

# IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SMALL STUFF!

## PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST THREE-DAY EVENT — PART ONE

By Cindy Collier Rawson

AS PART OF CINDY RAWSON'S SERIES ON "EVENTING ACROSS THE POND," THE EDITORS OF *EVENTING USA* ASKED HER TO INCLUDE ONE OR MORE ARTICLES ADDRESSING HER PREPARATION FOR A THREE-DAY EVENT. SINCE 1982, CINDY HAS REPRESENTED THE UNITED STATES IN OVER 30 CCIS IN EIGHT COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE 1998 WORLD EQUESTRIAN GAMES IN ROME.



**T**his article is about how I prepare for a three-day event and has been written with the rookie in mind. It is not meant to be a definitive guide, but is a brief description of what works for me as I try to swing the balance of fortune in my favor. I have outlined some of the pointers and tips I have picked up (sometimes through bitter experience!) and naturally, not everything I do will suit everyone. Choose what works for you.

Since I have assumed that competitors have access to quality trainers and that horse and rider are physically prepared for their first three-day, I have not included any training and fitness work in this discussion. The first part of the article will deal with general preparations, traveling to the event, and everything up to and including the dressage phase. In the next issue, I will cover the remaining stages of a three-day event.

Training for your first three-day event is not just about preparing yourself and your horse for the phases of competition. Once you enter the arena or set off on course, your success is going to depend not only on the training, skill, and fitness of the horse and rider partnership but on a multitude of other factors. Whether you believe in fate or creating your own luck, much of your competitive outcome rests on chance. The best preparation in the world cannot anticipate the weather, the size and location of the crowds, or the trajectory of an errant plastic bag! The pressures of competing are enough, so managing the things that you *can* do something about plays a huge part in keeping distractions to a minimum and reducing stress. If you are well organized and free to focus on the job at hand, you improve your chances of success and will hopefully gain more satisfaction from your riding.

### General

Pick your first three-day competition carefully. If you have an option, try to find a course that is suited to your horse. Check the USEA *Omnibus* for event listings, including closing dates for entries, and the FEI for qualification requirements. Work backwards in planning your competition schedule. Include enough time for back-up competitions should you not achieve your qualifications the first time around. You may have to consider entering two competitions at the same time if you are worried about oversubscription at the event you have chosen.

Register your horse and yourself with the FEI ([www.horsesport.org](http://www.horsesport.org)).

If you are competing in a CCI\* in the country in which the horse is registered, you do not need to obtain an FEI passport. Instead, the horse must be properly registered with the national federation (USA Equestrian in the U.S.), identifiable (a Coggins test form with the horse identification drawing will suffice), and have proof of all required vaccinations, which include the required primary influenza series (two injections given no less than 21 days and no more than 92 days apart), as well as a booster given within the preceding 12 months. None

of these injections can be given within the preceding seven days, including the day of competition or of entry into the competition schedule.

If the horse is competing in a foreign country, regardless of the level, then it must have an FEI passport. To obtain an FEI passport for your horse, seek USA Equestrian approval about eight weeks prior to the competition (particularly for foreign competitions as the entry has to come through your federation).

FEI competitions operate under a different set of rules and it is important to know the differences. The USET can help to keep you informed. Pay particular attention to the very strict rules on allowable medication during and preceding competition!

Prepare a check-off list of all the equipment you will need. Double-check it before you leave. Try to take duplicate items of all tack if you can. A bicycle is invaluable for touring the roads and tracks phases (A and C).

Consider taking a blood test from your horse six weeks before the three-day event to determine that the com-

plete blood count is correct at this stage of training. Consider a tracheal wash one-month ahead to test for clear airways and respiratory infections. This allows enough time to treat the horse if required. Your vet should be able to advise you on these procedures. Make sure all relevant paperwork is up to date, such as health certificates or Coggins tests.

Service your truck and trailer and plan your route well in advance.

### Traveling

If travel to the event involves a long trip, I take my horses off every six hours or so for a hand walk. For every full day of travel, I stop for at least five to six hours rest. It's important to know your horse's normal temperature and to take it twice daily while traveling. This is to monitor for shipping fever (consult your vet for more information).

