

## **Rider Weight – a difficult subject but one that has to be considered**

Just like us, age, fitness and other factors mean that different horses can carry different weights but for the purposes of a show or an event, we need a consistent figure to work with; the 20% provides us with a simple sum and a ratio that is easy to use. For example, when assessing a rider and their mount, does the rider take up more than 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the overall picture, if so, they are probably over the recommended guideline. This figure should include the rider in full riding attire with all of their tack. The animal should be of a healthy bodyweight and not an overweight one, as this is also a welfare concern.

Some associations have a 17% rider weight ruling which is very commendable and demonstrates a genuine concern for the welfare of their horses.

Some of the problems that we know categorically arise from riders of an inappropriate weight are muscle fatigue and loss of muscle tone which compromises the skeletal frame; performance is often reduced, and the equine is not able to function correctly, stumbling or falling. We often see or hear of behavioural issues, for example, not wishing to be tacked up or mounted. All of these points could potentially risk the safety of both horse and rider.

Other factors that add to the issue include hoof trimming measures such as the length of toe that can increase the relevance of the horse/rider weight ratio. In many cases, the weight of the saddle, stirrups, girths, numnahs, saddle pads/cloths are not considered but can greatly impact the overall weight ratio.

When considering the mount, we as riders do need to be honest about our actual weight. As a nation we are all far bigger than we were 50 years ago and sadly we often hear the concerns with overweight children at riding schools who are not able to just get on bigger horses; education as to health and fitness is a must in this area. Some riding schools run active “weight loss” sessions whilst others use weigh scales with red/amber/green range indicating type of horse which can be ridden.

More and more equestrian bodies are introducing a rider weight ratio, it’s hoped that in time this will be seen across all equestrian disciplines. Studies are being carried out as science and evidence-based information is obviously very helpful and supports the requirement.

We would like everyone to have the option to ride but obviously selecting the right mount is key.

**The welfare of the horse or pony must always be paramount.**

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### **The Welfare Stewarding Team**

We are an independent group of volunteers who strongly believe that employing prevention through education, we can make a difference. We are extremely grateful to the BHS (British Horse Society) who have provided online training with motivational interviewing techniques on how to broach those difficult conversations along with other training that included training on healthy bodyweight scoring, as equine obesity is an ongoing welfare issue.

Our aim is to educate and to encourage better horsemanship, understanding and consideration for all horses and ponies at our events. We like to reward where possible, even if its just a message of “well done”, “good handling” or “great combination”, this always seems to be very well accepted. In some cases, the event has provided a rosette/memento of some sort which could be awarded to those that demonstrate any of the above. We have been told that this has meant more than a class placing, demonstrating that welfare is really important to the competitors.

With social licence to operate in mind we are keen to protect shows and events from the possible implications of the poor horsemanship and/or welfare issues often going on behind the scenes at shows and events. More often than not, the competitor is unaware of how they are treating their animal as they are often too stressed and/or completely caught up in the moment, and do not consider how their behaviour is portrayed to the general public watching from the sidelines. There is a high percentage of the public that think that horses should not be ridden at all, so it’s of the utmost importance that we all look to protect the longevity of riding and showing within equestrianism.

Other events have commented that bringing in independent stewards has worked really well for them and takes away the issue of asking your own stewards to have potentially difficult conversations. Our team of 40 something which is growing all the time, includes a wide range of volunteers including veterinary surgeons, saddlers, chiropractors, physiotherapists and many other equine professionals.