



Horse comes first

The FEI Endurance European Championship 2023



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Race-info

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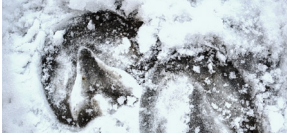
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Foreword

Horse comes first

As children, we all gazed into the eyes of our first pony with love. The long mane, the soft coat, and the big, gentle eyes. We learned to care for horses, to ride them, and to understand them. We fell off and got back on. Every setback was also a step forward, as it helped us understand the language of our horses better. So much so that when we are among our favorite animals now, we sometimes even feel like fellow beings. We see the world through their eyes, choose the paths with their feet, and prepare their food based on what we feel they need.

How privileged are we to be able to interact with horses all day, every day, to bring out the best in both of us? We are the chosen ones to sit on their backs. The love for the horse is what unites us, riders, trainers, grooms, and vets in this European Endurance Championship 2023. Although sports demand competition and rivalry, being together this week is also a celebration of connection and recognition.

We are all here for the same goal: to bring out the best performance from the horse, with love and respect for the animal. The Netherlands feels it is an honor to facilitate the horses with large stables, good food, lots of fresh water, and the best care from the best FEI vets. We can ask the horses to put everything into the competition, as long as we provide our superstars with everything they could possibly want. They are worth it.

In this magazine, riders, vets, trainers, grooms, and other involved individuals share their thoughts about horse welfare. They tell what putting their horses first means to them. No matter how different opinions and perspectives may be, we are all driven by the same love for the horse. And we are all willing to do our best for them. So, let's talk this week. Let's meet each other.

Let's find out what we can learn from each other, in order to help our horses perform at their best, with joy and happiness. Our languages may be different, but we all speak the language of the horse.

This discipline of equestrian sports comes closest to the natural way of life for horses. Roaming in the wild, keeping the herd together, and covering many kilometers. The 30 kilometers a day that a horse naturally covers have been expanded by the riders and trainers at the highest level of our sport to an impressive 160 kilometers in one day. The 160-kilometer route that awaits the horses and riders on Thursday, September 7th, caters to the horse's natural need to be challenged, to move in nature, and to cooperate with their fellow beings.

To all the riders and grooms: good luck on the tracks, enjoy the view, and encourage your horse. You've spent a lifetime preparing for this. Be the best companion and leader you can possibly be to your special horse.

To all the horses lining up at the start on Thursday morning: enjoy the nature, the company of your rider and of all the other horses. You were born for this.

Eric Lamsma
Fasna Trail, organizer
of Ermelo EC 2023

Iris Boelhouwer
Technical director / director of top sport
KNHS (Dutch Equestrian Sports Federation)

Catherine van Ravenstein
Voorzitter KNHS
Endurancevereniging



Saddle up for success: how the earliest rides shape tomorrow's endurance riders

In the Netherlands we have a saying: “learned young is done old”. By introducing children to endurance riding at an early age, we create the top of the future together.

Four connoisseurs share their vision on children and endurance sport.

Text: Rachel Marty



Sije Otten

Jay Randle is the owner of Splenda-crest stables located in Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. This riding school and endurance training centre has been touted as the foremost training stable for junior endurance riders in Australia for over the past 20+ years. “I was introduced to endurance riding in 2000 and realised that it was the one equine discipline that was holistic in its approach to the health and welfare of the horse. Riders must know their horse very well, must be able to recognise the most minor of changes in their horses’ attitude and well-being, and must spend many hours at a time perfecting their craft. I was hooked!”, she explains.

On a daily basis, Jay is involved in helping both youth and adults develop their potential as horse people and, among many other things, introducing youth into the sport of endurance: “My focus is on teaching old-fashioned ‘proper riding’.” While she encourages students to engage in any discipline they like, Splenda-crest focuses on students who want to discover endurance riding. When asked what the most important is when working with youth, Jay has a clear answer: “Let them play and encourage them to do, and not just watch”, she explains.

Let them play
Dymfy Vulto (The Netherlands), is an international endurance rider

herself and a mother of three young children, all involved in endurance riding. She agrees with Jay on the importance of fun and ‘just doing’: “We always go on competitions with the whole family. One or two are riding and the rest of the family is crewing. If we go far away, we make it into a mini vacation. The kids enjoy that. On the day of the competition, everyone has their own task and together we are a team”.

For the youngest children, there are child-specific endurance rides in the Netherlands. Renata van Meurs organizes rides like that. “We organize one of our rides at a local riding school, which allows the kids who take lessons there to participate. Kids at riding schools generally never get introduced to endurance, let alone get the chance to try it out”, she adds.

The horse is the trainer
But how does one ‘teach’ endurance? Jay answers: “The successful endurance rider needs to be balanced, confident, and a skilled rider above all else. In endurance riding, these skills are expanded to being made aware that the rider is in total control of their horse at all times.” Also, the horses themselves might play a huge role in teaching the young riders. “Horses may need conditioning, they may need direction, and they may

need to be provided with everything to make their lives meaningful, however it is the horse that then trains the rider”, she says. By having many horses available, Jay has been able to see students learn different things from different horses.

*It is the horse
that trains
the rider*

- Jay

Talent programme
Some children are very eager, as was Sije Otten, Dymfy's son. Sije and his brother and sister all started with a children's endurance ride when at the age of 6. “Sije rode his first competition at 10 years old”, Dymfy says. And that got him hooked right away: “When Sije was 11, he really wanted to participate in the selection for the talent-program for endurance, organized by the Dutch equine sports federation [KNHS, red.], but he was too young to be eligible. So he wrote a motivation letter explaining them he was eager to learn and grow into the sport. He was very happy when he was however selected for the programme”.

Photo Credit: Sarah Sullivan Photography | Captured: Tom Quilty Gold Cup 2023 @ Stirling's Crossing



Renata van Meurs



Monique de Boer



Team de Boer

Growing into succes

Kids growing up in endurance families might get the opportunities to start even earlier, as was the case for Caro de Boer, one of Monique and Geert Jan de Boer's children. Monique and Geert Jan, coached both their daughters up to youth championship level and have been coaching other riders to get the best out of themselves and their horses. Monique: "Caro started training together with Geert Jan and they rode their first endurance ride of 30 km in Arnhem. Pony Joepie was 29 years old, and Caro just 8. It was a whole party with friends and grandma all joining!" But learning was far from over. "Caro got her own horse when she was 10 years old. Candor was 4 years old then. She trained him herself. Although breaking in horses was our profession, she was the first one to sit on him." Caro ended up training Candor all the way up to participating in both World and European Young rider championships.

Growing into success does takes time. "I let my riders know that it takes 3 years of hard work to become a real endurance rider", Jay explains. First, the riders in the Splendacrest squad need to work on attaining their novice qualifications, which they generally do on Jay's more experienced horses. After that they go on to learn how to train and handle young horses by taking them through novice qualifications. All that happens before the children are allowed to ride in non-speed restricted rides. "Although speed is never encouraged in the Splendacrest Stable!", Jay clarifies.



Teach horse welfare

Teaching children to ride endurance also means teaching children the values of endurance and horse welfare. For Jay, it is even an essential part of teaching: "The knowledge that horses are all individuals, and need individual care and attention, really gets the message of horse welfare issues across. Housing, feed, hoof care, dental care, skin irritations, muscle and bone health, etcetera all are opportunities for students to learn new skills", she explains.

*Strength + Stamina + Strategy
= Success*

- Jay

When asked what skills are important when it comes to horse welfare, Jay refers to the Splendacrest motto, which is 'Strength + Stamina + Strategy = Success'. She explains: "Endurance Riding requires many other values, however strength of character, mind, body and soul are all vital. The stamina to persevere, learn, grow and encourage others is highly regarded. Strategy includes looking at your horse, the track, the time, the weather, and yourself, and putting it all together to succeed in the sport".

