



# Equitation Science: ‘The Road Ahead’

## **The future of equestrian sport lies with evidence-based training and horse management systems**

Much of the current state of equestrian competition and training is not evidence or science based which may place at risk the long-term sustainability and soundness of competition horses. Speaking at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Society for Equitation conference in Edinburgh, Secretary General of the International Riders Federation and Board member of World Dressage Masters, Wayne Channon argued for the contribution of equitation science to well-being of competition horses.

“While the current systems undoubtedly produce results, many of the training techniques on which they are based currently lack scientific evidence,” noted Mr Channon. “Opposing factions frequently assert that their system is the most effective without providing solid evidence to substantiate the claims. The French and German systems have been at loggerheads since François Baucher.”

Textbooks and training manuals provide instructions on techniques which may be rarely followed by riders in practice or which may contradict what is now known about equine cognition, learning abilities or biomechanics. Mr Channon highlighted the training of collection, in which the stop and go cues are momentarily applied at the same time. “This is standard practice and yet it would seem to contradict what science tells us about equine learning so more research is obviously needed”.

“Equitation scientists have a role to play in translating the results of high quality research to the practical training and management of horses,” said Mr Channon. “Research findings can assist riders to train effectively using validated principles and techniques which take into account the physical and cognitive abilities and limits of horses”.

In addition, Equitation Science can provide ordinary riders with the tools to train like experts by providing clear and independent systems to underpin techniques or methods. These techniques should be sustainable and ethical leading to reduced wastage due to behaviour or physical breakdown.

“All riders, irrespective of the level at which they ride or compete should understand why and how they train their horses,” commented Mr Channon. “Equitation science has a pivotal role to play in providing the answers”:

Areas that would particularly benefit from an evidence based approach included rein contact and pressure, rider position and the impacts of the saddle on the movement of the horse, and the role of pain in causing horse resistances during training.

Technologies such as rein tension meters enable the collection of real data on just how much pressure riders are using. The results of such research could then be translated into specific techniques which can be then adopted by riders.

Mr Channon noted that social media now means that anyone with a viewpoint can publicise their opinions and post damaging images or video. Misrepresentation or misinterpretation is given equal weight as fair and proper intelligence. Consequently the future of the sport needs to be protected by the development of a comprehensive code of ethics which is underpinned by quality, peer reviewed and validated evidence.

“The long term future of equestrian sports is one which is supported by science and is evidence led,” said Mr Channon. By applying the results of quality research to the everyday management and training of horses the sport will be accountable and sustainable and should be unafraid of scrutiny.”

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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.equitationscience.com](http://www.equitationscience.com)

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