

# THE EQUESTRIAN EMERGENCY

*How Equestrian Athletes Are Consistently Underperforming By Ignoring The Most Important Factor In Their Competitive Success And What They Can Do About It To Guarantee Peak Performance.*

If you're like most people who love riding your horses you will cherish this time no matter how many times you ride a day or in a week. Like many people you may well be frustrated with not performing as well as you hoped in the last event or the hunting field last time out.

So we all know that the horses fitness makes a huge difference to the outcome of the chosen event that you ride in, whether it be a point to point, a day in the saddle out hunting, an endurance ride, a 3 day event, one day event, showing jumping or dressage competition.

No one disputes how important the horses fitness is, its natural, but the top riders including, William Fox Pit, Laura Bechtolsheimer, Geoff Billington, Mark Todd and many more are acknowledging the importance of fitness training away from the horse.

## **The Equestrian Enthusiast Juggling Act**



I wouldn't mind betting that the same things are frustrating you like many other riders:

For many of you, the prospect of juggling one or all of the following will be daunting: marriage, being a parent, holding down a job or running your own business and fulfilling your dreams with your horse.

You are not alone, no matter what level you consider yourself to be at. This juggling act is exactly what Tina Fletcher faced on her way to gaining the Horse of the Year Show (HOYS) Equestrian of the year 2010. Importantly, Tina acknowledged that the better she performed and the better her results, the easier all the possible distractions became to deal with.

Having come from an equestrian family with my granddad and father both being farrier's, my mum being a wholesaler of horse shoes and my sister and I competing as children, my sister is now a jockey and has competed at CCI 2\* level.

I completely understand the multitude of factors that stress the equestrian rider who has to work every day. This undoubtedly can affect your horse's mindset. Turning up ill prepared, out of breath and flustered, will result in a flustered, confused horse.

It is definitely worth considering that by being physically fit and mentally sharp you will make great decisions and be more efficient with your already time constrained day! You are less likely to do silly things like forget your riding clothes and you will certainly arrive at the yard in a positive frame of mind! Make the most of your time with your horse!

### **I bet you wish you knew what would be the best exercise for you as a rider!**

If you are just about to embark on your new season, like many, I have a fair inclination that you fear the long days, achy legs and up to six horses to ride every day!

Many of my equestrian clientele, at first told me that they were fed up with the following:

1. Plodding around on their horse
2. A lack of time to get physically fit to ride their horse
3. A feeling that they were holding their horses back because of their lack of fitness
4. One of the major concerns for my social riders was getting on and off. Some were concerned that getting on was a problem and then later in the ride the inner thigh would stiffen up and getting off would then be more of a problem. We soon fixed this!
5. Putting on those jodhpur boots was a nightmare for some!
6. Many felt that doing exercise would just be an extra burden on an already hectic lifestyle. The efficiency in their training has been one of the biggest successes to date.
7. Some clientele said, 'The older you get the more everything stiffens up and hurts?!'-

*This is very easily counteracted by moving more using the specific muscles needed!*

Perhaps these are echoing some of your frustrations at present!?

Or maybe it's a lack of balance that's frustrating you...finding that your core strength isn't great and feel like you are wobbling all over the place?

My **Competitive Rider Clientele** also expressed these fears to me:

1. Some wished that they could be fitter to enable them to ride more than one horse at an event
2. Many expressed concerns that they got nervous at the start line because they knew they weren't in great shape
3. The majority expressed concern with not knowing what to eat to maximise energy on rides or on competition day.
4. A feeling that poor posture and physique was hindering their horse and also their performance.
5. Simply being knackered' after one round of x-country!
6. As an amateur jockey, many commented on not being able to race ride often enough to maintain a competition level of fitness that they are looking for!

Being fitter will undoubtedly make you stronger, tidier over a fence and a lot more effective when your horse gets tired near the end of the race or round!

Many equestrian athletes are 'reasonably fit' but could be fitter?

## The Typical Equestrian Enthusiasts Day



Trying to juggle everyday activities and equestrian duties on a day to day basis often ends up with a lack of specific time dedicated to constructive exercise.