I like to allow my horses a day at the event site to recoup for every 12 hours of travel.

Plan when to feed while traveling. Use electrolytes and make feed sloppy





Opposite page: The formal vet inspection is the ground jury's first impression of you, so it is important that you and your horse be well turned out. Here Cindy presents Benny at the Weston Park CCI.

Above: Cindy and Harley going out on Roads and Tracks at Aldon CCI\*.

to help keep your horse hydrated. I feed vitamin C starting a week prior to traveling to help avoid minor respiratory infections. Likewise, soaking any hay or feeding haylage can help to keep the dust down. Clear lungs are essential.

Buy a bigger trailer (just kidding!). No matter the size of your trailer or van, I guarantee you will fill it with all those "essential" items that always seem to match or exceed the capacity of your vehicle!

#### Arrival

Visit the stable manager as soon as possible to get all relevant information: your show packet, bridle and halter numbers (to be worn at all times), event maps, times of briefings, etc. The manager and staff will be very busy, so a smile always helps. Remember, they're more than likely

unpaid volunteers putting in long hours for the sport they love.

After settling into your designated area, get your horse used to the new and strange surroundings. Take him for a gentle hack and leg stretch. If he's an eventing veteran, he knows what's coming and may be excited and tense.

Hand graze as often as you can. Try to get as close as you're allowed (check with the show management or officials if you're not sure) to the actual competition arenas. To help the horse relax in this new and busy environment, be willing to keep pulling him out for short but frequent walks. Keep hard work to a minimum before the first vet check.

Protect your horse's legs at all times while traveling and during the event. Use stable bandages in the stall and boots/bandages when out.

Use lots of bedding so your horse is

warm, comfortable, and unlikely to scrape himself. Make sure there is an ample supply of fresh water. Keeping your horse hydrated is a top priority.

#### Rider's Briefing

Take notes and listen closely. If you're unsure of anything, ask questions. You don't get penalized for being green, but a green mistake could cost you.

Pay close attention on the drive around the roads and tracks. Find your kilometer markers and compulsory flags. They're easy to miss when mounted and you're under stress!

The same applies to the steeplechase walk.

#### Walking the Course

Walk the course alone the first time. It is the only chance you will get to imagine what your horse's first impressions will be.

The second walk can take a long time. Measure the course with a meter wheel and compare with the official distance. Often organizers will wheel a very tight line, in which case making the time will be difficult. Take careful note of all the alternative options and record your minute markers. Pick fixed objects as your minute markers (e.g. trees)—not items that may be moved or obscured by crowds on the day of the competition. Write them down.

Ask more experienced riders if you're unsure of the approach to particular jumps. Don't be shy. In my experience the "stars" of our sport are more than willing to give helpful advice.

On the third walk, imagine how the course is going to look on the day. Visualize your perfect ride and don't forget to also imagine yourself successfully coping with any problems that might arise.

On the morning of the competition, I go out on course to check the footing and to re-walk difficult lines. If there is enough time, I try to watch how the tricky fences are riding and compare notes with other riders.

#### Vet Check

All events are required to check the incoming horses soon upon arrival. Sometimes the horse will be checked

by a vet the moment he's off the trailer, so make sure he arrives looking his best. Bear in mind you are now at a horse show, which means by definition, you and your horse and entourage are on display. Initial impressions are the first steps to scoring well, so be neat and tidy in your person, your tack, and your horse, especially if this is your first time at a CCI. A sloppy turnout can create the impression that you're not serious about your sport.

The formal trot-up is the ground jury's first impression of you, so it is important that your horse be well turned out—look smart, smile and act confidently. (For more tips on the trot-up, see "What Has Six Legs and An Honest Smile" and "Farm Call" from *Eventing USA*, May/June, 2002.)

Practice trotting up at home. Ask a knowledgeable friend or your vet to watch you and help gauge the best pace and balance for your horse.

#### Dressage

Set up a dressage arena at home, so that the horse becomes used to working within artificial confines.

Simply laying planks of wood on the ground is a cheap alternative that creates the same effect, particularly if painted white. (A good job for Dads!) For the more nervous horses, try to introduce flowers or flapping, snapping flags into the training area so they are not spooked at the competition.

