



THE ABC'S OF CROSS- COUNTRY DAY AT A CLASSIC FORMAT EVENT

Robin Hahn (CAN) and L'Esprit at the 1976
Bromont Olympics. LIA SEGERBLOM PHOTO

BY MAX CORCORAN AND
ANASTASIA CURWOOD

This article originally appeared as part of a series on the Smartpak Equine USEA Classic Series in Volume 38, Issues 3 and 4 of Eventing USA. Max Corcoran explains what to expect from the start box to the finish line during the endurance day at a long-format three-day event. Preparation is key!

Max Corcoran is well-known as a world-class event groom and a past winner of Waredaca's Training Three-Day Event (T3DE). In her former role as caretaker to Karen O'Connor's competition horses, she traveled to the Olympic Games, the World Equestrian Games, and the Pan American Games, not to mention multiple upper-level three-day events in the United States and overseas. She is an avid supporter of the T3DE, and has given lectures at Waredaca's T3DE since its inception in 2003.

"The Training Level Three-Day Event will teach you to ride," Corcoran says. "I did one a few years ago after joking around with Karen and David [O'Connor] that I might be able to ride in one. To my horror they took me seriously—Karen insisted that I do it and David even lent me his horse. At the time I thought, 'what have I gotten into?' But it helped my riding a lot and I loved doing it."

In this article Max talked with Anastasia Curwood about what to bring and what to do on Speed and Endurance Day at a classic format event.

In preparation for a classic format speed and endurance day, I do my packing first. I pack two sets of gear: a steeplechase bucket and what I will need for the ten-minute box in a muck tub. The steeplechase bucket comes with me to the ten-minute box from the assistance area after Phase B, so I don't need to duplicate what I have in it. The weather dictates whether I bring some items, but the basic packing lists remain the same.

Sometimes riders at Waredaca have asked me whether they should bring spare stirrup leathers and other tack items. Whether you do so is optional, but if you break a piece of equipment that is not listed here, things probably have gone wrong enough that you need to go home and try for another day.

— ❖ — An Adult Amateur's T3DE Conditioning Schedule BY NANCY KOCH

This is the program that I developed for my off-track Thoroughbred Hubblescope. He won the best conditioned horse award at the South Farm Training Level Three-Day Event and stayed sound throughout the process. As with many working adult amateur riders, the schedule I used for the Training Level Three-Day took into consideration that I may have to miss a week or two of conditioning. Therefore, I started my conditioning program well in advance—three months. It is a very gradual program; most of the work increased only ten percent per week, allowing me to miss a week and still stay on the same schedule with minimal risk.

My approach to conditioning for a Training Level Three-Day is based on what I know as an athlete myself, and applying it to the classic three-day format; for a few years I took a break from eventing and competed in duathlon (run/bike/run) races. The “core” of my conditioning program was really pretty simple: one day a week of long trot sets at a good pace (220 mpm) and another day per week of either speed work or hill climbing. I started conditioning twelve weeks prior to the event date. I established a base for the trot set that was comfortable for my horse, which was 30 minutes.

Hill work was on a trail that ascended a gradual hill, at the trot (or canter if my horse preferred). We started at 20 minutes of up and down work with a ten-minute warm up and a ten-minute cool down (a bit of a challenge in Ohio, but we made it work). I increased the trot and hill sets in time increments of ten percent. My speed work base was two minutes at 450 mpm, with a short break, then one minute at 520 with a 15-minute warm up and cool down. Speed increased by one minute every other week at 450 mpm, and by one half minute at 520 mpm.

Week One: Long Day - 30 minute trot set; Speed Day - two minutes at 450 mpm, one minute at 520 (speed for steeplechase)

Week Two: Long Day - 33 minute trot set; Hill Day - 20 minute up/down with warm up/cool down

Week Three: Long Day - 36 minute trot set; Speed Day - three minutes at 450 mpm, 1.5 minutes at 520, with warm up/cool down

Week Four: Long Day - 40 minutes trot set; Hill Day - 22 minute up/down with warm up/cool down

And so on, until week number nine where my trot sets were 64 minutes, my speed was six minutes at 450 mpm and three minutes at 520 mpm (roughly what you need at the event). On week ten I did my last conditioning day. I did the same exact time as the event itself, without the jumps:

A - Ten minutes at 220 mpm
B - Three minutes at 520 mpm
C - 20 minutes at 160 mpm
Ten-minute break (walk)
D - Six minutes at 450 mpm
Cool down

Then I gave my horse the remaining days just hacking and doing some dressage work. This “taper” was important, as it gave my horse time to rest before the event.

If I was away for a day, or a week, I would just go forward and not try and make up what was missed. I always used galloping boots on conditioning days, and bell boots for the trot sets. I spread the conditioning days out so there were at least two days, and optimally three between them.