Many of us involved with horses may have days and weeks that look like this:

- Muck out 2 horses, ride both, walk 4 miles+ each day, and on Sunday's walking a extra 12 miles in an effort to maintain some fitness'.
- 'Muck out a few, feed, Take children to school, ride, muck out the rest, flat work/gallops, pick children up, tidy yard, cook tea'.
- 'muck out one horse, poo pick 2 fields so that's 4 horses worth, ride one mare every day, and the other one 3 times a week. Then try to walk in-hand babies as well if you have the time in-between work for a 30 min walk.'
- Out of bed, muck out 2 horses daily, then poo pick (twice a week in winter) and then use exercise bike when I can be bothered. Then maybe you also have Celebrity DVD which you do when you have the energy (not v often)!

### **This is a busy schedule. So why are you doing generic exercise on top of that?**

In the summer, like many of us outdoor folks, we do tend to be 'GENERALLY' more active in the summer months. You see, you may cycle to the yard 4 times a week, you may poo pick and muck out daily, and then when the sun comes out you will feel better and you might even pull out the old celebrity exercise DVD! You have to be careful with is confusing being physically active with riding specific exercise. Beware of the generic DVD exercise programmes. They may be strengthening the wrong muscles!

This kind of generic exercise gets boring and is highly unspecific for riders. It is such a shame that there seems to be such a lack of knowledge and guidance that's holding back many of you from maximising your time with your horse!

I encourage my personal fitness clients to make sure that they are fit for their purpose. This has become known in the fitness profession as 'Functional Training'. So if your main goal is to be the best you can on your horse, then make sure you are doing specific exercises, that will make you 'saddle strong', not generic activity.

### **These four legged creatures are not cheap to run!!**



Let's not forget, whether or not horse riding/ equestrian is your hobby or your job, its an expensive activity none the less. It would be crazy to buy a brand new motor bike if you weren't strong enough to stop it falling over, so why should it be different with the four legged creature you sit on every day of the week!

I bet some of you are paying your BSJA, amateur jockey licence or trail hunt subscription but will not be making the most of it this season because you are not fit enough to stay out all day! This is crazy.

I bet riding is your main hobby, it seems such a shame not to make the very most of the one escape from the stresses of daily life that you love so much. Many riders tell me of their problems during riding lessons, and I have had instructors asking me for advice on how they can help their pupils make it through the full lesson.

Your physical fitness is determines how well you can implement your riding skill.  
**FACT!**

You can be the most gifted rider on the planet, but if you have the posture of a bag of potatoes, you will never achieve your potential!

Being unfit also has significant implications on your concentration towards the end of the cross country round or the race and this is costing you valuable seconds or even placing in the event.

Being fit for purpose will help your horse when he/she is getting tired, keeping them focused on the fence in front or that gateway out hunting.

## **Weight is a big issue in horse riding!**



Some of you will be out there trying to stay as light as possible, while others of you will be trying to maintain some weight!

Perhaps you feel overweight and the excess baggage is hindering you?

Or maybe you aren't heavy enough and lack the muscle to hold your horse together?

Your muscle imbalances would be far better if you did specific training, resulting in dramatically improved posture on the horse!

## **Safety For You And Your Horse Starts With You!!**



Is your fitness level way behind your horse's fitness level?

As horse owners and riders you so often put lots of time into your horses fitness but not your own health and fitness! The fitter you are the safer you are in the saddle! By knowing more about the different types of exercise available to you that would specifically make you stronger for riding, you will maximise your time on your horse.

From time to time the conversation pops up about safety due to course building, but has anyone considered that the main problem could now lie with the fitness and mental alertness of the rider. Once the course has been declared safe, the horse is fit, the only danger is the jockey. If he/she is not fit to ride, the course will never be safe and their horse certainly won't be.

If you are physically better prepared you will be mentally more aware of what's happening, more agile in case your horse shy's in that gateway. You will be able to make a quick change of direction to avoid a hazard, fallen horse or jockey to avoid being brought down yourself. So, if you are fitter, your horse will stand more chance of staying on his or her feet, when forced to react.

