emergency lines of communication.
  - 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 availability of clean water.
  - Have ambulance for horses/ponies to be transported to a referral facility if necessary and where and how euthanasia is to be carried out if necessary.
- 9.2.3 Under the provisions of the Welfare Acts there is a degree of joint responsibility with organisers, but the owner or keeper of a horse/pony has prime responsibility for its welfare. It follows that the owner or keeper of a horse/pony:
- 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 horse/pony with regard to provision of emergency treatment, removal to a surgical facility and euthanasia.
- 9.2.4 Most, but not all, Member Bodies provide a farrier on site at Championship shows.

## **10. Responsibilities of Show Stewards**

- 10.1 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.

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

## **11. Responsibilities of Show Judges**

- 11.1 Any horse exhibiting signs of ill-health or lameness should be disqualified from the class and a veterinary surgeon (if present) called.
- 11.2 Any competitor ill-treating a horse will be asked to desist, reported to relevant Member Body Head Office and may be disqualified by the judge.
- 11.3 Any competitor misusing the whip or spurs may be disqualified. Children who overuse the whip will have the whip taken from them and the decision discussed with a parent/guardian.
- 11.4 A horse that has fallen is not to be allowed to continue in the class. Competitors are advised to seek the attention from a veterinary surgeon before the horse/pony is allowed to compete in a further class.

## **12. Conduct and Responsibilities of Spectators**

- 12.1 Spectators should not obstruct the entrances to arenas or impede the progress of a horse at any location on the showground.
- 12.2 All children must be fully supervised.
- 12.3 Dogs must be kept on a lead, away from horses and wear a muzzle if necessary.
- 12.4 Spectators should not run, shout or cause excess noise around the horses or arenas.