Be sure to have your bit and spurs checked in good time.

Find out which test you will be performing well in advance and start practicing at home, being careful not to actually "teach" the entire test to your horse, or he'll start to anticipate. Use a competent trainer and have someone video you frequently. If your facility has arena mirrors, even better! Thanks to the efforts of husband Scottie, we now have some in our outdoor school. The first time you see yourself riding in the mirror, be prepared for a shock!

Practice wearing your tailcoat. Pin down the flaps of your coat to your saddle pad; it looks neater and avoids distracting the horse. Make sure your top hat fits and will stay on while doing canter work in a stiff breeze.

Don't forget to sew on your USA flag to the saddle pad (good job for Moms!).

Find a length of black clothes elastic and sew a small loop on each end. This can be used for holding your dressage number in place by looping the elastic around your back, through the number, and hooking the loops over your coat buttons.

On your dressage day, bring everything that is needed to the dressage area: sponge, body brush, copy of the test, rain coat, fly spray, bits, extra studs, hoof pick, hoof oil, boot buffer cloth, towels, video camera.


Most events have a dressage ten-minute arena for the combination next to ride. Know where this is and how to get from it to the competition arena.

If there is sufficient time, watch an early test to check you have learned the right one. If you made a mistake, you wouldn't be the first!

Check the arena footing and observe how it is riding. Are other horses slipping or is the ground being churned up? Decide upon size of studs.

Ride your test confidently and look like you are having fun (even if you are not!). As we all know, horses are incredibly sensitive. They feel what you feel, and react accordingly.

I hope that this information is helpful. I welcome any feedback and can be contacted through my website at [www.Cindyrawsoneventteam.com](http://www.Cindyrawsoneventteam.com).

Next month: *It's all about the Small Stuff! - Part II*. Preparing for the steeplechase and cross-country, final vet check, show jumping, and after-competition care. 



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For more details, photos or video:

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Email: [creventteam@aol.com](mailto:creventteam@aol.com)



# IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SMALL STUFF!

## PREPARING FOR YOUR FIRST THREE-DAY EVENT — PART TWO

By Cindy Collier Rawson

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**T**his article is the second installment on how to prepare for your first three-day event, written with the rookie in mind. It is not meant to be a definitive guide, but is a brief description of what works for me as I try to swing the balance of fortune in my favor. In the last issue, I dealt with general preparations—travelling to the event and everything up to and including the dressage phase. In this article, I have outlined pointers and tips for the remaining elements of a three-day competition—the speed and endurance phases, the ten-minute box and show jumping. Again, not everything I do will suit everyone, so choose what works for you.

### The Day Before Cross-Country

- You are going to need help (particularly in the ten-minute box), so the more people you can rope in to assist you the better (at least two). Meet with your team the night before to assign jobs. Ask your helpers to watch certain fences you may be worried about and to bring their information back to you in the ten-minute box.
- Look at your start times and plan when to feed (four to five hours before the start of Phase A) and hand walk your horse in the morning. I reduce my horses' hay ration the night before cross-country and feed only a small flake in the morning.

- Always hand-walk using a lunge line and bridle if your horse is likely to be excitable.
- Consider buying a cheap set of walky-talkies—they are useful for relaying information quickly.
- Make a rider card so you know at what time to be at each kilometer marker on the roads and tracks and at each minute marker on the steeplechase and cross-country. This should be strapped to your forearm for quick reference on course. Make it easily readable and cover in plastic or clear sticky tape to make it waterproof.
- Have your team synchronize their watches to match the official competition clock (usually located in the stable manager's office). Buy a count down clock and commence counting down exactly two hours before you are due to start the cross-country phase. This allows everyone to know exactly how long is remaining before you start Phase D.
- Wear two stop watches on the day, and ensure that spare batteries are available. The second watch not only acts as a backup, but is important if you are halted on course. Recording your own stoppage time acts as a useful comparison to the official time penalties you may be given.
- Check that all of your equipment and tack is in good order and is safe to use.
- Tie a shoelace through the top braid in the mane. Then wrap it around the headstall of the bridle and tie it securely. This stops the bridle being pulled off completely should you have the misfortune to be pitched over the horse's head!