***"Remember, the horse has no bad intentions, he only reacts." Dr Gerd Heuschmann***

**You owe it to your horse, to be fit to ride!**

**BUT TOO OFTEN IT'S ALL LEFT TO YOUR HORSE! TAKE RESPONSIBILITY!**

## **I bet your horses eat better than you!**



So you school your horse twice a week, you've done some fast work , you have done some flat work, you might have lunged your horse, done pole work, hill work and may be long reigning, but you have been drinking hot chocolate and eating naughty cakes all week. Not very fair on the horse or on yourself, you are limiting your abilities before you get on. It doesn't seem like a great deal if you are the horse.

I know that many jockeys and riders spend long hours working in miserable weathers, with many of you younger jockeys often on poor diets. A lot of young jockeys leave home when they are young to pursue a career in the equestrian world, living on a shoe string, with very little nutritional guidance. They will often feel the need to skip meals to keep the weight down and live off unhealthy snacks, when they are gasping for that bit of energy!

Many find that they suffer with horrendous variation in performance and very erratic mood swings as a result of this. As equestrian enthusiasts we could really take a leaf out of our horses book by grazing as they do in the wild! Stop bingeing on monstrous meals at the end of the day, eat like your horse would in the wild.



## **Your Horses Are In Better Health Than You**



Many people spend double the money on MOT's for their cars than they do on their own health within a year.

When you add your horse to that, this difference gets dramatically bigger!

Horse physiotherapists do a fantastic job in the off season making sure that your horse has been assessed for any weaknesses that may cause a problem in the coming season. Having regular check ups for your horse, may well eliminate the small imbalances developing into injuries.

It is well known that regular physiotherapy can help to develop your horses top line, but what about your posture, what about your core strength, what about your fitness? Many people forget about themselves.

In much the same way as your horse, you will not use tight, over facilitated muscles properly, this will lead to further imbalances and ultimately injury. You will end up with strength in the wrong places and weaknesses exposed when you ride.

By using specific exercises and stretches you can ensure that you are going to be fit to ride, your now very fit horse.

Many equestrian enthusiasts spend hundreds and thousands of pounds addressing their horses feet and posture but very rarely address their own posture. By using core strengthening exercises, you (the rider) can become more balanced, have better symmetry, be far stronger and ultimately far more effective in the saddle. Addressing muscular strength all year round is essential to staying rider fit. Oliver Townend and Anna Ross Davies (Dressage rider) have both acknowledged that the off season specific training has helped them when their horses come back into work.

Everyone wants their horse to be confident and forward thinking in the competition field, but rarely consider that the rider weaknesses are holding the horse back.

It's all very well expecting your horse to approach the fence confidently, but if YOU are folding in the middle on the approach, due to a weak core and lack of cardiovascular fitness, you are sending negative messages to your horse.

Olympic Silver medallist Janette Breakwell, wrote an article for cross county riders that supports this, saying that 'if you are too forward you are blocking off his (the horse) front end as he takes off, so effectively you're working against him which won't help his confidence'. So, there's a top professional rider, acknowledging that the incorrect posture, ultimately caused by a weak core, will affect the confidence of your horse.

Consider this....

In the event of a fall, (now we have all been there), if you are stronger, more flexible and more alert, the falls may well be less frequent but if they do happen they will be less dramatic and potentially less severe!

### **A Home Truth**

Being fitter to ride may save you money, it may save you your job, and it may save your life!

## **A Horse Eye View of His/ Her Rider**



Here's what it looks like from the horses point of view.

**' Ok I will do lots of training in the next 2-3 weeks ready for our biggest event of the year, I will be fine tuning my jumping, transition between phases of dressage test and making sure I have the fitness to get to the finish line. Meanwhile my passenger (YOU!) are eating whatever you want, going partying, eating naughty cakes with all the other people on the yard, reading magazines, whilst I am on the horse walker...**

**Come 'game day' it looks like it's all on me then. I can't wait....Not!!!'**

This seems like a rough deal to me! Thank god I am not this horse!

I know the big worry for many equestrian riders, is not knowing how to do the right exercises. Many of you are concerned that a programme that is not specific in terms of its design will bulk you up. For this reason many people fear using resistance training whether it be dumbbells, body weight, stability ball or bands!

