



# IF YOU LIKE TO RIDE . . . WHY NOT MAKE AN EVENT OF IT!

**By Randy May**

## **The Word is Out**

The Board of Governors of the United States Eventing Association (USEA) has given the following mandate to their Education Committee: "Attract and assist newcomers to the sport."

This pamphlet is an effort to reach that goal.

## **For Those of You Who have Never Tried Eventing**

You are out on a peaceful trail ride, schooling some basic dressage, getting ready for a hunter show, or roading foxhounds and somebody up and pops this pamphlet into your hands. "What?" you exclaim, "me try eventing? I know all about that sport. It's a bunch of crazies galloping at stakes-winning speed over solid fences that look like McDonald hamburger stands. No way."

We have news for you. That is not eventing. The best way we can talk you into trying our sport is to explain why we love it.

## THE CHALLENGE

The challenge is not to take risks with your life or your horse's. Eventing offers a number of progressive levels tailored to different combinations of horses and riders. At each level, the same challenge is faced – training a horse and rider to perform well in three distinct and demanding equestrian disciplines. None of the three, dressage, cross-country, or show jumping, can be ignored. All three are difficult to master, and when you try them, you face what we call the ultimate equestrian challenge.

## THE SPORT

Unlike many forms of horse competition, eventing is not big business. There are few big prizes and few zillion dollar horses. Mink coats are seldom seen on horses or riders. It is a sport a genuine back-yard horse and rider can enjoy. We believe that eventing is for athletes, and we intend to keep it that way.

## THE HORSES

We love them. If you don't and are reading this, you have strange taste in reading material. Of course you will hear people say that eventing is too rough on horses. We reply that all horse activities contain a certain amount of risk to horses, riders, and even to bystanders. Eventing asks much, but properly conditioned, trained and ridden, life and limb problems become the exception rather than the rule. Since we ask our horses for a great deal, we have an uncommon bond with them. Remember, you start out with

simple tests in all three phases with slow speeds and uncomplicated fences at entry levels. The USEA is constantly educating event organizers to use only the appropriate design for cross-country and show jumping for each level. This results in maximum safety for horse and rider.

## THE PEOPLE

We have great people involved in every aspect of our sport. We help each other at all levels. Event people laugh a lot. Even at the beginning level, you may find yourself head to head with United States Equestrian Team members. You may not beat them, but don't be afraid to meet them. If you don't believe us, get to a USEA registered horse trial near you. Politely explain to one or more members of the organizing committee that you are interested in the sport and would like to learn what goes on and help out. You will have to do some walking and maybe even some running to keep up, but we'll bet you that you will enjoy yourself and learn a great deal.

## OUR BET

So that, in a nutshell, is why we do it. Here is our bet. Think about a sport that allows progressive challenge to rider, trainer and horse. If your horse can read, give him this pamphlet. Think about a sport where people help you, and not put you down. Go to a horse trial. Meet people. See what really goes on. Try our sport with one caution-you'll probably become addicted.



## INTRODUCTION

From now on, this pamphlet has two audiences – those people who are considering trying the sport of eventing, and those others who enter their first event without a thorough knowledge of the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) rule book. The purpose is to provide education and help in order for you to have a safe and enjoyable experience. Keep in mind the word “enjoyable”. If you don’t have fun in this sport, don’t do it!

Most people enter their first event at a level called Beginner novice. Generally, the competition is a one or two-day format. At this level, the dressage test requires only walk, trot and canter – rather like a one man hunter hack class in a low, rectangular ring. The cross-country course is simple and the show jumping test straight-forward.

Some competitions are called combined tests and leave out the cross-country phase entirely, scheduling dressage and show jumping only. In either case, the combined score from all phases determines the winner. The majority of the information in this pamphlet will refer to entry level competitions, and it all relates to USEA competitions. There are many unregistered combined training/eventing events, but they are not obligated to follow the rules for combined training/eventing laid down by the USEF. While many of these unregistered competitions are great fun, we can’t speak for all of them.

