

# The **Equestrian** **Athlete** Plan

**Your Complete Guide To Achieving Peak  
Performance Both In The Saddle And Out**



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## Why I Wrote This

I guess you may be wondering, what was my inspiration behind this book. Having come from a background of equestrianism, it is in my blood. My grandfather was a farrier, who later trained my father. My mother and father taught both my sister and I to ride from the minute we could walk, in fact I think I almost learnt to ride before I could walk.

The whole of my family has ridden at various levels and competed in various forms of equestrian, including hunting, race riding, dressage, show jumping, showing, eventing and social riding. As you can probably guess I have spent a lot of time in and around the equestrian scene including competing in tetrathalon into my teen years.

As I have moved into my professional career as one of the UK's leading fitness and health professionals, it really is no surprise that I have been able to work so successfully with my equestrian athlete's, we have that connection.

I understand them far better than most.

What has really bothered me up to now is that equestrian has not had the recognition as a serious sport that it deserves. It is because of this attitude that the equestrian athlete (EA) has been left to do generic exercise classes and DVD's, in a one size fits all approach. This really got to me.

I want to do something about it, so that EA's all over the world don't have to put up with this any longer.

The equestrian field is now ready to break the tradition and culture of 'get fit to ride by riding'. Where people have tried before and failed, this time with such a holistic approach to the equestrian athlete we will approach it in a very different light.

We are now ready to integrate resistance training with Pilates, interval training with mobility and postural strengthening with core stability. With all of this underpinned with a nutritional plan and a support network, this book is really going to take things to the next level.

No fitness professional up to now has developed such a holistic approach to training the EA. Sure some people have developed programmes for riders or written articles but none that actually address their requirements fully! The culture among equestrian has been Pilates and yoga, and there is nothing wrong with Pilates and yoga, in fact there is an element of the EAP that has Pilates style exercises integrated within it. But remember that these

modalities are just tools, and what makes these effective, is the way in which the tool is used to produce the results.

Equestrian sport is in a very exciting place right now, with 200 athletes heading to London 2012 to try and achieve victory in 3 disciplines (Eventing, Dressage and Show Jumping). It does not matter whether you will be heading to the Olympics or not (some of you will), you will want to enjoy your time with your horse just as much. To be riding fit has to be the dream of every equestrian athlete.

I wanted to give something back to a community of fantastic people who share one common passion, their horses. I cannot wait to work with you.

It would be right to acknowledge all those people who have been an inspiration to me in my journey thus far. No less than my beautiful girlfriend who has been immense.

Matt 😊



## Introduction

The major problem up to now has been a lack of specific and usable information surrounding how to get riding fit.

Even as far back as 1979 academic authors were acknowledging that it was beneficial if both the EA and the horse were fit. Then in 1996, a questionnaire on riding injuries revealed that 48% of riders suffered from lower back pain (Bird&Quinn).

But you would be well within your rights to ask, why has it taken so long for a fitness professional to provide a truly usable and specific training programme based on true training principles not just faddy methods?

As a result of this time delay, many EA's are limited by their own physical performance, with low levels of motivation, "bad backs" and "stiff legs" rife amongst the equestrian population.

Many EA's tell me how they are time constrained due to day light hours in the winter. This often leads to less frequent riding in those months and many Equestrian Athletes just like you have found it hard to get their training done because they haven't had a programme that is based around time efficient protocols.

Unfortunately in the past many EA's paid little attention to their own fitness, with more emphasis placed on the horse's fitness. Sure, if your horse is not fit then you will never win (we will get to what winning is later in the book).

But this is a two part team here right?

Your horse will never achieve its best if it is carrying a dead weight around with it. You know that really!



I have heard time and time again that EA's do not know how to warm up best for riding, resulting in feeling really stiff after. Don't worry we address it fully later.

EA's deserve and desire a better understanding of which exercises are best for the core and balance. Really they deserve more than that! You need a specific and progressive plan to actually help in the saddle.

It is pointless just having a list of exercises if you don't know how many times you should do them or to just do the same every time.

You wouldn't train your horse the same in week 1 as you would in week 8 would you?  
No, I didn't think so either, so you are no different.

The exercise books and generic classes haven't truly cut it up to now. Simply because they haven't helped you to understand how to stay on track and they don't provide a progressive training programme with a support structure that you can go back to in times of need. Even if the class does address some of your needs, the fact that most are generic to the general public is a big downfall, because you just won't get optimal results. It is kind of like feeding your horse with cows feed.

