

Directory of showjumping sessions

We thought it would be interesting to draw up as exhaustive a “directory” as possible of the training sessions commonly used to prepare eventing horses. Better understanding, shared terminology, facilitating understanding of training and planning sheets, and above all clarifying what we hope will be many discussions, are the objectives of this fact sheet. Each session corresponds to a particular objective and is presented in terms of its content and duration, but also according to the metabolisms involved and the estimated recovery time between each session of the same type.

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Technical level 



Erwan Leroux and Quambi du Figuier in the showjumping class © A. Laurieux

What you need to know before you start

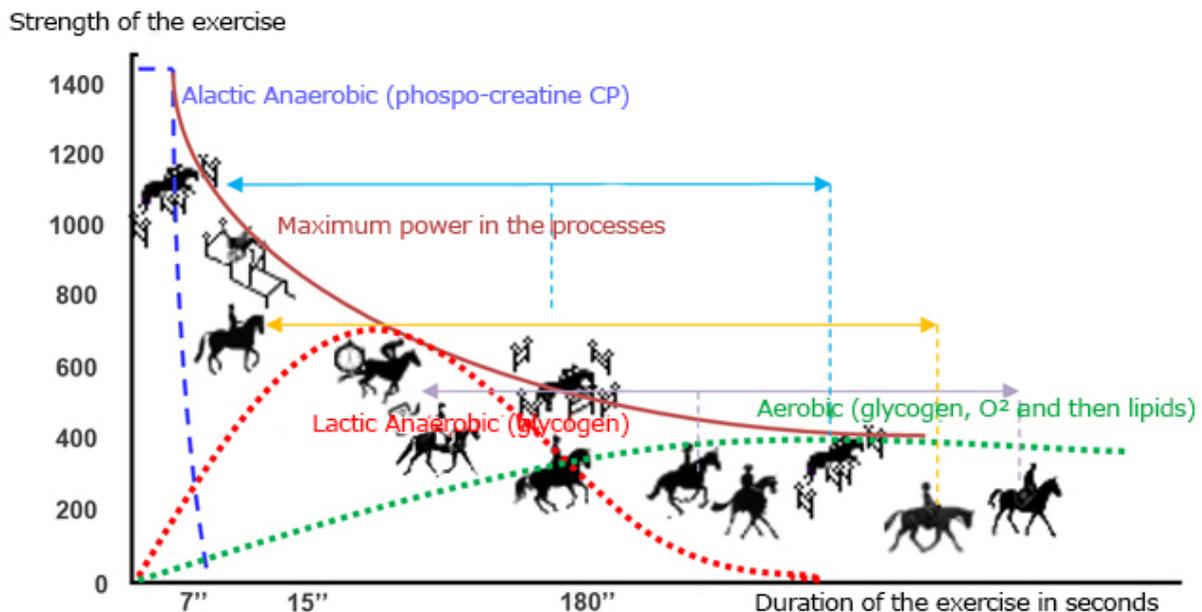
A metabolic contribution suited to each type of session

The form, intensity, duration, recovery times and demands on the muscles... depending on the type of session, determine the metabolic contribution for each of them. Ideally, it is on the basis of these demands that the programme and then the plan should be developed, according to the objectives set. The duration of the sessions should be adjusted according to:

- The age of the horse
- Its level of training
- The period in the programme

The sequence of sessions during periods, cycles and microcycles according to the characteristics of each rider/horse combination will result from this. All of these parameters make it possible to define training loads (energy expenditure, oxygen consumption and type of recovery required).

Shorter and therefore more intensive activities (e.g. cavaletti jumps or obstacles with full or semi-full recovery) mainly place demands on the anaerobic alactic metabolism; while an often less intensive and rather "long" trotting session will only work the aerobic metabolism. In show obstacle sequences, with repeated sequences and little intermediate rest, the anaerobic lactic metabolism will be dominant, as in a muscle strengthening session.