### O.K.-WHAT DO YOU DO FIRST?

Here comes the hard sell. Your first step is to join the USEA. This will cost you about what you spend on a fancy monogrammed saddle pad or a dinner at a good restaurant. You can survive without the saddle pad for now, and athletes shouldn’t eat all that rich food anyway – so join. Here is what you’ll get.

### EVENTING USA

*Eventing USA* is the only publication in the United States devoted solely to the sport of eventing. Printed six times a year, this four-color, glossy magazine is full of educational features covering everything from breeding your next event horse to riding a winning dressage test, from veterinary advice to the best way to negotiate a water jump.



### MEMBERSHIP CARD AND NUMBER

A pretty little card, and who knows, you may win your state’s lottery with the number!

### ACCESS TO THE USEA WEBSITE

The USEA website is the center for all information about the sport of eventing in the U.S. By visiting the USEA website you have daily access to the latest event coverage and news about the sport. The website is the best way to find event information, clinics in your Area, and any form or document you could need. Need to find a new trainer or coach? Check out the complete listings of ICP Certified Instructors by level or Area. Want to know who is the top rider in the country? Just click on the leaderboard page under the competitions tab. Take some time and explore [useventing.com](http://useventing.com) because there is a wealth of information to be had there.

### INFORMATION AND HELP

The staff at our office in Leesburg, Virginia are a friendly group and will do their best to answer any dumb question you may throw at them!

### AN ORGANIZED SPORT

If you are competing without membership, thousands of the rest of us are paying for countless hours of effort that go into organizing our sport for your fun and safety. We don’t want to accuse you of being cheap, but how ‘bout some help?



## **LONG RANGE PLANNING**

Eventing is a sport that needs a great deal of before-the-fact planning and organizing. Assuming you want to try it, you have to plan a conditioning and training program well in advance. At least two months before any event you plan to enter, have a Coggins test drawn on your horse. (In most states, you will need a Coggins within twelve months or less to enter any registered event. Check with your veterinarian to see if yours is one of these states.) The timing on this is critical since entries open six weeks before the event. The Opening date for all competitions is provided in the *Omnibus*. Since space in most events is limited, it is very important that your entry be postmarked exactly on the Opening date, (never before or it is invalid). Having gotten the paperwork out of the way, let's talk about instruction.

## **INSTRUCTION**

There are two basic ways to gain instruction in eventing – the first is reading, the second is having somebody teach you.

On the subject of reading, The USEA office has a full selection of educational material covering every soup-to-nuts detail of the sport. Call or email them – that's what they're there for!

Lessons are critical to all eventers at all stages of

development. You need an instructor who is well-informed in basic horsemanship, conditioning, dressage, cross-country, and show jumping. This often takes the form of several people if you aren't lucky enough to have a knowledgeable event teacher in your neighborhood. If you do, great! If you don't, there are several sources of information. We have already suggested that you go to a horse trial to learn. Visit the Instructor Certification Page (ICP) on the USEA website to see a full list of all certified event instructors. As an alternative, call or email your Area Chairman who can probably give you some names of experienced people for you to contact or the dates and location of any eventing clinics that may be planned for your area. Another good source of information is any USEA educational seminar which may be scheduled in your part of the country. These seminars allow you to learn a great deal of theory about the sport, so that you may compete safely and well.

## **SAFETY FOR THE HORSE**

Safety of the horse is a paramount concern of eventers, yet many entry level rider fail to follow some very basic rules. Accidents will happen in almost any activity, but the following items should always be borne in mind.

1. Make sure you are on a sound, healthy horse. If your horse has any lameness problems or has recently had any such problems, have your vet check him before

competing. If your vet advises caution, DON'T GO... PERIOD.

Learn your horse's temperature and take it frequently. This is a good way to check for any possible infection. If a horse has an infection, particularly of an upper respiratory variety, his temperature will probably go up and stress under these circumstances can cause damage. Consult with your vet.

Have your vet give the horse a good general physical examination, with attention to the heart, wind soundness and all other performance factors. Prevent a tragedy.

Be sure your deworming program and inoculations are up-to-date.

