

Fitness programme.

Preparation for the CCI*

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Basic Principles

The horse should be sufficiently fit for the level of competition intended

Any increases in workload should be gradual

Flexibility in your fitness programme is acceptable - do not be too rigid

It is important to prepare the horse for the level of competition it is intended to compete in. So a novice horse does not follow the same programme as an advanced horse yet the principles remain the same. Thought should first and foremost be with preserving the horse and you should aim to reduce any unnecessary wear and tear upon the limbs of the horse. Overdoing unnecessary demands on the horse should be discouraged. That said, if a horse is aiming for a three day event it would be better to have him too fit rather than lacking in fitness.

Fitness for participation in a BE 80 – 100 class should be covered by your consistent daily exercise routine of about an hour's duration during which time the average horse would hack, including periods of trotting and cantering, dressage and jump training. For those riders considering a three day event then a more detailed preparation will be required.

It's important to know what you are aiming for so it's a good idea to work out your fitness programme backwards from the date of the main competition aim, and you should include any competitions that you wish to take part in during your build-up.

If the horse has been out of work for some period of time you should allow between 12 and 14 weeks to have him fit enough for novice eventing, 16 weeks if you are heading for a CCI*. This will allow time to avoid pushing the horse during the preparation phase and will allow for time should something not go to plan.

Obviously, it's not possible to offer an plan for each individual horse as so much depends on the type of horse, facilities available and the time restraints of the rider. My own preference for fitness training has been to use a mixture of interval training combined with some faster hill work.

Early stages

Initial work consists of steady hacking along roads or tracks before incorporating any schooling sessions or canter work. The principles of training when hacking the horse should always be adhered to:

Controlled forward impulsion

Even rhythm in all paces

Correct bend in all movements

Should the horse be completely unfit, then the first couple of weeks should consist of about an hour to an hour and a half of walking under saddle each day. Once the horse begins trotting, some slight

hills and variations of land should be introduced where possible. Always work on the best available ground to you.

During the third and fourth weeks some simple dressage training can be introduced. If the horse has not been receiving and hard feed during these early stages, now would be the time to introduce some more nutrition to his diet according to the amount of work that the horse is doing. Generally speaking, as the horse's workload increases so does the amount of hard feed he receives.

Phase two

After five or six weeks of relatively steady work the horse should be ready to move onto a more intensive programme of work. This will involve increasing the canter periods in schooling sessions, some pole and jump training along with starting to work on the horse's respiration as well as continuing to improve the horse's muscular development. In order to improve the horses respiration ability, I like to include some timed bouts of cantering which become longer and more demanding as the horse develops in his fitness (Interval training).

Canter days take place every fourth day where possible and sometimes the canter day is replaced by a show jumping or cross-country schooling session.

I would normally start by cantering the horse with three five minute steady canters, each period of canter should be interrupted and followed by a period of walking for three minutes before repeating the second and third five minute canter workouts.

Gradually the periods of canter will be increased but rest periods of three minutes of walk remain the same. The level of three day event the horse is aiming for, and the type of horse will determine the length of canter periods the horse should build-up to. Typically, a horse aiming for a CCI* three day event would be completing three nine minute canters. These canters are ridden at a steady pace, not at XC speed. If the rider is able to incorporate some hills into the interval training, then the length of time the horse is cantering for should be reduced accordingly.

On the days in between the canter work the horse should continue with flatwork, hacking and jump schooling.

Competition phase

Where possible try to choose competitions that fit into your fitness routine and those which will help the horse prepare for the three day event.

Week 1	Hack 1hr Walk & Trot	Hack 30 mins School 30 mins	Hack 1 hr Include hills	Hack 1 hr mainly trot	Hack 1 hr Mainly walk	School 40 mins	Day Off
Week 2	Hack 1 hr	Hack 1 hr Include hills	Hack 1 ½ hr	Hack 1 hr Mainly trot	School 45 mins	Hack and school 1 hr	Day Off
Week 3	Hack 1 hr	Hack 1 hour include some canter	Hack 30 mins School 30 mins	Dressage lesson	School 45 mins	Hill work including trot and canter	Day Off

Week 4	Hack 1 ½ hr	Hack mainly trotting	Hack 30 mins, school 40 mins	Dressage competition	Hack 1 hr then SJ school	Hack with trot and canter	SJ Competition
Week 5	Day Off	Hack 1 ½ hour	Dressage training	Dressage competition	Hack include canter	Hack include hill work mostly trotting	Day Off
Week 6	Canter 5/3/5/3/5	Light hacking	Dressage training	Hack 30 mins then pole work	Canter 5/3/5/3/5	Hack followed by light jump school	SJ Competition
Week 7	Day Off	Canter 5/3/5/3/5	Hack 1 hr	Dressage training	Hill work mainly trotting	Canter with short sprint 5/3/4/3/-sprint 600m	Light hack
Week 8	SJ training	Hill work mainly trotting	Dressage training	Dressage training and pole work	Canter 6/3/6/3/6	Day Off	Hack 1 ½ hr

Week 9	Hack 1 hr mainly trotting	Hack 40 mins dressage work 30 mins	Canter 4/3/4/3 pipe opening gallop – 600m	Dressage training 1 hr	Canter pipe opener 1000m three quarter speed gallop	Hack 30 mins, dressage school 30 mins	Competition ODE
Week 10	Day Off	Hacking 1 hr	Hacking with hillwork mainly trotting	Canter 7/3/7/3/7	Dressage training	Show jump training	Dressage with pole work
Week 11	Canter 7/3/7/3/7	Hacking 1hr	Dressage training 1 hr	Canter 5/3/5/3 with 600m gallop	Hacking 30 mins dressage 30 mins	Hacking with pole work and light jump school	Competition ODE
Week 12	Day Off	Day Off	Hacking 1hr	Hacking with hills mainly trotting	Canter 8/3/8/3/8	Light hack	Dressage training
Week 13	Hill work mainly trotting	Canter 8/3/9/3/8	Hack 30 mins followed by SJ training	SJ Competition	Hack 1 hr	Canter 9/3/9/3/9	Light hacking
Week 14	Dressage training with pole work	Dressage training	Canter 9/3/9/3/9	Day Off	Hack 30 mins, dressage training 30 mins	Competition	Competition
Week 15	Day Off	Day Off	Hacking with dressage schooling	Canter work 2 x 800m gallops	Hacking 1 hr	Jump schooling session	Dressage training

Week 16	Canter 9/3/9/3/9	Travel to event hack at venue	CCI* Trot up	CCI* Dressage	CCI* XC	CCI* SJ
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The above table offers a rough guide. Obviously, riders must be guided by their horses in the preparation and must be able to be flexible to accommodate the recovery of the particular horse.