STEEPLECHASE BUCKET

- The bucket itself can be dumped out and used for water
- Sponge and scraper
- Towel
- Scissors
- Duct tape (always very good!)
- Spare shoes (or Easyboot if no farrier available)
- Spare reins
- Hole punch
- Water for rider
- Halter with number on it
- Cooler or rug for horse (if weather is cold, in case horse has to stand for hoof care)

TEN-MINUTE BOX

- Steeplechase bucket and contents
- At least two to four water buckets (depending on weather)
- Extra studs and wrench
- Extra horse boots
- Extra bell boots
- Extra whip
- Extra bridle with a different bit
- Cooler or rug if weather is cold
- Rain sheet if weather is wet
- Chair for rider
- Jacket for rider

THE BIG DAY

One hour before my horse starts Phase A, I go out to the ten-minute box and leave my equipment, placing a rain sheet over

it if it is rainy. I don't go sooner than that because I don't want to take up space that other competitors who go earlier might need. I will leave it in a compact pile and will return to set it up after Phase B.

Then I return to the stable and tack up the horse for steeplechase, because there is no time between the end of Phase A and the start of B to change equipment. Phase A is a warm-up phase for horse and rider, so the rider might wear a jacket if it is cold. He or she will trot and perhaps canter, and should plan to get to Phase B a minute or so early in order to shorten stirrups and check that the horse still has the same number of shoes he left the barn with.

After Phase B, the rider will start Phase C and then pause at the assistance

area. We will again check the shoes, and if the horse had a funny jump on the steeplechase, we will jog the horse to make sure he is sound. If the weather is warm, it is well worth it to take two or three minutes to sponge and scrape the horse. There is plenty of time for Phase C, and this step can be crucial to cooling a horse out quickly after steeplechase and before reaching the ten-minute box. While the rider is on Phase C, I take the steeplechase bucket over to the ten-minute box, and I am there in time to meet my horse with a halter at the finish of C.

The ten-minute box is a time to cool the horse and to allow the rider to regroup after the first three phases. You don't want it to be intense, but sometimes it can be. Try to be as calm and quiet around the horse as possible, as first timers might be puzzled, and old-timers will be excited about Phase D ahead! More people there helping is not always better, and for hot, excitable horses, the fewer the people the better. At the most there should be three people on the horse: one person will stand at the head and will halter and walk the horse, and two other people will stand on each side to sponge and scrape. And, if the rider's dad, mom, spouse, or other relative does not know anything about horses, it is best to leave them out of the box. Remember that this is probably a big competition for the rider, and it is her time to regroup and refocus on what lies ahead, so it is best for her to sit down and do whatever mental preparation she needs without distraction.


When the rider arrives at the box, I (if I am the designated person at the horse's head) put the halter on over the bridle and loosen the noseband and girth if necessary. The vet will take the temperature, pulse, and respiration immediately. I try to find out these values if possible—especially the temperature—so that I know how much cooling the horse might need.

Then I walk the horse over to my station and start cooling out. I put the reins up by the poll so that I can avoid getting them wet as much as possible. I check over the boots and shoes, making sure that the boots are on straight, all shoes are present, and for nicks or cuts. Then the people sponging and scraping will wet the horse with sponges and scrape the water off as quickly as possible. Scraping is critical because the water heats to the temperature of the horse and scraping it off helps to shed heat. Cold water, especially if the weather is warm, will help cool the horse (it is a myth that one should not put cold water on a hot horse!). I will also walk the horse in large circles to help keep air circulating and his muscles loose. Usually, the vets will want to see the horse jog after about six minutes. At this point I snug up the girth if necessary, to prevent the saddle from slipping. Once the horse has been jogged, it is up to the rider when to remount, but two to four minutes before the start of D is the norm. Just before the rider gets on I check the saddle position, tighten the girth and noseband if I have loosened them, and towel off the reins.

Many events have the end of Phase D next to the ten-minute box. I will meet my horse there, do a quick assessment for cuts, and allow the vets to take the vital signs immediately. I get the tack off to allow for as much cold water as possible to reach the horse's skin (but I always take studs out before taking boots off). And if the horse wants water, he can drink as much as he wants. It is another myth that hot horses should not drink water—in fact, the higher heart rate will allow quicker rehydration. If the weather is cold, I quickly bundle

the horse up in a rug or cooler. I keep tabs on how the horse is cooling out, and once she is ready to return to the barns, I pile everything into my muck tub, ready to be taken back too.

Once we return to the stables, I always give the horse at least 20 minutes alone, unless there is a critical veterinary issue. This allows him some time to urinate, eat a bit of hay, and get his composure back. If the horse is sound and healthy, it is best to allow him as much rest as possible. After this period I will begin cold therapy. However, not all horses will tolerate ice; some find it (especially the noise) scary. So I will have tried it at home first and, if necessary, I will use commercially available wraps that hold ice instead. Then I wrap the horse over liniment (in my case Lona's Leg Liniment) with a little bit of baby powder sprinkled over it. I prefer not to use poultice, because I have had too many horses develop big legs from a small invisible cut or boot rub that I have unwittingly covered with mud overnight, but you should use what you prefer (as long as you have tried it at home first). That night, I will ask a friend to watch the horse jog in hand, and take him for a walk to stretch his legs. Then he gets the rest he deserves for a job well done.

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