2. Ride a conditioned horse. The general opinion is that a fit foxhunter or a horse that can do an hour of work on the flat one day, a half hour jumping school the next day, and one and a half hour brisk hack on the third, all without signs of exhaustion or distress, is the most probably fit enough for an entry level horse trial. No special conditioning work should be needed at this level besides consistency. The USEA has publications which deal with conditioning for the higher levels of the sport, and it is helpful to understand the basic principles involved.

3. Event horses are the ultimate equine athletes. Yours should be well fed and glossy from good food, grooming, and management. This sport takes work!

4. Sound hooves are the basis of a sound horse. The old adage goes, "No foot, no horse." Your horse should have regular attention from a good farrier.

5. Many riders equip their horses with protective boots for cross-country, either galloping or overreach boots, or both. Expert advice should be sought before using such equipment as improperly fitted gear can cause as much damage as an accidental heel grab or laceration. The rule of thumb is to use only equipment that is necessary. "Less is beautiful." Make sure everything that the horse wears fits him properly and is in excellent repair and condition.

## SAFETY FOR THE RIDER

Following are some general rules for eventing which are specifically designed to minimize rider risk in competition.

1. Just as your horse must be fit, so must you! Eventing is a sport involving stress, and if you are not fit, you will be exhausted by even an entry-level course. If you are tired, both your ability and your judgment will suffer, and this can be dangerous.

A rider conditioning program is of great benefit; one which involves riding as well as pursuits such as running, swimming, or bicycling.

2. Your head is the only one you have – protect it. Doctors cannot yet do brain transplants so an investment in quality head gear is perhaps the most inexpensive one you can make. The USEF Rules for Eventing state that "At all levels of eventing competition, from Beginner Novice through Advanced, at Federation Endorsed competitions and recognized competitions, riders must wear headgear as follows, except as may otherwise be mandated by local law . . . Upon arrival, anyone riding a horse must wear properly fitting protective headgear which passes or surpasses ASTM (American Society





through the USEA webstore or at many local tack shops.

## SAFETY ON CROSS-COUNTRY

The cross-country phase is the portion of eventing that is unique to the sport – the essence, if you will. This phase is also the most risky and the one most difficult in which to obtain decent instruction. There are some general rules to guide entry-level competitors which should be fixed firmly in mind.

1. You get to your horse trials, you walk the course, and you may find a fence or fences that you feel are beyond you and your horse. What do you do? No two dollar ribbon is worth the risk of trying something you feel is dangerous, and if you feel that way about a fence, you invariably ride it as such, thus escalating the problem. If you seriously believe that you are in over your head, don't take it out on the organizer. He or she has spent countless, thankless hours to put on this event and will probably lose money and sleep doing it. Instead, select one of two viable options: Use the obstacle as a schooling fence. Break to a trot or a walk, get organized, and then pick up a nice, slow canter, treating the fence like you would a practice fence at home.

Or else...

If you are really worried, go around the fence and take the elimination. Please remember, eliminated riders must leave the cross-country course immediately. If you have to do the latter, you probably should get more schooling prior to your next competition.

If, on choosing the former option, you go exceptionally slow, be aware that another rider will be following you two, three or four minutes behind, and the rule book states very explicitly that you must give way to let a rider behind go through in an unobstructed fashion, and also that you are forbidden to use a passing rider as a lead.

The basic principle here is not to try something that you feel you or your horse are incapable of doing.

2. There is a philosophy of going cross-country that is

for Testing and Materials)/SEI (Safety Equipment Institute) standards for equestrian use and carries the SEI tag. Harness must be secured and properly fitted.

. . . It is the responsibility of the rider, or the parent or guardian or trainer of the junior exhibitor to see to it that the headgear worn complies with appropriate safety standards for protective headgear intended for equestrian use, and is properly fitted and in good condition." If you think your head is only worth an \$8.95 hard hat from a resale shop, it probably is!

3. A body protector is a must in cross-country phase. The USEF recommends "that the vest should pass or surpass the current ASTM standard F1937 or be certified by the Safety Equipment Institute. Inflatable vests are permitted only when worn over a body protecting vest." The body protector has become quite a fashion statement and you can get them made in custom colors for a more chic look while on course!