The children's endurance rides organised by Renata in The Netherlands also have horse welfare as the main focus during the events: "We take the time to teach the kids what the veterinarians look at during the vet checks and why, and give them the opportunity to try it out for themselves. This means that every child who participates gets the opportunity to listen to their pony's heart, learn how to feel the horse's muscles and how to test whether their pony has been drinking enough", she says. "And, there is no ranking at our rides", she continues, "Because being first or last is not what should matter for the children.

We always start the prize giving ceremony with the two most important questions, which are: 'did you have fun?' and 'did you take good care of your horse?' Luckily, the answer has always been yes, which means that everyone goes home with a prize", she explains. "Well, mostly it looks more like "as many prizes as they can carry" as our sponsors are always very generous for the children", she adds with a laugh.

Avoid stress

Nowadays, the Netherlands has about five of such rides each year, giving around 150 children the opportunity to get acquainted with endurance. Most organizers started because they realised that there was something missing for the kids to get into endurance. Renata: "Young children need to learn in a safe and fun environment. A real competition brings a lot of stress, performance drive and for both parents and child that is not always enjoyable. The kids endurance focuses on exactly that: education and easy going fun. We try to avoid the stress by taking out the strict and always focussing on the fun. For example, if you miss your starting time because your kid needed to go to the bathroom after all, well, then you just start a bit later".

*Children need to learn
in a safe and fun
environment*

- Renata

The nature of Ermelo

Text: Melanie de Jong

Cyriasische Veld

To the southwest of Ermelo lies the Cyriasische Veld. It is a large dry heathland with a lot of heather and locally crow heath. Cattle and sheep roam freely here, their grazing serves to maintain the heath. The area is rich in insects, including the dung beetle, which gratefully uses the manure of the grazers. The beetles have an important function in the food chain on the heathland.

Speulderbos

The Speulderbos is one of the most beautiful and oldest forests in the Netherlands. Curved oaks grown in wonderful curves determine the atmosphere. It is popularly called the forest of the dancing trees. The forest is a paradise for birds of prey, deer and wild boar. The Solse Gat is located in the middle of the forest. This is a deep egg-shaped pit in the forest.

‘The Speulderbos is one of the oldest forests in the Netherlands’

Legend of the Solse Gat

The monastery that stood in the forest had several towers. A moat surrounded the monastery, while a wide road formed the entrance. The abbot and the monks who lived in the beautiful monastery did not take pious life very seriously. They made short shrift of religious practices. Rather, they sold their souls to the devil and led a life that was diametrically opposed to the ideals of Christianity: they drank liters of wine, gobbled themselves up at meals and organized meetings with witches and ghosts, where they read the 'black mass'.

People from the neighborhood who passed the monastery at night knew that dark practices were taking place, because they heard a lot of noise and saw that the monastery was brightly lit. This went on for a long time. The monks partied, drank and enjoyed life. Until, somewhere in the Middle Ages, a stormy Christmas evening put an end to the wicked debauchery in the woods. Residents stayed in their houses because it was so raging outside. Suddenly they heard a huge lightning strike. The next morning a young boy passed by the site and discovered that the complete monastery had disappeared in a big hole in the woods. All that was left to see were some uprooted trees around the site and the cobbled path that formed the access road to the monastery gate. With the disappearance of the monastery, however, peace in the forest did not return. Strange, scary noises were regularly heard around the Solse Gat at twelve o'clock in the night. Until daylight came. Only then did peace return around the Solse Gat.

Ermelosche Hei

The Ermelosche Heide is a heathland area near the town of Ermelo. The highest point on the Ermelosche Heide is the so-called "Paalberg", a small moraine from the ice age. The site has been used by different groups of people over the centuries. One finds burial mounds from the time of the Bell Beaker culture. In Roman times around the year 170, there was a March camp for the Roman army that could accommodate about 4000-6000 Legionnaires. Its contours are still clearly recognizable in the landscape. The earthen defensive walls of the Roman marching camp have the status of a national monument and were partially restored in 2006.

Leuvenumse bossen

The Leuvenum stream seems endless: it is the longest stream in the Veluwe. It is no less than seventeen kilometers long and runs right through the woods of Leuven. All the way from the Uddelermeer to the Veluwemeer. Plants and animals benefit from the more natural processes and the improved water quality. For example, a rare species of fish has returned, the brook lamprey, and also a rare bug, the brook cigar. Typical water plants such as yellow iris, hedgehog's head and large water-crow-foot grow along the bank. If you pay close attention while walking along the stream, you may see a blue flash passing by: the kingfisher! One of the dozens of bird species in the Leuvenumse bossen.

Hulshorsterzand

Hulshorsterzand is a unique place in the woods of Leuvenum. An open drifting sand area, with heathland and a wandering flock of sheep. The area looked very different when Natuurmonumenten bought it over 100 years ago. The shifting sand was completely overgrown with conifers. They were once planted here, because people used to find all that drifting sand a nuisance. Trees were planted on it and the sand no longer drifts. But with that, many animals and plants that belong on open drifting sand disappeared. Natuurmonumenten has worked hard to make the sand drift again. To get back the plants and animals that used to live here. Many animals have returned. For example, three times as many pairs of the rare nightjar breed. And there are now twice as many species of bees flying on the Hulshorsterzand.

Elspeetse heide

In the thirties of the 20th century (never realised) plans were made for the construction of airfields on the heathland. In the Second World War, the German occupiers started the construction of an airstrip, but due to the plowing of deep furrows by farmers and resistance fighters, it was never put into use.

‘The kingfisher is one of the many bird species in the Leuvenumse bossen’



This article was written using www.vvputten.nl, www.historiek.net, www.wikipedia.nl en www.natuurmonumenten.nl

Horse welfare – a veterinary perspective

Text: Rachel Marty

Horse welfare has been a much talked about subject in all horse sports over the past few years. While it seems easy to wave away the concerns of the critics with a “they don’t know what they are talking about”, it might be much more productive to dare take a critical look on our sport and reflect on how we can do better. In order to get that critical and reflective view on horse welfare in endurance, we asked two veterinarians about their thoughts: Sarah Coombs and Waling Haytema.



Riding or working with a horse is a huge privilege. As Sarah puts it: “These horses are the most incredible athletes”. By letting us on their back, they allow us to share their incredible strength and amazing power. And as William Lamb said in 1817: “With great power comes great responsibility”. By nature horses are not likely to show discomfort or weakness. Simply because instinctively, they know that if they do, they are most likely to fall prey to predators who are programmed to seek out the weakest members of a herd. Additionally, they cannot speak our language, although every horse person probably at least once in his or her life has wished for exactly that to be possible. This means that it is up to the riders and trainers to invest the time and effort required to get to know the horses in such a way that it becomes possible to recognize any sign, however small, of discomfort or unease within the horse. Waling puts it like this: “We can only justify the performance we ask of our horses if we know our horses very well and take such good care of our horses that we do not cross borders and endanger horse welfare”. “It is a privilege to work alongside them and safeguard their welfare”, Sarah adds.

*It is a privilege
to work alongside
horses and safeguard
their welfare*

- Sarah

It starts with the fundamentals

According to Sarah, horse welfare entails more than just a horse’s physical health: “Horse welfare to me is the physical and psychological well-being of the horse, such that if we are to make use of their incredible athleticism it must be without exploitation or causing suffering”. For Sarah, this begins with allowing horses access to the fundamental 3 F’s: friends, forage and freedom. “In a practical sense this means, on a daily basis, allowing the horse to relax in the company of others, to spend some time each day at liberty preferably at grass and to provide him with the forage-based diet which

is essential for digestive health”, she explains. She sees that in average, endurance horses might have an advantage in this respect: “for the traditional endurance trainer the horse spends much of ‘the other 23 hours’ when it is not training, turned out at grass. Periods of high athletic demand are conventionally followed by long periods of rest, usually turned out often for weeks at a time following a 160 km competition”.