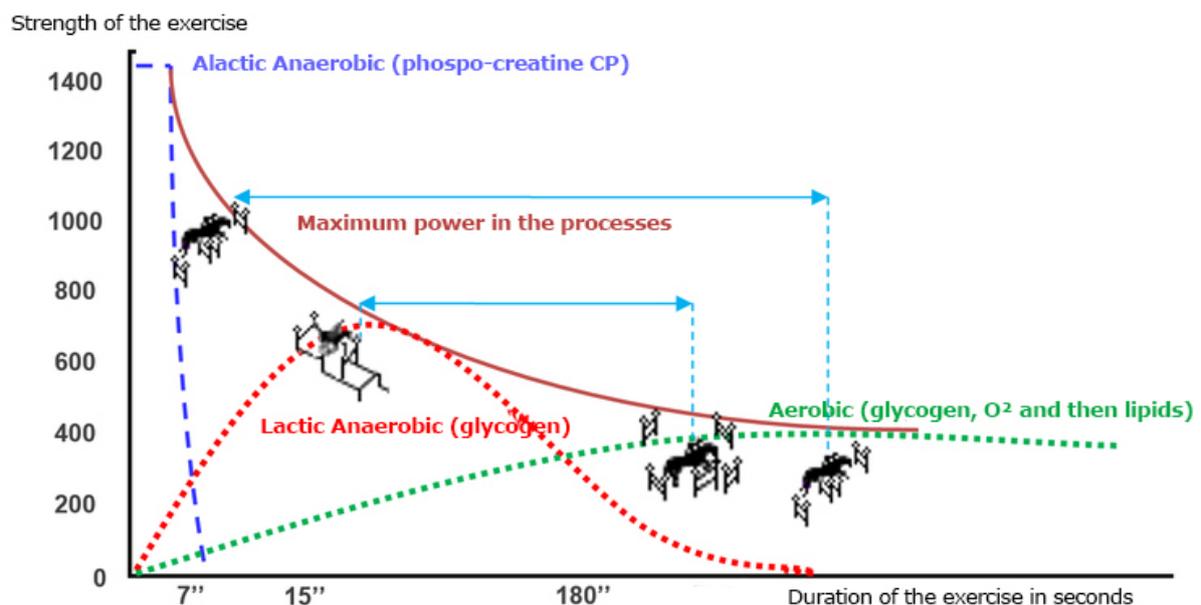
Graph 1: Example of metabolic contribution at work according to exercise intensity and duration. Obstacles (blue arrow), dressage (orange arrow), cantering (purple arrow)

For each session, we define:

- An **average time** excluding warm up and recovery;

- The **necessary intensity** of the session, i.e. the demand or power (%VO2 max, amount of force or maximum height depending on the discipline);
- The **necessary recovery time** after the session: this value, which is generally defined according to experience, is key, alongside the metabolic contribution, and is indispensable for defining the amount of work and the sequence of sessions;
- The **main metabolic contribution**, remembering that this may, for equal work, evolve according to the period, duration, intensity and with a different management of recovery.

Directory of mobile obstacle sessions



Graphic 2: Metabolic contribution to the workout according to the intensity and duration of the exercise - From left to right: cavaletti session with long recovery, "cardio" type muscle strengthening, series of obstacle sequences with or without recover,

Gymnastics sessions over obstacles

Many trainers incorporate these into the "mechanisation" sessions. They consist of a repetition of close jumps.

Improving the horse's coordination, they also develop its technical gesture and fluidity, its rebound and the pleasure it takes in jumping.

These sessions take different forms:

- easy lines on low obstacles, where the horse is looking for ease and range of movement without forcing;

- lines (over mobile or semi-fixed obstacles) which put the horse at height with ease and high-quality movement, the actions of the rider are reduced to a minimum.

There should not be too many jumps, especially since the horse is confronting difficulties that it mastered during the previous preparatory session.

The session may include floor bars to promote rebound, in which case, if a small jump is included, it is isolated and low.

This type of session can replace a "stretching" session on the flat because it helps to tighten the top line. See also the fact sheet: Directory of dressage sessions.

Average length of the session	30 to 40 minutes	with fewer than 10 repetitions
Required session intensity	60 to 70%	
Recovery time required after the session	12 to 24 h	
Dominant metabolic contribution	Alactic or lactic anaerobic	According to the sequence of repetitions / aerobics according to duration

Note: In the same way, gymnastic work can become anaerobic lactic over a short and intense session with reduced recovery times between sequences of movements. This type of session plays a role during competition periods for example.

Gymnastics sessions to strengthen muscle over obstacles

Very similar to gymnastics or mechanisation sessions, they are different from them in that the objective is specifically oriented towards muscle strengthening. They consist of a repetition of exercises using all the jumping muscles. Different types of contractions can be worked, or a strengthening session can be linked to an obstacle session to take advantage of the muscle fibres (and MU motor units) or pre-fatigue by taking care to adapt the heights, distances and especially the number of repetitions and recovery times.

