



Equitation Science: ‘The Road Ahead’

Rein tension explains differences in “rideability” scores during performance horse testing.

Researchers from the University of Gottingen have found that an impartial measure - rein tension can explain rideability scores given during performance horse testing. Current German mare and stallion performance testing involves horses being put through a series of standard riding assessments tests including dressage tests, and cross country and show jumping rounds. A number of test riders and judges observing from the ground, independently score each horse on a number of parameters, including “willingness to work” “constitution” and “rideability”.

Presenting at the 8th International Society for Equitation Science conference, in Edinburgh, University of Gottingen researcher Dr Ute König von Borstel noted that the current grading system is highly subjective, with the scores given to individual horses by different judges varying substantially and low agreement between riders and judges in many cases.

“Rideability results often reflect a rider’s subjective feeling about the horse. We conducted this study to determine if the rideability scores given by riders were influenced by the rein tension they experienced when riding the horses” said König von Borstel.

Rein tension can be measured by data loggers which provide objective evidence of the amount of pressure applied to the reins by the rider during riding.

A total of 33 mares and 13 stallions from two different testing stations were observed on two occasions during their performance test dressage training. During the observed tests, rein tension was continuously measured using data loggers and the frequencies of behaviours (which may be indicative of conflict) such as head-tossing, tail swishing and snorting were also recorded.

The University of Gottingen researchers found that rein tension (measured in Newtons), and the steadiness of rein contact were strongly correlated with the rideability scores given by both test riders and judges “Of all the measured parameters we observed, including the various behaviours, we found that the higher the maximum and mean rein tension, the lower the rideability score”, said König von Borstel. “We also found that variability in rein contact correlated with the rideability scores, with higher variability in the tension on the reins resulting in lower rideability scores”.

Of the behaviours recorded during the riding tests, only shying correlated strongly with rideability scores, with higher frequencies of shying resulting in lower scores.

The researchers concluded that differences in mean and maximum rein tension are used by riders and judges to determine rideability scores. Given the lack of consistent correlation between test scores and conflict behaviour, the researchers suggest that objective measures such as rein tension should be included in future performance horse testing to increase the impartiality of the scoring system.

The research was conducted at the University of Gottingen by C. Glißmann and U. König Von Borstel

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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. www.equitationsscience.com

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