The highest degree of fitness

It is often argued that “endurance comes closest to a horse’s natural behaviour”. This mostly refers to the fact that horses in the wild cover long distances searching for food and water and keeping themselves safe from the elements and predators. However, the word ‘closest’ is one that we could put into question, as research shows that wild horses travel between 25 and 80 km per day. Obviously, this is nowhere near the 160 kilometres they cover at an endurance championship. Additionally, wild horses carry no rider and travel their distances at a much slower pace. It is clear however that wild horses are not a common sight in endurance competitions, much less at championship level.

Aside from being trained specifically for the task at hand, it must be acknowledged that horses have been domesticized and bred for specific capabilities for several centuries to amplify certain abilities depending of their use: strength, speed or stamina. Most horses performing at the highest level of endurance, often Arabians or Arabian crosses, have been bred specifically for their stamina. Although these are the perfect horses for the job, riding 160 kilometres at high speed can still be seen as quite excessive. When asked about how horse welfare combines with topsport, Sarah answers honestly: “High level endurance riding requires the highest degree of equine fitness and athleticism of any equestrian discipline, in my view”, she admits. Waling concurs: “The fact that we demand an extreme performance from the horse entails the risk of damaging the welfare and health of the horse”.

Sarah does add a ‘but’: “our sport is called endurance riding and not endurance racing. More recent developments have lost sight of that vital distinction.

Increasingly trainers, riders and owners are talking about races and racing, missing the basic point that the sport is a combination of the skills required to produce a horse that can get to the finish first and those, more challenging, demands of bringing a horse to the finish in good condition, with additional reserves in hand that would allow that horse to complete a further loop”. Sarah sees these two objectives of finishing first and finishing with a horse with enough reserves left to be able to continue, in regular conflict with one another. According to her, it then becomes the responsibility of the veterinary inspection to remove horses from competition when they begin to be unfit to continue and before their health and welfare has been compromised. “The link between high speed and the condition of the horse is well established but not well appreciated by many stakeholders”, she admits.

*Our sport is called
endurance riding
and not endurance
racing*

- Sarah

Sarah Coombs

Sarah is a practising equine veterinarian and has a long history with the sport of endurance. She became involved with the sport through a client who lent her a horse to do a ride. Although she no longer rides, she has stuck to the sport in many other ways: "I have been an FEI vet since 1994, am currently Deputy Chair of the FEI Endurance Committee, and I also chaired the Endurance Temporary Committee which brought forward the extensive rules review in 2020." She goes on to add: "I am involved in endurance as a prospective Level 4 Endurance Official Veterinarian and also as a member of the FEI Hyposensitivity Control team travelling to competitions on a regular basis".

Aside from her experience in endurance, Sarah has also been a consultant to equine welfare charities for over 30 years travelling widely including to North Africa, China and the Middle East, as well as until recently being a Trustee for World Horse Welfare for whom she still sits on technical advisory committees.



We all have a role to play

Sarah admits that high speed endurance, which she defines as having loop speeds exceeding 21 km/h, contributes a high risk to horses. "This risk can only be managed to safeguard welfare when riders exercise appropriate responsibility for riding the horse according to its abilities, and the vets carry out robust veterinary inspection and remove horses that are at risk at an early stage", she explains. An endurance event knows various actors with various responsibilities. Nevertheless, each role does have common ground, which can be found on the topic of horse welfare: putting the horses first. Whether one is a rider, a veterinary, a judge, or even a crew member or volunteer: the welfare of the horse should always be prevailing.

"The riders carry primary responsibility for the welfare of the horse", Sarah states. Waling's opinion is not any different: "the greatest responsibility to protect a horse's welfare lies with the rider". He continues to explain:

"The rider needs to know his or her horse well enough to allow input from the trainer and vet to make a sound decision about speed and progression in the competition. The rider must be intensely involved with the horse that is under his or her care".

For Sarah, the rules that were introduced by the FEI for endurance in 2020 contained clear warnings that the implementation of these rules and their enhanced protection for the horse fundamentally required a change in attitude from riders. She admits that many have not yet transitioned into this mentality. Basically, she brings back the riders' responsibility to three main requirements: 1) learn and respect the rules; 2) exercise the primary responsibility for the physical and mental well-being of the horse irrespective of any outside influence; and 3) remember that the horse must come to the finish with enough spare reserve to be fit to continue. On the second requirement, her experience in the fields brings her to add:

"riders must recognise that their actions on the track cause the horse's condition and consequently the outcome of the vet inspection. For a lot of riders this connection between their riding and the horse's well-being has never been made. If the horse 'fails the vet' they are more likely to blame the vet than reflect on their actions". Waling agrees that rule changes also help in improving horse welfare: "We see that the regulations within the FEI are regularly adjusted to prevent horses from being put under too much pressure".

A sustained attention to detail

When critique is made about top-level endurance being a high-risk sport, defenders often point to the amount of veterinary checks horses have to go through before, during and after a ride. These vet checks have been put in place specifically to warrant horse welfare in endurance. "Vets have a key role to play", Sarah confirms. Both the experience of the veterinarians, as well as the thoroughness of the inspection

at a competition make it possible to identify a horse in time. "This requires great skill and sustained attention to detail over a very long competitive day", Sarah says.

The veterinarians performing the vet inspections during competitions are however not the only veterinarians involved in endurance. Especially at championships and for team members, the team veterinarian also plays an important role. Waling explains: "The veterinarian is important for monitoring the well-being of the horse, especially when preparing for a competition. Horses should be in optimal fitness before starting the competition, and the rider should adapt his competition plan to what the horse can perform. The team veterinarian also provides information to the team members about the fitness of the horses during the competitions". This clearly shows that horse welfare is a team matter.

The rider should adapt his competition plan to what the horse can perform

- Waling

Another role that carries an important responsibility when it comes to safeguarding horse welfare are the judges and stewards of the competition. Sarah: "Judges must know the rules thoroughly and implement them correctly and equally 'without fear or favour'. There is absolutely no place for cheating". "It is the duty of the officials and especially the judges to apply rules without prejudice", Waling agrees.

Improving horse welfare in endurance

Looking at what we do well, such as the role of regular and strict vet checks during endurance rides where horses are required to be fit to conti-

nue even after they finish, is extremely important. However, as golfer Tiger Woods once said: "No matter how good you get you can always get better". We ask our two veterinarians about their ideas on how to make horse welfare in endurance better. In Sarah's opinion, the use of illegal drugs is the most important threat to horse welfare that requires attention in endurance. She explains: "the use of illegal drugs makes veterinary inspection and the accurate, objective assessment of the horse almost impossible". According to Sarah, the planned review of the FEI Equine Anti-doping rules in 2024 should include bold measures to address this problem. "Without robust action to eliminate cheating due to drug abuse which in turn has such catastrophic effects on horse welfare I believe that the sport at international level has no future", she states. Aside from being an experienced veterinarian, through her work for both the FEI and the charities she has a lot of experience in using her critical thinking to achieve improvement. This is no different for endurance, in which she has been involved for several decades. She believes that taking measures to reduce speed would also improve horse welfare in endurance, as well as measures to increase the robust nature of the veterinary inspection. For the later, she adds: "with the professional role of the veterinarian protected from competition pressures". Last but not least, she believes that the selection of officials at top level should be improved: "Use only the very best officials at top level, those with excellent professional credentials and for the vets those with long experience and proven expertise in equine clinical work. The FEI Education system must take into account the level of equine clinical knowledge which veterinarians have, this is no place for those that have only worked in food safety or lab practice."