These sessions take different forms:

- Lines of bounces (plyometrics);
- Wide oxers with a horse that is "constrained" on close ground lines or where the horse will develop the thrust with their hind legs (concentric).
- Repetitions on steps equipped with intermediate poles, using eccentric exercises on the descent and concentric exercises in the ascent are particularly effective on the elevating muscles in the shoulders.

Note: These sessions always take place at some point before or after competition because they place great demands on the neuromuscular system (especially the eccentric and plyometric register)

Average length of the session	30 to 40 minutes	Series of several repetitions interspersed with a more or less complete recovery depending on the period (from 3 to 6 minutes or from 6 to 8 minutes between series)
Required session intensity	80 to 100%	
Recovery time required after the session	24 to 48 h	
Dominant metabolic contribution	Aerobic	Can become anaerobic alactic or lactic depending on how close the sequence is repetitions are or can even be aerobic if the session is long

Technical sessions over obstacles

The horse discovers new obstacles (liverpools, water jump, etc.) or acquires a new skill (very rounded jump, shortening strides in a line, etc.).

It develops new abilities (jumping sideways, over a narrow obstacle...). This is about using low barriers to develop the understanding of a difficulty through learning. The work must be done in a relaxed manner and must not cause fatigue to make the session enjoyable for the horse.

Average length of the session	45 minutes	Series of repetitions from 15-30 seconds
Required session intensity	50 to 60%	
Recovery time required after the session	6 to 12 h	
Dominant metabolic contribution	Aerobic	

Note: Apart from learning new movements, technical work can become anaerobic lactic over a short and intense session with reduced recovery times. This type of session plays a role during competition periods for example.

Connecting technical and cardiac jumping sessions

The horse performs repetitions of 6 to 12 obstacles striving for technical optimisation (ideal curve, straight jump, optimal supervision, respect of the stride contract, ...) without particularly seeking to put in effort.

To give a more “cardio” focus, you can play on the number of repetitions and/or shorter resting times. The trainer must organise the communication of these technical instructions so as not to delay the sequence of rehearsals. Technical quality must remain a priority.

Average length of the session	30 to 40 minutes	Series of repetitions from 15-30 seconds
Required session intensity	70%	
Recovery time required after the session	48 to 72h	
Dominant metabolic contribution	Anaerobic or aerobic	Depending on the type of session and the period

Sessions on fixed obstacles

Combining cross-country and technical sessions

Initially used in an educational context for horses in training, they are also practised at a high level to review certain kinds of obstacles or when striving for a particular technical work on the circuit or particular combinations. The horse has to work within the specific cross-country pace to stay within the constraints of the test.

These sessions should be relatively short so as not to alter the technical quality of the work. For greater “cardio” focus, cantering work can be combined with some cross-country obstacles.

Average length of the session	30 to 40 minutes	With several repetitions
Required session intensity	70%	
Recovery time required after the session	24 to 48h	
Dominant metabolic contribution	Lactic or aerobic anaerobic (power)	Depending on the duration and intensity of the session

Note: In the same way, gymnastic work can become anaerobic lactic over a short and intense session with reduced recovery times between sequences of movements. This type of session plays a role during competition periods for example.

Mixed sessions

These sessions, too rarely used in horse riding, are nevertheless highly relevant for preparation of the so-called combined or multiple tests, such as those involved in eventing competitions.

The point is to work on the physical as well as mental capacities of the rider and the horse, to combine the qualities of different tests into the same session. The series of two or three sequences organised in duration, intensity and recovery time according to the periods, make it possible to tackle a particular theme (balance when cantering/ galloping for example...).

Here are a few examples of sequences: dressage, obstacle, cantering / dressage, cantering, obstacle / strengthening, obstacle, cantering / cantering, obstacle... The constant aim is for high quality work. And changing the saddle is also important from one sequence to the next.

From a metabolic point of view, the choice of a rather lactic or aerobic workout can also give this type of session a real added value. The important thing is that the objective of the session is defined before riding the horse and does not evolve with the work, without an objective argument.

Average length of the session	45 minutes to 1 hour
Required session intensity ²	70 to 80%
Recovery time required after the session	24 to 48 h
Dominant metabolic contribution	aerobic / lactic anaerobic (capacity)

Conclusion

Presentation of these types of generic sessions, which can be adapted to other disciplines if necessary, should enable the reader to construct varied and progressive cycles and microcycles according to training periods and sequencing. The knowledge of the metabolic contributions of each session and the length of recovery time will allow effective sessions to be followed without harming or cancelling one another out.

The rules that enable the rider to adapt them to the horse and the objectives, must include an assessment of the training load of each session.

About our writers

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