So maybe you decided that you were going to do 'something'.....

But, on top of perhaps not knowing what to do, the weekend's event is in the back of your mind and you worry that you need to do enough but you're worried that you might over do it. You know you need to work hard but want to have something in reserve for the weekend!

Within the equestrian culture and in days past, there has been such an emphasis on the horses' fitness that many riders failed to realise the benefits of their own fitness on their horses' performance. With such a large proportion of time allocated to the horses fitness, if any rider fitness was going to take place, it had better work and it damn sure should be time efficient.

For this reason, many riders like yourself, previously worried that the effort put in to their own fitness wouldn't help their horse and the performance results seen.

Is this you?

1. Nervous because you don't like the thought of the gym?
2. Perhaps you don't know what exercises will be best for improving your riding?
3. Have you tried exercise before and didn't see the benefits?
4. Did you start a programme and stop? Was this because of a lack of support?
5. Do you worry that you don't have the nutritional guidance to maximise your efforts when training?



Are you worried that you won't have the support to keep you on track?

Unfortunately, at present, unless you are at the elite level, you receive very little training or advice. As far as I am concerned, it doesn't matter whether you are on the world class potential list or want to ride your horse hunting once a week, you need a support system.

From grass roots to elite level, every equestrian enthusiast needs to be fit for purpose!

## **TIME IS PRECIOUS!**



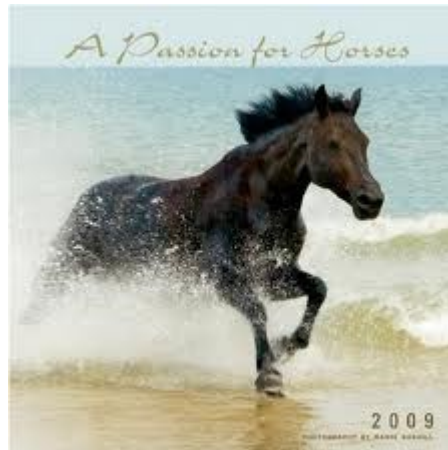
As we mentioned earlier, many of us in the equestrian game have limited time. Are you worried about a lack of time to train and fitting it in with all the riding you have to do?

Many of my clientele worried that they wouldn't get the mucking out done in time before work, if they had to train. I solved this problem with an efficient and specific programme that got results for my client. For some the worry was that the training will get in the way, especially in the winter when day light hours are limited anyway.

I know that many of you find training for dressage and show jumping much easier than getting yourself fit to ride x country, normally due to facilities and location. This really sucks as the X country comes last and you need to be on top of your game! So to get your fitness up for the X country phase, a home based exercise programme is all you need, I promise!

Maybe you don't have any fears.....You just need motivation and a plan.

**Are horses your passion? Are they an inspiration in your life?**



Do you want to look back at pictures of you looking smart in the saddle not a beach ball, or a hunch back, held together by your body protector?

Imagine that professional photograph looking slim, strong, healthy and competent at your event, amazing!

When that sun is shining and you have the day to ride....don't let your fitness hold you back. Stay out all day until the sun goes down!

Imagine being able to give your horse the best chance of completing the x-country course and coming home safe and sound and contemplate the thought of being able to give it your all in the show jumping arena and ride confidently into every fence, giving your horse the impulsion he/she needs.



For those of you who ride dressage, your posture will directly correlate to your marks! You want to be able to maintain that posture right throughout your dressage test, not just down the centre line on the way in to the arena.

You want to stay out of the saddle when your horse is galloping for all six x-country rides or point to point rides. You want to be stronger and more equal in the saddle. You want to be physically fit to ride to your very best and to enjoy the one thing you love doing!

Perhaps your goal is to go up a BE (British Eventing) level this year? If you are striving for the next level, you need to start creating excellent habits, this starts with you getting fit for purpose.

Perhaps you just wish you were healthier and fitter so that you were less of a burden on your horses back? Imagine having energy left at the end of 3 miles to ride the finish not looking like a bag of balls sat on top!

I know deep down you really want to know which exercises best mimic what you do in the saddle and the metabolic demands of your equestrian event and you just wish someone could tell you how to train to make yourself a more effective rider.

