

How to use the Ridden Horse Performance Checklist

also known as the Ridden Horse Ethogram / Ridden Horse Pain Ethogram / RHpE
(adapted from Dyson et al. J. Vet. Behav. 2018;23:47-57)

Have the horse warm up as usual, then watch it performing its full repertoire of movements for 5-10 minutes, including 10m diameter circles on each rein in figures of eight (complete circles) in rising trot.

- Watch from the side, from in front, and from behind.

Use a stopwatch to measure behaviours that are time-dependent.

- If it helps, film the ridden session, and replay it as many times as needed (the screen you watch on must be big enough to be able to see the relevant behaviours, and the horse needs to fill the screen).
- As with any skill, using the RHpE gets easier with practice.

Some considerations

White of the Eye: Some horses have a blue eye or a small iris in one or both eyes, so the sclera (white of the eye) is visible at rest. The criteria for this behaviour cannot be applied to these horses in the affected eye(s).

Bit Pulled Through: If the canons (mouthpieces) of the bit are too wide for the horse's mouth, it may be more difficult to evaluate this behaviour.

Stumble, Trip, Toe Drag: If the horse is being worked in an arena with deep footing or in long grass, it may appear to have a hindlimb toe drag, so this behaviour cannot be evaluated. Stumbling would still be a significant observation.

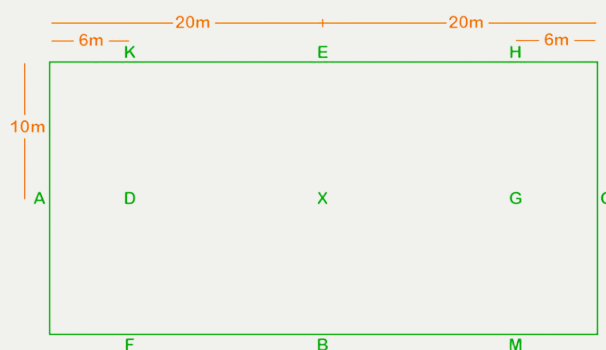
A purpose-designed dressage-type test suitable for application of the Ridden Horse Performance Checklist (RHpE)

(adapted from Dyson et al. Equine Vet. Educ. 2020; 32[Suppl.10]:112-120)

All trot is performed rising.

1. From A trot 1½ circuits of the arena on the right rein to C
2. At C trot 20 m circle right
3. At C trot 20 m circle right – walk at X for 5 steps & then resume trot
4. C to A trot
5. A working canter right 1½ circuits of the arena on the right rein to C
6. C circle right 20 m
7. C trot
8. B circle right 10m 1½ times and then from XE circle to the left 10m 1 time and then half circle to the right from X to B
9. Continue in trot to A and at A medium walk
10. KXM change the rein at medium walk
11. C trot 1 circuit of the arena on the left rein
12. At C trot 20 m circle left
13. At C trot 20 m circle left – walk at X for 5 steps & then resume trot
14. C to A trot
15. A working canter left 1½ circuits of the arena on the left rein to C
16. C circle left 20 m
17. Trot at C; C to E trot
18. E circle left 10m 1½ times and then from X circle to the right 10 m 1 ½ times
19. B working trot on right rein to A
20. A canter right
21. A to M canter right
22. MXK change the rein; trot at X and canter left at A
23. A to H canter left
24. HXF change the rein; trot at X and canter right at A
25. E trot
26. C walk

Assess from MC corner for movements 1-9 and from CH corner for movements 11-26

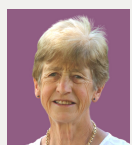


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“Bad behaviour has become normalised. If we recognise that this is pain-induced and can be abolished by addressing the causes of discomfort, then horses will be more cooperative and trainable, more comfortable and potentially safer to ride, and more successful – a win-win situation for both the horses and riders.”
The RHpE was developed by Sue Dyson and colleagues. This document is copyright Sue Palmer, The Horse Physio, 2023.

Pain affects all aspects of a horse's performance, including its partnership with the rider, and its potential to progress. It does not always create lameness. Robust research shows that the presence of 8 or more of the 24 behaviours of the Ridden Horse Performance Checklist indicates the presence of musculoskeletal pain. Some lame horses may have a score of less than 8/24.



Horse Name..... Date.....

Each behaviour could have a variety of potential causes. It is the total checklist score that is important. Even if the threshold of 8/24 is not reached, scores of 6 or more should alert a rider that there may be a problem. If a horse is monitored over time, rising scores indicate a potential problem

Behaviour	Yes / No	Notes
The ears rotated back behind vertical or flat (both or one only) for five or more seconds, or repeatedly laying the ears flat		
The eye lids closed or half closed for two to five seconds		
Sclera (white of the eye) repeatedly exposed		
An intense stare / glazed expression / looking zoned out, for five seconds or more		
The mouth open with separation of the teeth for ten seconds or more, or repeated opening and shutting of the mouth with separation of the teeth for ten seconds or more		
The tongue exposed, protruding or hanging out, and / or moving in and out, repeatedly		
The bit pulled through the mouth on one side (left or right)		
Repeated changes of head position (up / down, but not in rhythm with trot)		
Head tilted, repeatedly		
Head in front of vertical (more than 30 degrees) for ten or more seconds		
Head behind vertical (more than 10 degrees) for ten or more seconds		
Head position changes repeatedly, moving from side to side		

We hope that one day, to overcome performance and behavioural problems, riders, trainers, coaches and all other equestrian professionals will first look for physical issues in the horse, rather than simply training the horse or the rider whilst ignoring the horse's attempt to communicate"
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Behaviour	Yes / No	Notes
Tail clamped tightly to buttocks on mid-line, or held to one side (crooked tail)		
Tail swishing large movements: repeatedly up and down / side to side / circular		
A rushed gait (frequency of trot steps greater than 40 in 15 seconds); or irregular rhythm in trot or canter; or repeated changes of speed in trot or canter		
Gait too slow (frequency of trot steps less than 35 in 15 seconds); may resemble passage-like trot		
Hindlimbs do not follow tracks of forelimbs but deviated to left or right; on three tracks in trot or canter		
Canter repeated strike off on wrong leg (incorrect lead); or change of leg in front and / or behind (disunited)		
Spontaneous changes of gait (e.g., breaks from canter to trot, or trot to canter)		
Stumbles or trips repeatedly; or repeated bilateral hindlimb toe drag		
Sudden change of direction, against rider's directions; or spooking		
Reluctant to move forward (has to be kicked, with or without verbal encouragement), or stops spontaneously		
Rearing (both forelimbs off the ground)		
Bucking or kicking backwards (one or both hindlimbs)		



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