### Cross-Country Day

- Stay calm. It is normal to be nervous. Visualize completing the course successfully—don't focus on the what if. If you do your best and what is right for your horse, you will succeed.
- Check the footing. Ask riders who have already completed if you aren't sure which studs to use for each phase.
- Try spotting a few fences yourself if there is time. If not, ask knowledgeable people to watch the fences that you think are difficult and have them report back to you with their information in the ten-minute box.



Dara Bailey photo

Above: The start of Roads and Tracks. Phase A has a pace of a brisk trot at 220 meters per minute (mpm) for a CCI\* event and is a warm-up for Phase B—the Steeplechase. Roads and Tracks Phase C is a cool down from the Phase B and allows for a fair amount of walking. The pace is slower at 160 mpm. Once your horse has had time to recover, trot on to get to the ten-minute box at the required time.

Below: Phase D—Cross-Country. Approach the first fence carefully, and support your horse. After the excitement of the 'chase, many horses try to brush through the first cross-country fence with occasionally unfortunate consequences.



Dara Bailey photo

- Allow plenty of time to get yourself and your horse ready.

### Roads and Tracks - Phase A

- When you walk or drive the roads and tracks, take careful note of the obligatory markers. Many "old and bold" riders have been eliminated from an event by missing a compulsory flag during the roads and tracks.
- Hand walk your horse in the morning. If your horse is fairly calm, mount and walk for 20 minutes before the start.
- The pace for a CCI\* will be a brisk trot at 220 meters per minute (mpm). This means Phase A will be between 16-20 minutes in duration and over 3,500-4,400 meters. You might want to consider a short canter to get the horse thinking "forward" before the steeplechase.
- Always try to look for the best footing.
- It never hurts to say hello to the flag marshals. Not only does it relieve the tedium or their day, but it reduces the chance of your number being missed!

### Steeplechase - Phase B

- Work with your trainer to practice the pace and rhythm needed for the steeplechase. If you don't have access to a track, measure 640 meters in a field and learn to ride this distance in one minute. A simple homemade brush fence with a good ground line will aid your practice.
- The pace for a CCI\* will be 640 mpm, lasting 3-3.5 minutes, over a distance of 1,920-2,240 meters. There will be five to seven brush fences at 1.4 meters (4' 7") high.
- Try to keep an even rhythm with no erratic changes of pace to conserve the horse's energy, and try to finish within ten seconds of the optimum time (on the underside, naturally!).
- I always choose a marker 30 seconds back from the finish line, allowing me to gauge and adjust my pace, if necessary, at the end of the course.
- Keep your horse balanced as you slow down gradually, at the same time making headway onto phase C.

### Roads and Tracks - Phase C

- There will be a designated assistance area after Phase B. Have a helper (armed with your horse's spare shoes and studs, sponge and water) check your horse's shoes as you ride past. If he has lost one and the event has a compulsory halt on Phase C, (generally within one kilometer of the finish of Phase B) fit an easy boot to allow you to reach the farrier in that rest area. If there is no compulsory halt, the farrier will be available just after Phase B and you can have your horse's shoe replaced immediately.
- If your event has a compulsory halt on Phase C, dismount, sponge and scrape the horse, and check that all studs are tight.
- After the exertions of the 'chase, Phase C allows for a fair amount of walking. The pace is slower at 160 mpm (25-40 minutes over 4,000-6,400 meters). Once your horse has had time to recover, trot on again to get to the ten-minute box at the required time.

### Ten Minute Box

The ten-minute box warrants a small article in itself. However, if you prepare, stay calm, and think logically, you will have more time than you think.

- If this is your first three-day event, consider practicing your vet box routine at home.
- As the rider, the less you do in the box, the more time you have to visualize the course and stay focused on the job at hand. Have a drink and gather information from your fence spotters.
- Arriving one or two minutes early into the box allows that little bit of extra time. On the other hand, don't waste energy on Phase C by arriving too early.
- As you and your horse approach the box, you will be required to trot to enable the veterinarian to check the soundness of your horse. She will also check your horse's pulse, respiration, and temperature as soon as you have dismounted.