## Turn Your Dreams and Wishes into Reality



Imagine the day you go to x country schooling and your horse doesn't stumble going into that same set of steps because you haven't got the strength to hold him/her together!

Visualise yourself being able to event one more horse without feeling that your performance has been hampered by the previous efforts on the x country course!

Imagine being able to make the most of a one to one lesson because your back doesn't stiffen up after 5 minutes making the rest of the lesson a pleasure not a battle!

Look forward to jumping out the saddle after a hard days hunting and landing on legs that actually feel like they belong to you!

Imagine if you were more confident with your strength to hold your horse round the x country course. Imagine if you could sit in trot for longer periods of time without getting tired.

Imagine if your new strength and fitness made these 4 daily chores a breeze!

1. \*Humping the hay bales wasn't so hard every day.
2. \*Get that mucking out done quicker!
3. \*More strength to lift the bags of feed into the feed bin or carry buckets of water across the yard.
4. \*Picking up your horses hooves to clean them out.



By following a specific exercise programme, expect your muscles to be strong, quick and reactive for the end of the race or event.

## DONT CONFUSE ACTIVITY WITH PRODUCTIVITY



Ok so the New Year / new season approaches and you like many may have considered a general fitness plan that looks something like this:

'I'll do about an hour most days, on cross-trainer, treadmill, rowing machine and weights'.

I am sorry but you are not going to get fit for anything, let alone rider fit.

*Firstly*, that generic 10 minutes on the x-trianer, 10 minutes on the bike, 10 minutes on the treadmill stuff is boring, and you will give it up!

*Secondly*, your body will adapt to this. Therefore after 2 weeks, it will find the same thing much easier. This results in a lack of results and is often followed by relapse, you see this in gyms all over the world after January!

Heres another way of looking at it.

Week one of your horses fitness programme, you just bring them back into work and you do 1 hour of lunging. Then in weeks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 you do exactly the same. Will they be ready for competition? Will they have improved from week 1 by doing the same every week, answer is NO!

*Thirdly*, the weight training you are doing may actually be training the opposite muscles to the ones you need for your riding .So that valuable hour has turned into a complete waste of time and counterproductive for when you come to jump back in the saddle!!



## **So maybe you wanted advice from an 'expert'?**



So like many people, you pop to the shop to get the latest celebrity DVD! That is a waste of time and money! The last time I checked, Davina McCall would have been awesome at counting calories, but I am not sure about her exercise and programme design skills!

Please do not buy a January/New Year DVD, you will regret it. Instead do some research, speak to your friends and fellow riders about who and what to follow, read fitness and health articles and journals.

More than that, the exercises in the DVD are likely to be very generic, which will leave you frustrated after you follow it for a month and you don't feel any stronger. The plus side of the DVD is that you can do it at any time, but what about a specific equestrian fitness programme that you can fit into your day? Not just a generic, one size fits all programme, that you will get bored with!

Have you bought e-books that sat on your desktop for the so long, that you cant even remember when you bought it?

## **The, 'I will start that on Monday' scenario!**



You see that's the problem that many people face in their quest to get riding fit, there's no progressive support, addressing the whole package, from time management to nutrition.

Many people started the pilates class, which did helped for a while, but felt like they needed an oxygen tank on their back whilst riding because the cardiovascular fitness was way behind?

## The GYM.....ahhhhhh!!!!



'I don't do anything other than riding and mucking out etc but I really need too, I just don't know where to start?!

Have you tried the gym, but found it boring and too many people just staring at you rather than getting on with their exercise?

If you are like many of us equine enthusiasts, you will be much more confident doing something outside, at home or in a designated area that you can get on with what you are doing!

Perhaps you are lucky enough to not put on weight through poor nutrition. I don't know if this is lucky really, as you could be a 'skinny fat person'. That's someone who looks healthy from the outside but is a mess on the inside due to all the toxic, processed foods they eat.

Even if you look healthy, the chances are, that when you go to ride, muck out, poo pick or clean the yard, you feel unfit and weak, because you are not fit for purpose.

Developing a strong core, great cardiovascular fitness, and healthy eating habits, will help you from the yard to the saddle, every day!