They don't know what they are talking about

It has been obvious that the expression of public opinion on the welfare

of horses in sport has grown rapidly, especially with the development of social media. Waling confirms this: "As long as I have been involved in endurance there has also been discussion about horse welfare". Although Sarah recognizes that the opinions can be ill informed, she finds that this public scrutiny cannot be ignored. She admits that often equestrian professionals try to quiet the critical opinions down with comments such as "they don't know what they are talking about". However, she believes that we must acknowledge the opportunity this critical voice can bring to the sport: "the equestrian community needs also to recognise that a 'fresh set of eyes' can often provide a novel insight into what we in the horse world have become accustomed or inured to over many years". She illustrates this further: "One example of this would be the stabling of horses 24 hours a day. These norms are being challenged and it is the role of the equestrian community to engage with people that they don't agree with, respect their right to a view and to ask themselves whether maybe their critics may have a point and that every aspect of how we keep and use horses should be subject to review and the equestrian community has to be amenable to change". She goes on to add: "In my opinion, to refuse to engage and to resist all change will threaten any long-term use of horses for equestrian sport".

A fresh set of eyes can provide a novel insight

- Sarah

Waling Haytema

Waling has been a practising equine veterinarian at the animal clinic Wolvega since 1995. In his work, he focuses mainly on orthopedics and surgery. Through his work, he often comes in contact with sport horses. Waling has an interesting inside-out, but also outside-in perspective on endurance, as he is currently actively involved in the sport but has grown into it from other disciplines: "I have been a teamvet for the KNHS [Dutch national equestrian federation, red.] since 2008. Initially for reining and since 2015 also for endurance".

It was quite a transition for him: "Of course I had to learn a lot in the beginning, but I was attracted by the purity of the sport and the character and performance of the horses that make this possible". For him, endurance is special: "The dynamics of the matches, especially with a team, are very nice".



Horse comes first

The European Endurance Championship 2023 in Ermelo is centred around the motto 'Horse comes first'. The organizing committee sees this as a pledge to create a competitive environment with great sport, amazing athletes and horses that are put first in every aspect of the word. When asked what the motto means to her, Sarah shares with us her perfect example of a horse being put first: "The horse being put first is the one whose rider is receptive to their wants and needs and who comes to the vet panel and retires him after passing the vet inspection because 'he is not himself'. Of course, the rider needs to know his horse well to make such a judgement and the trainer (if any) also has to accept that for a horse that is genuinely put first there will always be another day. Some things are more important than success in competition.

A long competitive career and a safe and comfortable retirement are end goals which are too often lost". For Waling, it means something similar: "To me it means that the

well-being of the horse comes first. We want a happy athlete and must protect the horses from pain and health problems." Sarah continues: "it means that the welfare of the horse is (supposedly) paramount in every decision taken during its life. The responsibility for the horse's welfare before, during and after its competitive career is with all members of the FEI family". What would this look like in perfect circumstances? Waling answers: "I think this motto succeeds when all participating horses finish the competition well, preferably at the finish. That should be the aim of all concerned".

Unfortunately, Sarah will not be in Ermelo this year but she has confidence that her colleagues will take their responsibility in the veterinary inspections. Waling is looking forward to the competition: "I get a lump in my throat every time when a horse arrives healthy at the finish of such a very long day and very long ride".

I get a lump in my throat every time when a horse arrives healthy at the finish

- Waling

The veterinarians in this article speak in a personal capacity.

Thanks for the ride:



Explore Ekohimp: sustainable horse bedding

Are you searching for an innovative and sustainable solution for horse bedding? We like to introduce Ekohimp by GreenInclusive Natural Products. Ekohimp is a natural horse bedding made from hemp sourced from Dutch farmers. It offers a range of benefits for horses, horse owners, and the environment.

About GreenInclusive Natural Products
Ekohimp is an innovative brand under GreenInclusive Natural Products, a company shaping local value chains with agro-based resources, striving for a sustainable and circular economy. Originating from the Netherlands, the company has embraced hemp as a central pillar of its business strategy. It's committed to developing innovative bio-based products that offer both economic and ecological benefits. Collaborating with the agricultural sector, tomorrow's natural resources are produced in the Netherlands, forming the basis for high-quality products, including those for the construction industry.



A sustainable alternative to traditional bedding

Traditional bedding like straw or shavings is widely used in livestock and horse husbandry. Ekohimp provides a sustainable alternative with numerous advantages:

- 1. Biodegradable:**
Ekohimp is crafted from hemp, a rapidly growing crop that requires minimal water, no pesticides, and fertilizers. It's entirely biodegradable, making it an eco-friendly choice.
- 2. Longer lifespan:**
Ekohimp lasts significantly longer than traditional bedding. Its robust structure enables extended use, making it a cost-effective solution for stable environments.
- 3. Excellent absorption:**
Hemp is renowned for its superb absorptive properties. Ekohimp can hold up to four times its weight in moisture, maintaining a dry and hygienic stall.
- 4. Natural odor control:**
Thanks to hemp's natural fibers, Ekohimp helps reduce unpleasant odors, enhancing the living conditions for animals.
- 5. Low dust production**
Unlike shavings, Ekohimp produces minimal dust, improving air quality in the stable and supporting animal health.



“Ekohimp: sustainability and efficiency”

Excellent choice
Ekohimp is designed with sustainability, efficiency, and the needs of horse owners in mind. By utilizing premium hemp from local farmers, GreenInclusive contributes to a resilient agricultural sector and stimulates the production of sustainable resources. In an era where sustainability and environmental consciousness are paramount, Ekohimp provides a sustainable and efficient alternative to traditional bedding. With its natural attributes, extended lifespan, and positive environmental impact, Ekohimp assists customers in creating the most comfortable environment for their animals, thereby improving their well-being.

About hemp
Hemp is a versatile plant. It serves as a natural resource for countless applications, including paper, clothing, construction materials, and even livestock feed. The plant grows rapidly, offers a high yield per hectare with relatively low water and nutrient input, and has a positive environmental influence. It's cultivated without pesticides and is an excellent rotational crop for the Dutch agricultural sector.

Discount and delivery
Experience the future of sustainable horse bedding with Ekohimp, brought to you by GreenInclusive. Enjoy free delivery in the Netherlands of Ekohimp products for your convenience. Enhance horse comfort and support a greener environment effortlessly. Contact us today via phone or email to place your order and receive an exclusive 20% discount on your first purchase.

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Horse in the spotlight

Text: Melanie de Jong

Everyone thinks their horse is special, whether it's character or sporting performances that doesn't matter. In endurance we see many special horses, all of them athletes of the highest caliber. Sometimes it seems so effortless, some horses are just 'doing their thing'. In this article we put two horses in the spotlight that have achieved beautiful performances. The riders tell what sets these horses apart from other.

Romane Yernaux about Sichen the Sauvlons

Can you introduce your horse?

"Sichen the Sauvlons is a Arab-trotter. He is now 20 years old. He is born in Belgium at the Sauvlons Stables."

What sets your horse apart from other horses you have worked with?

"He doesn't have a preference when it comes to types of races. He can finish happy and healthy at any race. For example; he has finished such as Florac, Mont Cuq and Abu Dhabi. He is mentally very strong, he doesn't need other horses to finish a race. We rode alone for 5 loops during the Championship in Ermelo in 2021."

What makes this horse an excellent endurance horse?

"He knows what his job is and makes the entire race and everything around it look easy. He chooses the pace that he finds matches the terrain and 'handles it'. I don't have to worry about him. He has great balance, it seems like he can actually 'read' the terrain, match his pace and choose his footing carefully."

What is its best character trait?

"Sichen is a funny and expressive horse, I always know what he wants. For example; after riding him I always give him a treat. If I forget it, he will stare at me."

He has finished Florac, Mont Cuq and Abu Dhabi

- Romane

What is its biggest flaw?

"The recovery times (HR) can be a little longer than I would like. So, I just walk the last 500 meter of the loop with him. I try to keep him calm and out of the fast lane so most of the time I'm cooling him down a bit separate from the other horses to be outside of the rush. This helps."

What is its biggest accomplishment? And why?

"Sichen and I finished 33 races and have only been vetted out twice!"

What is your proudest moment?

"We finished 5 European championships and 1 world championship. I am super proud of our last championship. Because Sichen was already 18 years old, he was the oldest horse to finish."