After Phase C, the most important job in the ten-minute box is to cool down your horse. Use iced water if competing in hot weather, and have one helper sponge the horse while another scrapes him off. The faster the water is on and off, the faster the horse will cool down.

- When choosing your spot in the holding area, think about the time of day you will be running and choose a place that offers shade or shelter and easy access to water and ice.

- The ten-minute box can become crowded, so try to take all your equipment and spare tack in a trunk. Although this can be a little awkward to manage, it keeps your things together and, most importantly, dry. Most events will have some form of transport available to help you move equipment to and from the ten-minute box.

- Have your supporters assemble with plenty of time before you arrive, and have them fill several buckets with water and/or ice. As long as the weather is cooperative, lay out all equipment on a rain sheet so that it is easily accessible. (A full equipment list for three-day events is available via e-mail.)

- Your helpers should know where the farrier is located and have a complete spare set of shoes handy with the studs already fitted.

- The most important job during the ten-minute break is to cool the horse down. Use iced water if competing in hot weather, and have one helper sponge the horse while another scrapes him off. The faster the water is on and off, the faster the horse will cool down.

- It is important to keep your horse walking between washdowns—this keeps his muscles relaxed and prevents lactic acid build-up.

- The ten-minute box will also be the area to which you triumphantly return having ridden a clear and fast cross-country round. (Thinking positively!) Ensure that you also have the equipment and helpers necessary to care for your horse when you have finished the course.

- Timing is the key in the ten-minute box. This is my team's approach at a typical three day:

◆ **Minute twelve**

- Vets will take the temperature, pulse, and respiration rates of your horse. Ensure that you keep this information for future reference.

- Put a saddle cover on (to keep the saddle from getting wet while washing the horse down), loosen the noseband and girth and put the halter on. Alternatively, clip a lead rope to the bit.



After the horse's pulse, respiration, and temperature have been checked, a helper trots the horse before the veterinarian to check for soundness.

◆ **Minute eleven**

- Check that the boots have not slipped and look for any cuts or scrapes from the steeplechase.

- Wash and scrape

- Walk the horse around in a 20-meter circle and check that all shoes are still on. If one is lost, go immediately to the farrier to have it replaced.

◆ **Minute ten**

- Wash and scrape

- Walk the horse around the box

◆ **Minutes nine, eight, and seven**

- Wash, scrape, and walk

- Offer the horse water if he will drink or squeeze a soaked sponge into his mouth.

- Check that studs are still tight—change if necessary

- Change the bit if necessary

◆ **Minute six**

- Wash and scrape

- Walk the horse around the box

- Syringe an electrolyte mixture into the horse's mouth

◆ **Minute five**

- Liberally apply eventing "grease" from the top of the legs and stifles to the hooves. Do not apply to the chest and stomach as this stops the skin from sweating. Use rubber gloves to apply the grease so that you don't transfer this slippery stuff to the reins or stirrups.

- Dry reins, stirrups

◆ **Minute four**

- Reposition the saddle and tighten the girth

- Veterinarian will ask for the horse to be trotted up to check for soundness and will possibly monitor the heart rate and temperature again.

◆ **Minute three**

- Take the halter off

- Tighten the noseband

- Re-mount

- Dry soles of your boots and stirrup pads thoroughly

- Check the girth and tighten the over-girth

◆ **Minute two**

- Pick up a trot and canter if sufficient area is available. Make sure that your horse is alert and realizes that the day's work is not yet done!

◆ **Minute one**

- Under starter's orders

- Have someone available to assist if you anticipate any difficulty with your horse when entering the start box.

- Start your stopwatch ten seconds before you are due to set off. Check that it is actually running and have eyes up and both hands on the reins when you hear the word "Go!"

### Cross Country - Phase D

You and your horse have trained hard and are fully prepared. You have walked the course and know all of the alternatives. You have visualized your clear round and are ready for the most exciting part of the competition, the cross-country

- Approach the first fence carefully, and support your horse. After the excitement of the 'chase, many horses try to "brush" through the first cross-country fence with occasionally unfortunate consequences!

- Try to make up time between fences by "kicking on" upon landing.