You will be stronger, more stable and fit for purpose! .

## Give yourself permission to succeed!



How do you feel about the following benefits

- Increased strength for on and off the horse
- Improved cardiovascular fitness levels, making riding and yard work easier
- Improved mobility and flexibility, allowing you to maintain your seat for longer
- Improved core strength and stability for injury prevention
- Improved alertness and mental sharpness
- Improved balance and posture, helping to prevent fatigue and perhaps injury in the saddle

Being physically fit for purpose you will enable you to take in the multitude of environmental factors that affect you and your horse every time you ride and compete. Your thought processes will be far clearer and you will find yourself doing far more, thinking less.

You may even find that you can use positive imagery and visualisation before you ride to give you a great confidence boost and this will have a calming effect on your horse and its performance. By training specifically for riding you will be able to plan ahead, feel the horse and co ordinate far more effectively than before.

Your mental toughness will go through the roof. You will feel far more controlled and the results will be under your control rather than all the external influences. You will find yourself far more resilient when put in an adverse situation. So it might just be that spot where your horse shy's every time or at that fence he/she doesn't like?!

When things get tough out on that hack, in the hunting field, on the race course, in the arena, or on the x country course, you will be mentally tougher and prepared resulting in your horse staying on track and you remaining focused on the job in hand.

Don't confuse the aforementioned benefits as these:

- Arrogance
- 'Gun-ho' or happy go lucky
- Aggressive
- Optimistic

These are all psychological benefits of having a healthy body and a healthy mind. You need a support network, not an e-book or DVD that will sit on your desktop or worktop unopened. You need a programme that will start when you buy it and run from that point.

### **Success Loves Speed And Success Loves Action Takers.**

The combination of taking action and having a plan will lead to success.

This can be achieved with as little as 20 minutes of targeted exercise per day. Developing strength and stability in the key muscles around the spine, the paraspinals, multifidi and erector spinae, you will significantly reduce the likelihood of lower back pain.

Not forgetting that the core is made of many muscles that all work together to form a corset like structure holding you in place. There are muscles to the side and front of the core that need to be trained for optimum posture.

By using very specific body weight leg exercises, you can create a demand for oxygen that relates directly to your riding. Using my experience of working with riding clientele I have been able to develop a group of exercises that are so effective when it comes to creating the same feeling in the legs

You will find that the specific nature of the mobility matrixes' and stretching protocols will enhance your performance no end! Making you feel more comfortable in the saddle from the minute you get on to the minute you get off!

Having better levels of strength by using simple but extremely efficient and effective exercises will save you time on the yard and money when it comes to treatments for a bad back.

By having a nutritional plan, you will feel energised and fresh to make the most of your riding. By ridding yourself of all the toxins and eating clean, whole, natural foods, you can not help but feel re vitalised. Because your body will be less toxic, better hydrated and full of goodness, you will make more concise and clear decisions, on and off the horse.

Ultimately the specific nature of the exercise and nutritional plan will lead to a more functional, rider body! Significantly reducing pain due to postural imbalances, improving the key components of the cardiovascular fitness needed for equestrian rider and a stable core for the ultimate riding body.

**Get Fit For Purpose, Get Fit to Ride!**

## **It Just Makes Sense To Get Fit For Purpose ...Don't You Think**

I would love you to grab a copy of my articles

### **8 Fitness Blunders The Equestrian Athlete is Making**

*This is a fantastic little article of a the major points that are holding equestrian athletes up and previously held my equestrian athlete clientele up before I met them!*

### **How Cauliflower, Broccoli And LESS Sit Ups Will Give You A Better Seat And A Flatter Stomach!**

*An absolute diamond article that has really helped my equestrian athletes to understand why sit ups are ruining their seat positions and their horses balance into a fence.*

Also please pop over to my YouTube Channel and take a look at these videos.

Two of them feature my Personal Training Clients and one of the others features a Badminton and Burghley Winner

Check them out!!!

<http://www.youtube.com/user/FAFITNESSBLAST#p/a/u/2/f9VqXfGjJkQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8LXprK1Ql0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQDdmDC-uGs>