

Guidance notes on Walking Cross Country Courses **from National U18 Coach Caroline Moore**

- ♦ Always try to make sure you have enough time to walk the course. Combination fences will often need more analysis and walking more than once. Try to not be put off by mobile phones or 'chit chat' as this will take your concentration away.
- ♦ Try to occasionally walk with someone who is very experienced to get his or her opinions. They may be able to see a problem that you may not recognise and be able to offer help with a solution
- ♦ Always walk with 'horses eyes' Take notice of first impressions and anything that is going on around the fence, such as, where the fence judge is positioned, is there a clear getaway, groundlines or maybe a fence in the background that will take his attention away.
- ♦ Make sure you walk the course with your horse in your mind. For example, your horse may have a weaker side where he will fall in or out on the shoulder. This will greatly affect how you will ride a curving or turning line.
- ♦ Take note of ground conditions as they may be vary around the course. Take into consideration when you are running, i.e. early or late in the day as this may affect how you may ride different lines if the land is getting very cut up.
- ♦ If you are at a three-day event or are able to walk the course the day before it would be useful to walk the course at the same time of day you will be running. This will give you a good idea of the sunlight, shadows etc.
- ♦ Even if you decide to jump the straight route at a fence you must be familiar with the alternatives and black flag routes in case you have a problem.
- ♦ Ride your horse to develop his confidence. Longer but easier alternatives are ideal for a horse if he has had a bad jump prior and needs to develop his confidence back.
- ♦ When walking the course, occasionally glance behind you, as this will tell you if you have walked the most economical route. Try to tighten up your lines in between fences where you can as this will help with achieving the time
- ♦ Note which areas of the course are on straight flat land and which areas are up hills, through woodland, twisty lines etc, as these will take more time. You may need to plan a strategy to achieve the time. Make sure you take notice of a change in light, especially if the sun is very bright as this will affect how quickly a horse can read a fence.
- ♦ If you are wheeling the course know where your minute markers are, try to wheel the most realistic but tightest lines possible. Try to be as accurate as possible i.e., measure the distance through the water etc.

- ◆ When walking distances try to imagine where your horse is going to land in relation to the fence and walk your distance and lines from that point. For example, is your horse going to land much closer to a pig-arc than an upright palisade?
- ◆ However try not to get too dominated by distances as lines will often ride very differently to how they walk. Riders must learn to ride by their 'eye' and feel rather than be too worried by distances.
- ◆ Sometimes it can be useful to make notes as you are walking round which you can refer to later on. Some competitors will even take video footage or photographs of the individual fences
- ◆ Give yourself time before you ride to sit down by yourself and visualise riding each fence and how to ride them. This will remind you of all the combination fences and how you plan to ride them. Try to do this in 'real time', ie, take 5 mins or so.
- ◆ If you have a question about a particular fence try not to dwell on it too much or be swayed by the opinions of others. Make up your own mind and stick to your plan as best as possible
- ◆ Have a structured warm-up, which should include practicing gear changes in the canter and using the practice fence to develop confidence, accuracy, a rhythm and to settle a horse on to the aids.
- ◆ Always come through the finish with a positive rein contact and riding in balance. Ride forward to a balanced trot in a straight line for about 20m before riding forward to walk and giving the horse a long rein and dismounting. Loosen off the girth but keep walking your horse until he stops blowing. Getting your horse cooled down if hot or a thin rug if very chilly wind is very important and should be done as soon as possible. Allow your horse to drink water with the chill taken off as soon as he stops blowing. Don't forget to check your horse all over for injuries and treat as necessary.