



**10<sup>th</sup> International Equitation Science Conference**  
**Equine Stress, Learning and Training**  
**ISES – Denmark 2014 August 7-9**

**Can equestrian professionals recognize signs of stress in the ridden horse?**

Presenting at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Society for Equitation Science conference, in Denmark, Nottingham Trent University researchers Carol Hall, Rachel Kay and Kelly Yarnell stated that “the interpretation of ridden horse behaviour by equestrian professionals, vets, instructors and riders, was found to differ from that suggested by physiological evidence.”

Ridden horse behaviour was assessed by twelve equestrian professionals (4 instructors, 4 riders and 4 veterinary surgeons) as they viewed video footage of ten horses that were ridden at walk, trot and canter in a pre-defined ridden test lasting 2-3 minutes. The horses were scored on seven performance parameters derived from the Fédération Equestre Internationale (FEI) rules for dressage and German National Equestrian Federation scales of training (relaxation, energy, compliance, suppleness, confidence, motivation and happiness).

Scientists also analysed the video footage independently. All aspects of the behaviour of the horse were recorded including ear position and movements, tail position and movements, mouth movements and salivation, auditory signals, head and neck position and nasal angle. Horses’ nose angles (behind and in front of the vertical) and head

carriage (high, neutral and low indicated by the position of the horses' nose relative to the body) were analysed. In general, equestrian professionals scored horses who spent most of their time with a high head carriage negatively; and those with a lower head carriage more positively. This was contrary to the physiological evidence from stress related hormones measured in saliva and eye temperature. Only the instructors associated neutral head carriage (nose in line with body) and nose angle as a positive sign. The FEI guidelines state that the nose should always be in front of the vertical and the physiological data gathered in this study supports this principle. Increased awareness of, and reference to, the FEI guidelines would ensure more consistent evaluation of ridden horse behaviour occurs.

The International Society for Equitation Science conference offers an outstanding international platform for scientists and professional practitioners to present and discuss research related to the field of equitation science. For more information about the conference, venue and programme: [www.ISES2014.com](http://www.ISES2014.com)

The International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to facilitate research into the training of horses to enhance horse welfare and improve the horse-rider relationship.

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