

# The Basics of Warm-Up Etiquette

story by Zeb Fry, Illustration by Caroline Helmke



# “Good manners reflect something from inside—an innate sense of consideration for others and respect for self.”

— Emily Post

WE ALL FACE THE CHALLENGES OF COMPETING, AND WITH EVENTING, THERE IS NO ROOM FOR ERROR AND NO SECOND CHANCES. A good warm-up is just as important as the actual phase itself and can set the tone as to the type of weekend you are going to have. What seems to be missing in the warm-up arena is manners and etiquette, not just from the riders but from anyone near or around the warm-up.

The old adage certainly applies to the challenges of the warm-up, and it is not hard to remember: Treat others the way you want to be treated. Here is a list of reminders for anyone who is in or nearby the warm-up arena.

## KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

- Do your best to ride left shoulder to left shoulder if you are approaching another horse and rider traveling in a different direction. This is not always possible, especially if the warm-up is in a field, but it is a general rule of thumb to avoid bumping into another competitor. If the approaching rider looks confused about which way to go and you both start doing the swivel step, make the call. Tell the other person if you are going to pass them on their inside or outside.
- Keep a safe distance (at least one horse length) between you and other riders. Sometimes the warm-up is a tight fit, and you do not have any option but to ride at a close proximity. In such cases, be sure to give others a heads-up and let them know you are approaching behind them and on what side. Additionally, do not ride with blinkers on. Keep your eyes up and know where you are going.
- If you notice a rider having trouble, whether the horse is misbehaving or is getting spooked when closely approached by other horses, do not push your luck. Give that horse and rider the space they need for the safety of all. Consequently, if your horse is misbehaving, try your best to stay out of the way of other riders or find another quiet area to warm-up.
- Keep your whip to yourself. Poking, smacking, or touching another horse with your whip as it passes by is a major no-no. The whip should lay straight down the side of your horse and not pointed outward.
- Be aware of how loud you may be when you cluck, kiss, or give other verbal cues to your horse. Very often other horses who are familiar with those cues will also respond and naturally become confused.
- Do not lunge in the warm-up arena while there are riders preparing, even if your horse is well behaved and under control. Locate a place that is designated for lunging.

## VERY IMPORTANT PEOPLE

- Do not monopolize the warm-up fences, and do not raise the fences to heights that the others are not able to jump.
- As you approach a jump, call out the fence so others know that you are about to jump the “OXER!” and will stay out of the way.
- If you cut someone off, it is always appreciated if you apologize afterwards, but avoid making that same mistake twice.
- Many riders bring non-compete horses to events. Remember that the warm-up arena is for the competitors preparing to enter their class, and it is important not to get in their way.
- Avoid “training” your horse the day of the competition. It is too late: you are at the trials, and it is time to compete.

## FOR THE REST

- Spectators need to stay out of the way of horses entering and exiting the warm-up. This applies to dogs on leashes, children in strollers, and family members wanting to take pictures.
- Unless they are setting fences, spectators and coaches need to stay out of the arena.

## RESPECT VOLUNTEERS

- Remember the ring stewards are usually volunteers, so be polite, grateful, and do not try to bully your way. If you wear a pinque coat, that is just added responsibility for you to represent yourself professionally. If you are riding multiple horses and are having difficulty with your ride times, you need to take that issue up with the people in the office before the show starts, not with the ring stewards.
- Know your ride times and be aware of the order of go. Pay attention and listen for your number to be called. For dressage, know which arena you are in and what the signal from the judge will be. For all this, wear a time piece. The ring stewards are there to help you, but it is your responsibility to keep up with certain details. 🐾

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**Zeb** has been riding and competing in equestrian events for over 30 years with her early training galloping at the track. Immersing herself in her riding, Zeb evented up to the two-star level and owns and runs little Kentucky Farm in Ball Ground, Georgia, where she trains ex-racehorses to be sport horses.

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