How do you keep this horse healthy and happy?

"I keep him moving as much as possible. He is going out in pasture every day. He isn't outside 24/7 because he hates sleeping outside. So far he is still doing international races up to 100 km. He is not ready to be retired. After a race I give him 1 month of rest. But then I will slowly start to ride him again. Otherwise, he gets really bored and jealous of the other horses I am training."

Bojan Lipvac about Thor

Can you introduce your horse?

"Thor was born in 2007, his mother was a Bosnian mountain horse and his father was an Arabian horse, and he is 147 centimeters tall. Thor's mom worked in the woods near us and luckily ended up with me. It was not known how old it was, but the owner, from whom I bought it, said it was over 20 years old. After several unsuccessful attempts, we finally managed to get a foal, but after 5 months she unfortunately died, and Thor occasionally suckled another mare who also had a foal."

What sets your horse apart from other horses you have worked with?

"Thor sets himself apart because of its persistence, firmness and strength. I believe that it is so durable precisely because of its Bosnian part, because these are horses that were bred for extreme efforts (carrying loads) on very demanding terrain and a harsh climate."

What makes this horse an excellent endurance horse?

"His strength, endurance and speed. It is easy to work with him because

he really likes to work, but when he decides to do something, it is very difficult to dissuade him from it."

What is its best character trait?

"Thor has a lot of persistence and desire to compete with other horses. He has an innate ability to see where he stops when we ride, but in races he forgets that, and I have to hold him back a lot because he always wants to be in front and the problem is that he doesn't like the horse to be too close behind him. I try to adjust riding to his mood and when he chooses the position he wants to be in, we mostly ride there."

What is its biggest flaw?

"Thor has thick skin and fatty subcutaneous tissue, which makes it difficult to cool down and it takes more time for the heart rate to drop. Considering that this is genetically determined, we do not do anything special, but cool it down with water and ice as much as necessary."

What is its biggest accomplishment?

"Our biggest accomplishment as a team is that we finished 2nd on the FEI Endurance Open Combination World Ranking in 2019. Thor has completed 13 races of 160 km."

What do you love most about this horse? And why?

"What I like most about Thor, is that after all the kilometers he ran, he still has the same desire to compete as at the beginning of the race."

How do you keep this horse healthy and happy?

"Thor spends most of his time in the herd in the pasture. As for preserving health, I think it is most important not to ask the horse too soon and too often, up to what limits can it withstand?"

Thor's mom was bred for extreme efforts, like carrying loads

- Bojan



Training in the hills, with lots of snow

Text: Melanie de Jong

A technical terrain, many hills and lots of snow up your knees for the entire winter. Laura Preiss, former youth rider in the Swiss national team, explains how she deals with this while training her horses.



Tell us about the terrain in your area.

"Switzerland is characterized by many hilly landscapes. Since we are at home in the Jura region, our terrain is rather stony. It is important not to go too fast in this kind of terrain during training. It would be too much of a strain on the health of the legs. Trotting downhill or cantering should therefore only be trained specifically and not at all in every training session. In our training we therefore also work a lot at a walk with a good forward and downward posture of the horse."

"Rides in the snow are wonderful"

How do you set up your training?

"I prefer to adjust the pace to the terrain during the ride, rather than riding stubbornly according to plan. If the gradient increases unexpectedly or the paths become stony, I tend to slow down and go into trot or walk. The same applies to steep, long descents."

How about the feet and the tack?

"Our horses mostly had normal horseshoes. Only for races, especially when there was a lot of tar or very hard ground, were horseshoes with silicone soles used. For me, a well-fitting saddle is part of a basic equipment and should be checked regularly. I notice that a saddle that is too tight can lead to stumbling, especially when moving downhill."

What do you do in winter?

"Rides in the snow are wonderful. In winter, we usually have horseshoes with special grip so that the snow doesn't stick. In addition, special elements can be screwed into the horseshoe to prevent slipping."

What did you learn when training with the Swiss national team?

"We worked often and a lot on technique. Examples of the latter are cantering up and down, the seat and dressage units. For example, when cantering downhill, the focus should always be in the distance and not on the ground, which often happens unconsciously."

Portrait of a rider Tom MacGuinness: a journey of faith and passion

Tekst: Rachel Marty

In the horse world, Tom is probably most known for the very successful company he built and managed for years: Horseware. Selling millions of horse blankets each year and continuously innovating horse products. But in endurance, Tom probably stands out mostly due to the competitiveness he shows at his, for our sport, not very common age of 72. He has ridden many competitions and gained quite a few high rankings over the past 10 years. And it hasn't gone unnoticed. Reason to find out more about who Tom is, and what drives him.





Getting the interview planned with Tom took a bit of time. Because Tom is a busy man. Having sold the controlling interest of Horseware two years ago, you might think that he is now enjoying a relatively quiet time, as many other at his age do. However, he is not one to “take it easy”. His time is filled with many endeavours, of which he speaks of with great passion. He has used the time to create a new company named Horsepall. Aside from his professional life, Tom is also a Christian, a father, a writer and an avid rider. But above all, Tom is a passionate man.

A solutions person

“The main thing in my life, is my relationship with Jesus Christ. My relationship with God. Nothing else even comes near”, Tom explains. His faith drove him to stop his studies and become a missionary at just 21 years old. He moved to South America and lived there for several years. When he moved back home to Ireland, he started working in his parents’ riding school. “I simply had no other plan at that moment, I had been a missionary for nearly 10 years”, he states. His siblings where not interested in taking over the family business, so he stepped up. He got all the diploma’s required for being an instructor and started running the riding school.

“After a few years, I realised there was no money to be made in this business”, he recalls. He wanted something more. While working with horses, one of the problems he was confronted to on a regular basis was how horrible horse blankets were. “So I had this idea, to make a horse blanket”, he says, “But who was I, to reinvent a whole business? People had been doing this for hundreds of years. But eventually I realised: wow, these guys are all wrong!” From the basement of his parents’ house, with no experience or knowledge on how to make a blanket, he started his

business. Tom took on every single problem he had encountered as a user of blankets, step by step looking for the right answers. “In life generally, I see mostly solutions. I’m a solutions person”, he explains. Which hasn’t only helped in his entrepreneurial endeavours.

The strategy of endurance

Tom wasn’t one of those avid riders from a very young age. He started riding at 12 years old and continued until he left for college at 16. After he came back from South America, he hadn’t ridden in over 10 years. Horses played an important part in his life, however. From running the riding school to producing horse related products through his business Horseware.

It is no until much later in his life that he turned competitive in horse sports. “I played polo for 12 years. At reasonably high level. But I was never really good at polo. Because I don’t think that quick. It’s a really fast thinking sport”. He played at a competitive level for about ten years before switching to endurance. When asked why he made the switch, his answer is quite simple: “I wanted to participate in the World Equestrian Games in France. Since there were no Irish endurance riders, that was my chance.” According to Tom, endurance is completely different to polo, especially because of the amount of time that is spent in the saddle: “A polo match is over in an hour. I like endurance because I spend hours and hours with my horse”. So Tom quit polo, which he admits to miss a little bit. But he found out that Endurance is much more suited for him, both physically as well as mentally: “My physiology fits endurance. When I was young, I used to do cross country running, so the endurance just fits me. I also have that kind of mentality to keep going”, he admits.

According to Tom, endurance is the noblest of horse sports: “It is the only sport where the horse is doing what it is made to be: get from A to B. People have been using horses for getting from A to B for thousands of years. That is what we have domesticated horses for”. The fact that it also is “incredibly difficult to finish a 160 km”, as he adds, makes it a great challenge that Tom enjoys striving for.