4. All competitors are required to wear USEA medical armbands or medical ID bracelets while jumping any fence at the competitions. Armbands can be purchased

critical, but one which lower level riders often do not seem to understand. Many times, novice riders can be seen galloping at high speed and when they approach a fence, they actually increase their pace, much as if they were trying to ram Old Dobbin through the jump. This is all wrong! Let's talk about some guidelines:

Never go faster than you need to. Speeds are determined by the height of the fence, and roaring into a two-foot vertical at steeplechase pace is courting disaster. Entry level speed is approximately 350 meters per minute, or thirteen miles per hour. This is a working canter with a few trots thrown in, NOT a screaming gallop. Learn this speed by galloping over a measured distance and timing yourself.

A horse running cross-country tends to become strung out and heavy on the forehand. This is exactly the wrong frame in which to jump a fence safely. If you then increase speed, you escalate the problem. The horse jumps correctly by balancing himself, rocking back on his hocks, and going with all his hindquarter power behind him. Your job, aside from looking pretty, is to take the horse from the on-the-forehand, galloping frame back into the balanced jumping frame. This

technique is something you'll have to learn by doing, not reading. Understanding the principle is crucial. Several strides before the fence, use your upper body and seat, give and take on the reins to balance the horse, and maintain leg impulsion to help him get into this maximum efficient frame for getting the job done.

## **SOME RULES FOR COMPETITION:** **A CAPSULIZED VERSION**

The *USEF Rules for Eventing* come in a thick book, and it's impossible to mention all of them without reprinting the manuscript in total. The Rulebook is free for download from the USEA website or can be ordered in print form from the USEA webstore.

The following are several rules which seem to cause special problems to entry-level riders.

### **SCHOOLING**

A rider may exercise his horse only in designated areas on the competition grounds and, under penalty of elimination, must not enter any of the three competition areas prior to his turn to go. Make a point of asking where you can school. ***Penalty – elimination***





## DRESSAGE PHASE

There are three rules which differ from the rules covering a regular dressage competition, and it gets confusing even to old hands!

1. It is forbidden for any person other than the competitor to school a horse. A groom may walk or trot him on a long rein, or lunge him, but they may not perform any function that could be interpreted as schooling. The only “gadgets” that can be used during warm-ups are side reins, and those only during lunging. **Penalty – elimination**

2. Tests must be performed from memory at ALL levels, without the benefit of a caller. **Penalty – elimination**

## CROSS-COUNTRY AND SHOW JUMPING PHASES

1. A hard hat with safety harness fastened must be worn when jumping either warm-up or competition

fences. **Penalty – elimination**

2. A body protecting vest must be worn during cross-country. **Penalty – elimination**

3. All competitors in USEA recognized competitions must wear a USEA armband while jumping any fence. **Penalty – elimination**

4. Warm-up fences must be jumped in the direction in which they are flagged, (red on the right, white on the left, just like competition fences.) **Penalty – elimination** (Note: Intelligent behavior must be your rule in the warm-up areas. Keep your head up and give way to others. Holler out your intention to use a fence. Screaming “OXER” may make you feel like a nitwit, but this can prevent a nasty collision.)

5. Starting before the judge has given the signal (usually by bell or whistle) in the show jumping phase is forbidden. **Penalty – elimination** (Note: It is customary – and polite – to salute the judge before the bell is rung.)

6. Showing a fence to a horse following a refusal in show jumping is also forbidden. **Penalty – elimination**

7. You must cross between the finish flags after cross-country or show jumping. It’s amazing how many people in their exuberance following a clean trip forget to do just that!) **Penalty – elimination**

## SOME FINAL SUGGESTIONS

Don’t go to a competition alone. Bring a friend along to help you. There is a lot of horse holding involved, errand running, equipment hauling, and other related chores to perform at a horse trial, no matter the level of competition. Having someone there will add a great deal of enjoyment to your day.

When you get home write a quick note to the organizer(s) thanking them for all the effort they put out in order for you to have a fun day’s competition. If you have criticism, turn it into a construction suggestion. If the event is registered, use the Event Evaluation form which will be provided. Only through intelligent feedback can our sport continue to grow.

We hope you will join us, both in our sport and in the USEA.