Be aware of how your horse feels. If



your horse is tired, steady up between fences, support with hand and leg and come home slowly.

- If your horse is really tired or not having a good time, it is far better to retire to fight another day than to give him a bad experience or worse!
- Horses are great levelers. If all does not go to plan, use your round as a learning experience. Remember the positives, work on the negatives.

#### Aftercare

Once the excitement of the cross-country is over, the real work begins in caring for your horse. After all his efforts, it is vital that care starts immediately if he is to be sound and supple enough to pass the final veterinary inspection and have the best chance to perform well in show jumping.

- The horse will need to be washed, cooled down, and walked until his heart rate and temperature have returned to normal.
- Keep your horse hydrated. Be sure to offer him small amounts of water at frequent intervals and monitor his water intake.
- Care for his legs begins immediately. First of all, I use cool boots soaked in ice water to take the initial heat out of the legs. It is vital however, that these are not left on too long as they start to have the opposite effect on the legs if they are allowed to heat up!
- After the horse is completely cooled down I like to whirlpool my horses' legs for 20 minutes using boots full of ice water and repeat the process one or two more times throughout the evening. Finally, I use a cooling poultice and bandages overnight.
- Use of a magnetic rug, massage and simple stretching really helps keep horses from stiffening up. Feeding arnica tablets throughout the event can also help reduce bruising and soreness. Your vet should be able to advise you on these matters.
- Hand walk your horse to help keep the lactic acid from building up. After the initial cooling down period, take him out two or three more times for a ten- to fifteen-minute walk (depending upon the time at which you finish the cross-country). Try to

walk for the last time just before the stables close for the night.

- Leave your horse alone for at least six hours, remembering that rest is an important part of recuperation.
- Repeat icing, massage, stretching, and hand walking in the morning.

#### Final Vet Check

The final veterinary inspection will take place on the morning of the last day of the competition. Each horses' soundness is assessed to ensure that it is safe for them to continue the competition.

- Your horse may benefit from a hack or light flatwork to loosen him up on the morning of the final day.
- Learning how to trot up properly takes practice. So as not to appear sluggish, your horse needs to trot straight and stay well up with you.
- If you find that your horse is really stiff in the morning and not responding to treatment, then it is always best to retire. Bear in mind that this will hopefully be the first of many three-day events, and a little restraint now may save your horse for a glorious career later on!

#### Show Jumping

- Remember that this is the final phase of a long and tiring competition for your horse. Try to do enough flatwork to ensure that your horse is supple and obedient, but don't overdo the jumping in the warm up.
- As with the cross-country, allow yourself plenty of time to walk the show jumping course. I like to walk two to three times, paying close attention to the areas where time can be made up. Time penalties in show jumping can be very expensive!
- Unless you are unfortunate enough to be one of the first to jump, watch a few riders to see how the course is riding and whether the time allowed is tight.

#### Aftercare

- Your horse's therapy treatment after show jumping should be basically the same as that given after the cross-country, although he will probably not need to be washed down in ice water

- unless it is extremely hot. Use ice, poultice, and bandages on his legs, and a magnetic rug, etc., on his body.
- Keep your horse hydrated. Monitor his water intake.
- On the way home, I like to stop and unload once every six hours to give my horse a hand walk.
- After our return home, I give the horse two to three days off. He will then be hacked every other day for ten days (if sound and well) to let him down. Finally, he will be turned out for a well earned two to four week holiday!

I hope that these articles have been helpful and go some way toward easing the daunting prospect of a first three-day event. While there is no substitute for actually getting out there and doing it, this information should help the first timer get a taste of the preparation required in order to take on the biggest challenge our exhilarating sport has to offer. I welcome any feedback and can be contacted through my website at [www.Cindyrawsoneventteam.com](http://www.Cindyrawsoneventteam.com). Good luck and happy eventing!



## EVENTING CLINICS

CINDY COLLIER RAWSON

Represented USA  
at World Equestrian Games 1998



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with European style'**

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AVAILABLE FOR CLINICS IN USA

Tel: 011 44 1225 742 198

Email: [creventteam@pobox.com](mailto:creventteam@pobox.com)