A great part of that challenge, for him, is getting the strategy right: “When you start a 160 km, or even a 120 km, you have a certain amount of ‘gasoline’. If you spent it all in the first 2 loops, then you are screwed. So, you have to know your horse, you have to know the terrain, you have to know the ascent and descent and take that into consideration. So you have to know how to ride and understand what you got in the ‘tank’”. He thinks back of his last championship In Butheeb to illustrate his statement: “Horseware HLM Fontana is an amazing horse, but no matter how fast or slow you gallop, he always has a 4 minutes recovery time. So I know that I am going to gallop a little bit more, be a little bit faster than the other riders I want to keep up with. I will leave a little bit behind, catch them up and then have to ride a bit ahead into the vetgate to make up for the slower recovery. While with my other horse, I know I can just keep with the group.”

*To get to the end,
you have to look
after your horse*
- Tom

Horse comes first

The motto at the European Endurance Championships 2023 in Ermelo is ‘Horse Comes First’. When Tom is asked what this means to him, he refers back to endurance being a noble sport, which is additionally really regulated by vet checks during and at the end of the ride: “I’ve been disqualified twice after doing a 160 km. There is no other sport where the horse is examined after the fact. There is no other sport where the horse, after having finished, needs to be fit to continue”.

‘Horse Comes First’, for Tom, means that endurance riding is a partnership between the rider and his horse. “To get to the end, you have to be a partnership. If you don’t look after your horse, you’re not going to finish”. He adds: “So, unless you are an idiot, you look after your horse. It is as simple as that.”

Striving for success

Tom is an elite rider, acquiring an impressive 16 finishes on 160 km rides and has participated in 6 championships. His three horses Horseware HLM Fontana, Djohar Pandora Jack and Chamaille des Aubus are trained an hour outside of Barcelona where he currently lives. According to him, the circumstances are perfect for endurance training, including soft winters, big hills and a talented trainer: Jordi Arboix Santacreu.

Tom rides three times a week over a distance of 30 to 40 km: “But I should be going to the gym a little bit more”, he admits. “The horses are not getting me fit anymore. I ride the 30 or 40 km easily, but it doesn’t get you fit enough to be really riding 160 km”.

When asked how competitive he is, Tom needs a second to think about it: “Well, people think I am a very competitive guy. And I am. But I’m not competitive in the sense that I want to beat somebody. I’m just interested in winning if I am the best. I want to get the best out of what I and my horse have to give”. He wants to win, yes. But for him it is mostly about wanting to succeed: “At the end of the day, it isn’t about how much races you’ve won, or how much money you made. Because you can’t take that with you when you go. So success is about understanding who you are and where you are going to go. And I know where I am going”.

Memories and goals

And he does. Tom is going to the European championships in Ermelo with a clear goal in mind: placing top-10. He explains: “I’m not going to win, but you know, I’ve been 11th twice. I’d like to be in the top 10. That is what I’m striving for.”

He isn’t completely sure yet which horse he will be riding in Ermelo: “I’ve got 2 horses qualified. The one I rode in Butheeb [Horseware HLM Fontana, red.] has a formidable heart. She is very sound. The other horse [Djohar Pandora Jack, red.] doesn’t have as much experience, but it’s an amazing little horse. She has a 2-minute heart and is really courageous, has great energy”. It is a privilege to have two great horses able to do the job: “So I will have to choose.”

Tom can draw on previous experiences. There are three specific rides that come to his mind when asked what his most memorable endurance rides were: Brussels, Tryon and Butheeb.

All of these are championships. The reason behind them being memorable to Tom are very different. Brussels is mostly remembered for being his first European championship. A “great experience”, especially being only Tom’s third 160 km ride while still coming in 11th. Tryon goes to show how much Tom likes to strategize his rides: “It was an amazing competition in the sense that everything we had thought of that would happen, happened”. “Except for the false start”, he confesses. “We knew that people were going to go too fast. I had ridden in the test event and another competition very similar to Tryon, very humid and very hilly. We knew what to expect. We trained for that”. He continues: “For example, when we were training for Tryon, we trained with fleece quartersheets every day, all summer long. Because the horses had to be prepared.”

Last but not least, Tom looks back upon his last championship, the world endurance championships in Butheeb: “It was also amazing. The horse was amazing. Just unbelievable. She just kept going”, he tells with a big smile on his face. “And I really know I let the horse down in the last loop. My strategy in the last loop was faulty because I was concerned with an experience in a previous ride which kept me from going for it. We could have given more.”

And that, he plans to do in Ermelo.

Horsepall

Proudly wearing his horsepall polo shirt during the interview, it is clear that Tom is passionate about his new business: horsepall. “I want it to be the go-to application for health monitoring and management”, he states. Horsepall was created to aid in understanding the wellbeing of horses through data. The first two products: a comfort sensor which attaches to the inside of rugs in order to track temperature and humidity, and a heart rate monitor.

He does admit: “If I had realised how difficult it was going to be, then I would probably have thought about it twice. Because there is software, and hardware. And then you have the application, both for the phone and the web. Then you have to find out what people want. But people don’t always know what they want. It’s like Henry Ford said: if he would have asked the people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses”.

www.horsepall.com

Volunteers the invisible force behind the championship

Text: Rachel Marty

They work mostly behind the scenes, on the sides or hidden in the shadows of the event. While being almost invisible, they are the driving force behind the championship. They are many, work hard and their contribution should in no way be underestimated. Without them, there would be no championship. The volunteers.

Georgette Zeijen and Monique Moor are this championship's volunteer coordinators. These two enthusiastic and energetic women organise everything regarding the volunteers in Ermelo. Things such as recruitment, scheduling and coordination during the event days are all part of their job description. Quite a big task, especially since a championship like Ermelo requires around 125 volunteers to make everything run smoothly. Monique: "In 2021 during the European and World Championships in Ermelo, I took on this role together with Georgette. That went really well, so when the organizing committee asked us whether we wanted to do it again for the European Championships in 2023, we immediately said yes".

Making schedules and coordinating a team is not something Monique is new to: "I work as a team coordinator in a breeding company for vegetables, so I like to make a schedule", she explains.

Monique is also an endurance enthusiast, which she enjoys together with her partner and their two horses. Multi-day endurance rides are her absolute favourite. Aside from enjoying the sport as a participant, Monique is also often found at endurance rides as a crew member, volunteer or in her role as board member for the Dutch national endurance association.

Georgette has a lot of experience managing volunteers: "I have been organising national competitions for several years", she explains. Georgette works as a physiotherapist for disabled people. She came into contact with endurance as a crew member, but it did not take long for her to start competing herself. She was Dutch Endurance champion in 2016 on the 100 km, and in 2018 she became Dutch National Endurance Champion in Ermelo on the CEI*** 160 km with D-Prodigy. "This is something I am still very proud of", she expresses. D-Prodigy, as well as another horse she competed with in her early years, are enjoying their retirement with Georgette. In the meantime, she has started training her younger horse for the future.

A question of motivation

What motivates volunteers to put hours and even days or weeks into an event? "It is amazing to have such a championship in our own country and be part of it", Monique explains. "Also, without volunteers, there is simply no competition", she adds. But that is not her only reason. She also enjoys the event itself: "We all share

the passion for the equestrian sports, and I know a lot of volunteers so it's a great way to catch up with them. Also, it's a lot of fun".

Georgette sees volunteering as a responsibility, she explains that doing things for others should not always require getting money out of it: "Some things you just do out of passion and love for the horse and the sport". Nevertheless, she is also impressed with the dedication shown by the volunteers who signed up for Ermelo. "It is very special to notice that there are still so many people who have a warm heart for the sport, the participants and the organization", she says. She goes on to add: "It's great that so many individuals can put together such a great event".



*Some things you
just do out of love
for the sport*

- Georgette

There is always work to be done

Around 125 volunteers will be walking the grounds at the European Championship in Ermelo. That is a lot of people and a lot of work to be done. Volunteers can be found almost everywhere during the event. Checkpoints, road crossings, gates and the vetgate are just a few examples. But also before the event starts a lot of hands are needed for things such as plotting, checking and marking the route, recruiting volunteers and setting up the event site. Once all participants and spectators have left the grounds, the volunteers are still at work taking out route markings, cleaning and clearing crew points and scooping up lots of horse poop.