Your motivation comes from having a task that you find exciting and beneficial to your passion. When you stop finding the task beneficial you are likely to fall off the rails, but not

with the EAP, the programme is exciting and we have a support network set up. I have it all covered for you here.

Developing muscular strength and endurance is essential for you. I frequently get asked questions about how to develop strength in the legs for riding. It is really important for you to simulate the position and metabolic demands on your body in your training. That is why we won't be using any of those crazy inner thigh machines that haven't worked for you before and have made your adductors even tighter!!!



Equestrian instructors and people like yourself have told me how frustrated you both are with the stiffness that you suffer from is causing you lower back pain. Many of you will have been to the osteopath and/or chiropractor numerous times to treat the symptoms, but have you ever addressed the problem? This has become increasingly frustrating for people like yourself as you just can't get 100% from your time on the horse and feel like you are fighting a constant battle against back pain.

Due to the time constraints that you are under already the added time of a journey to a gym may make a totally gym based programme unrealistic. Add to that the expense of a gym membership and you really have been fighting a problem. If you have been able to get to the gym, it has been a place where the trainers just haven't really understood your individual needs as an EA, so they send you off with a one size fits all approach training card.

What you wanted was a plan that actually helped you with the specific demands that riding places on the body.

Not knowing what to eat during your busy schedule has held you back in reaching weights you need to and keeping energy levels up throughout the whole day. You have tried all those faddy diets that leave you feeling sick, lethargic tired and simply didn't fit into everyday life. You probably got frustrated because you couldn't see the results and gave up early on. What you wanted and needed was something that was easy to follow, didn't involve calorie counting or pointless weighing of foods. The nutritional plan you needed was based on eating clean, whole and unprocessed foods that will leave you feeling energised from the moment you wake up to moment your head hits the pillow.

## **Here's What's In Store For You**

### **How To Create the Stable and Mobile Body You Need**

In chapter 1 we will be taking a look at stability and mobility. You should get a great understanding of what both stability and mobility are, and why both of them are so important to you in the saddle. You will also have a clearer idea of how to gain the posture you have wanted for so long to make your riding style more comfortable and efficient. It is also my aim to help you understand how you can prevent the stiffness you may have previously suffered from or prevent it from manifesting itself over time.

### **Time Is On the Mind**

In this chapter we will address perhaps the biggest issue in the EA's mind. Time. By the end of the chapter you will have a much clearer understanding of how this programme will differ to the ones you have done before and how it will succeed where others didn't. You will learn the physical and mental benefits of why shorter workouts are better for you. I will explain to you what the best exercises are, for you to do at home to save you wasting time travelling to the gym.

### **Why You Will Be Assessing Not Guessing For Your Core**

In chapter 3, I will take you through how to train your core specifically for equestrian. You will then see why the conventional methods haven't worked up to now and may have been harming your performance both on and off the horse. You will have a far better understanding of why sit ups are over training the exact muscles you don't want to work anymore. I think most importantly you will understand how you can perform a very simple postural test. Remember if you don't assess you are essentially guessing.

### **How To Create Your Saddle Strong Back**

Chapter 4 is a real gem. Never before has the EA had this level of information from a fitness and health professional. You will learn what exercises you can do to prevent injury in lower back. On the flip side of that I have laid out the sort of exercises you should avoid to prevent back pain in the first place. You will also find out why you may be at risk of lower back pain and how you can minimise the risk.

## **How You Will Develop Your Riding Fit Legs**

In chapter 5, I have laid out how you will get those strong legs you need for your riding. By the end of the chapter you will have a much clearer idea of what exercises you need to be doing and why the specific exercises are important. You will understand the importance of training your legs to cope with the energy demands of your event. Importantly, you will have far more clarity on which leg exercises won't make you heavier or give you bulky thighs and calves.

## **How To Fuel To Make Sure You Don't Fall At The Final Hurdle**

In chapter 6, I am going to clear up how you need to fuel your body for energy and endurance. Here, you will gain an insight into how you will fuel your body with great food both at home and fit into your schedule. I will also enlighten you on how to choose foods to maintain the most efficient bodyweight for your event. I will explain how you will keep your cardiovascular fitness levels as high as possible.

## **Mind Over Saddle**

Last but absolutely not least, I will explain how you will stay on track. You will look at winning from a different perspective and why you aren't a happy winner if you don't take of the vehicle you arrive in. I will explain the importance of goal setting and how to go goal getting. You will find out why if nothing changes, nothing will change!

Ok so now move on to the *How To Create Your Riding Fit Body* Chapter.