Georgette elaborates: "During the competition days, approximately 80-100 volunteers are active. A large part of the people is on the route at a checkpoint, water point, grooming point, a crossing, at a fence or on the quad to check the route. In addition, there are also people on site working on time registration, refilling water in the cooling area and dispensing the ice. Those are the more visible tasks, but there are also indispensable people behind the scenes. They ensure, for example, that the vets, officials and volunteers receive food and drink and that there is 24/7 supervision at the stables."

When asked whether a certain kind of person is needed for volunteering, Monique is quick to answer: "Anyone can volunteer, you don't even have to love horses to do it". She adds: "There is just no competition without volunteers. There are so many things to do at a competition to make the event go well. But also to improve the comfort and safety for participants, such as helping them at road crossings". When asked what makes a perfect volunteer, Georgette has to think for a moment: "Good volunteers are reliable and flexible, but also see work that needs to be done. As a coordinator we just can't see everything ourselves. Having people there who do see this is really a relief".

It all comes down to teamwork

Volunteers have different tasks, but working as a team is essential for the success of the championship. They work together as a whole to make the event run smooth,

they work together as smaller teams to carry out their specific tasks, and they work together as individuals to make it possible to fill in gaps or tackle unexpected events. Something that worries both Georgette and Monique are the last minute cancellations from volunteers, which can obviously always happen especially seeing the amount of volunteers. "When the schedule is finished and people cancel in the morning, you have to switch gears and quickly adjust the schedule", Monique explains. Luckily she is used to this in her work.

In order to make all this teamwork run smoothly, some crucial elements are required. "Good cooperation, good communication and above all enjoyment are the keys to success!", Monique explains. Georgette adds that it is also about the team spirit: "The strength of a good volunteer team is everyone's passion for the horses and the sport. This creates a connection between the volunteers". There is also a common goal, Georgette points out: "Everyone aims to make it a wonderful and successful event".

Without many realising it, it is a fact that the atmosphere at a competition is very much dependent on the volunteers and how much they are enjoying their time at the event. Having a feeling of togetherness is an important part of that joy. Happy volunteers work harder, help better and share their joy with everyone around them. And all that reflects on everyone present at the event.

A contribution to horse welfare

In endurance, everyone has a role to play when it comes to horse welfare. The volunteers are no different in that aspect. Their contribution is both practical and preventive. In the practical sense, the volunteers fulfil tasks that have been designed specifically to improve the horses' comfort during the ride. "There are people who ensure that there is always enough cooling water, who support the treating vets and help provide ice to cool the horses. But we also have the quad team to make sure that the route remains correct so that the horses do not have to walk extra kilometres unnecessarily", Georgette explains. She goes on: "We are all connected through our love of horses. Together we will do our utmost to ensure that all participating horses have a good time during this event".

But there is also a role that volunteers play that has less to do with their specific tasks, and more with their keen eyes: "the volunteers must report special circumstances", Monique explains. "They have a signalling role in the context of horse welfare. This in collaboration with the officials of the FEI", Georgette adds. It helps that almost all volunteers are equestrians themselves and that they are to be found literally everywhere during the event. In this way, they play an important role as safekeepers of horse welfare during the championship.

Looking forward to Ermelo 2023

The recruitment and planning that comes with their role takes up a lot of time for Monique and Georgette. Nonetheless, they are very much looking forward to the event. When asked what would make the championship a success for them, Georgette replies: "If we can organize a super successful event with all those volunteers, just like two years ago!", she says, "It also makes me very happy when volunteers say afterwards that they want to come back next time". Monique doesn't need to think about it long: "If I see happy faces, I will have one too!"



*If I see happy
faces, I will
have one too!*

- Monique:



Josefine Flury, rider (Switzerland):
'My motto is 'let your horse shape you, so that you can shape your horse'. My horse asked me to be stronger, so I excersised. He asked me to be calmer and more collected, so I learned to control my thoughts. He asked me to be more balanced, so I worked on my seat. My horse comes first, because instead of forcing him to change, I change myself so that he has room o grow.'



Ursula Klingbeil, rider (Germany)
'The motto of the European championship 'Horse comes first' could be also the motto of my family and me. We love all of our horses and live with them together at our small farm. That means for the preparation for Ermelo that we give Aid du Florival all legal support we can. She is our most famous athlete and to finish with this horse means to win.'



Pierre Aufrett, trainer (France):
'As a young trainer, I've no doubt made the mistake of wanting to race with horses whose training hadn't been optimal. With hindsight I now know that you need to give the horse time to reach his peak. It's the horse that tells you when to perform, not the other way around. My role is to ensure the welfare of my horses in order to maximize their physical abilities and above all to prepare them for new challenges in the best possible way.'



Allan Leon (France), chef d'equipe of the Swiss team:
'I am proud to be part of the Swiss team, because I know that for every athlete and staff, all of us got something in common: horses first! Performance is something important of course, but deep relationship and respect for our horses is an essential part of the success!'

All driven by the same love

Tekst: Puck Kromkamp en Anna Brandjes

In this article, riders, vets, farriers and other involved individuals share their thoughts about horse welfare in endurance. They tell what putting their horses first means to them. No matter how different opinions and perspectives may be, they are all driven by the same love for the horse.

Nicola Thorne, rider (Great Britain):
'Endurance is the one sport where the rider spends the most amount of time on and with the horse on competition day. You should feel a true empathy with your horse, be able to feel their nature and character and show them how much you think of them by taking good care, riding them well, concentrating on what they need and rewarding their efforts whether the day finishes in success or not.'



Lore Persais, technical adviser at Devoucoux (France):
'At Devoucoux we always seek to highlight the harmony between horse and rider. My work as a technical adviser prioritizes the comfort of the horse with panels adapted to its morphology but also by advising and adjusting the saddle to the rider so that it does not bother the horse as the kilometers go by.'



Bruno van Cauter, vet (Belgium):
'Our job as vets is to take care of them with the highest standards of professionalism. The aim of our examinations before and during a competition is to see horses that feel well, physically and mentally. I feel happy after a competition when all the horses at the final exam are qualified, well looking and the treating vets have no work.'



Christopher Frederik, farrier (Belgium):
'Teamwork seems important to me. The rider, the staff members (the coach, the veterinarian and the farrier) discuss to tailor the best shoeing for each horse. It's necessary to know each horse we take care of in order to customize the shoeing based on its minor weaknesses. For this race in Ermelo, considering the fairly smooth and sandy terrains, it seems important to me to limit the penetrations into the ground to ease the tendons and ligaments, and to lighten the shoeing.'



Lea Vogler, rider (France):
'Horses first, the rest later. If you give to a horse what he needs, he will give you his heart in return. We have to spend many hours together during training, travels and races, so the most important thing is to gain their trust.'



Katriin Kalle, rider (Estonia):
'Every time I ride, I try to listen and see what the horse is feeling and what he needs. If my horse (pony actual-ly) tells me it's not his best day, I do not push him. The fact that my partner is a pony makes it easier to ensu-re that 'horse comes first' really works, because we all know that pony's are the deciders in the partnership.'

Foreword

by the FEI Director Endurance

On behalf of the Fédération Equestre Internationale, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Ermelo (NED) for the FEI Endurance European Championship for Seniors 2023. Over the coming days, we will be witnessing Europe's best Endurance athletes tackle the different stages of this 160km ride, aiming for both individual and national glory. Spain, current tenant of championship title, will surely be leaving no stone unturned to repeat the feat, as will the individual European champion Angel Soy Coll (ESP).

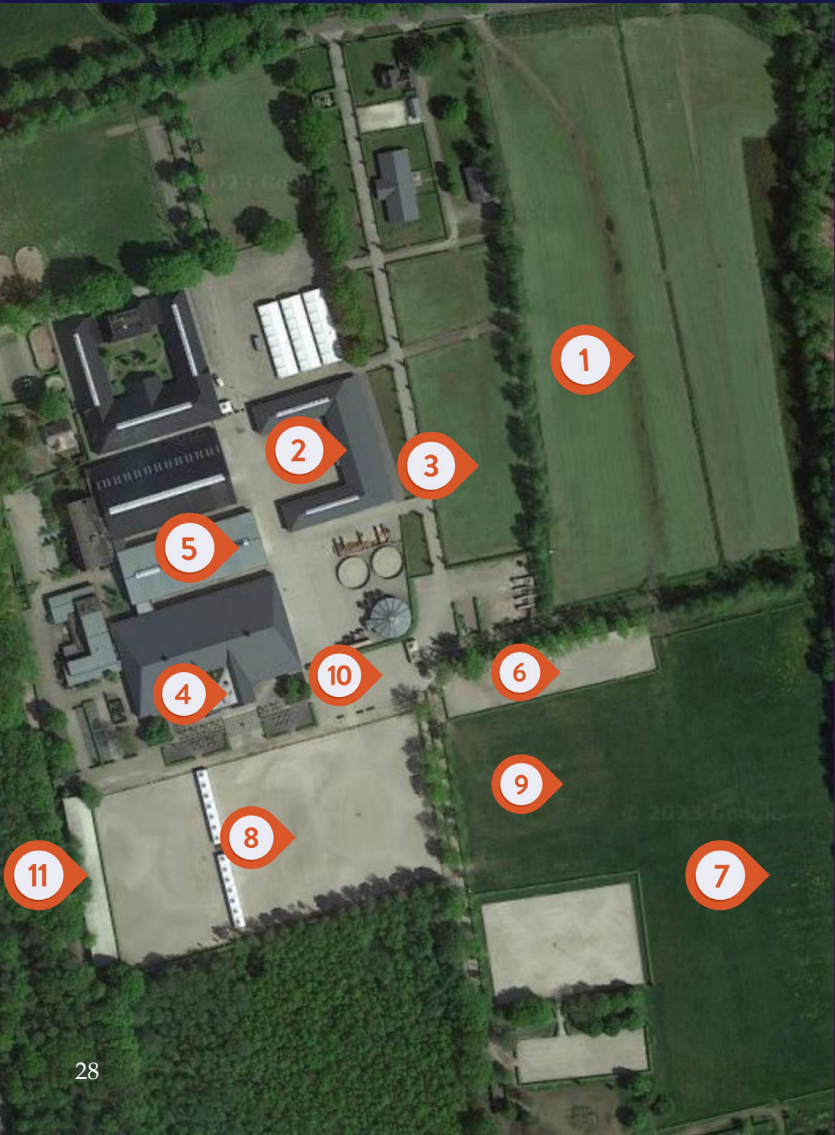
FEI Endurance is a sport which, at its very essence, is based on excellent horsemanship and incredible stamina to physically and mentally sustain the focus required to perform at the highest level. It is also a sport reliant on trust between partnerships and teams, thorough planning, and a very committed entourage. To represent your nation here at the FEI Endurance European Championships is testament to life-long

passion and love for the sport. It also has lasting ramifications for the discipline as a whole, captivating, thrilling and enticing an expanding international audience.

I would like to thank Eric Lamsma and his team, as well as the sponsors for their continuous support. It is wonderful to be in Ermelo again. Thank you to all officials, volunteers and the media for providing the perfect platform to highlight a fantastic event.

To the athletes and their entourage, I wish the best of luck and to the fans, may you enjoy every minute of the best our sport has to offer!

Christina Abu-Dayyeh
FEI Director Endurance



Map of the Venue

- 1. Parking
- 2. Stables
- 3. Paddocks
- 4. Show Office / Press Room
- 5. Opening Ceremony
- 6. Warm-up area & demo's
- 7. Start / Finish
- 8. Recovery/ vetting area
- 9. Hold Area
- 10. Shops
- 11. Catering



Timetable Ermelo 2023

5 september Tuesday

09:00	Opening of office
09:00	Opening of stables
14:00	Opening of training track
17:00	Meeting key-officials and OC
18:00	Closing of office
18:00	Closing of training track
19:00	All horses must be in stables
19:00	Opening ceremony
22:00	Closing of stables

6 september Wednesday

07:00	Opening of stables
08:00	Opening of training track
09:00	Meeting officials OC
10:00	Opening of office
11:00	Chef's d'équipe meeting
11:45	Walk through competitors vetgate
12:00	Closing of training track
12:30	Closing of stables
13:00	Show
13:45	Opening of stables
14:00	Opening of training track
16:00	First veterinary inspection
17:00	Riders weigh-in
1 hr after end first inspection	Declaration of starters by chef d'équipes at office
17:00	Closing of office
18:30	Press conference
19:00	Closing of training track
19:00	All horses must be in stables
23:00	Closing of stables

7 september Thursday

04:00	Opening of stables
06:30	Start CH-EU-E
10:00	Opening of office
12:00	Opening of training track CEI
17:00	Closing of training track
18:00	Closing of office
22:00	Closing of stables

8 september Friday

07:00	Opening of stables
10:00	Opening of office
11:00	Price giving ceremony
13:00	Briefing riders CEI
16:00 - 17:00	First veterinary inspection CEI
17:00	Riders weigh-in CEI
17:00	Closing of office
22:00	Closing of stables

9 september Saturday

04:00	Opening of Stables
06:30	Start CEI***
07:30	Start CEI**
09:00	Start CEI*
10:00	Opening of office
18:00	Closing of office
22:30	Closing of stables

10 september Sunday

08:00-10:00	Transport check
08:00	Opening of Office
11:00	Price giving CEI
12:00	Closing FEI stables
14:00	Closing of office



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Tension in unfamiliar territory

Horsemanship for competitive riders

We've all faced it at some point, and it can be quite bothersome: tension in unfamiliar territory. In the realm of endurance sports, it can be particularly troublesome when it leads to your horse having a high heart rate. Jeannette Martens, an instructor specialized in horse behaviour at Versatility Horsemanship, explains: "To make your horse braver, you need to expand its comfort zone."

"Throwing your horse into the deep end won't help; taking big leaps will only push your horse into the panic zone," Jeannette begins. "Its sympathetic nervous system (fight, flight, or freeze response) gets activated, and it accumulates more tension in situations like these. Baby steps are therefore crucial. By building upon many small successes, you can start erasing the negative experiences and building your horse's trust. Think of it like stretching an elastic band. You don't do it all at once, or it will snap."



Breath is king

"Make sure that at all times, no matter what you're doing, you maintain your breath. When we aim to form a team with our horse, we are responsible for at least 50 percent of that team. Only when you can consistently breathe into your belly and stay relaxed can you signal to your brain that this experience is okay, and consequently, store it that way. By mastering your breath regulation, you can assist your horse in regulating its mental state. Horses are constantly reading our breath, heart rate, and muscle tension. So, the more relaxation you can achieve there, the more your horse mirrors it. Let's say you want to ask your horse to pass by that intimidating tractor: build it up step by step, ask your horse to get a bit closer each time, all while maintaining relaxed breathing."

What does my horse need right now?

- Jeannette

The power of words

"Pay attention to how you talk to yourself. What can be quite helpful is a mantra: a short, powerful phrase that you repeat to yourself. A few examples are 'I can do this' or 'Trust the moment.' A wonderful mantra when your horse finds something nerve-wracking is: 'What does my horse need right now?' This helps you keep looking at your horse and how you can best assist it, but also helps you be present in the here and now. A mantra can also aid in regulating your breath as you repeat it, and thereby assist your horse. So, let's say you're about to start a competition and you notice your horse finds it a bit nerve-wracking, repeat: 'What does my horse need right now?' This way, you become a guide for your horse when you intend to take it out of its comfort zone."



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TIP

Ideal in the Vetgate due to the additional water intake

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