

Planning the horse's training

Key to success and renewal of performances, planning training is unfortunately too often unformalized by riders and their coaches. However it's essential to bring all the consistency needed to the preparation of the horse and his rider according to their objectives and their level of evolution. The sports season generally focuses on one or several sequences according to important goals. The overall planning organization can be generalized at all levels and in many cases systematized to all horses. The one we will discuss in this document can be adapted with regard to your conditions and constraints.

by **Guy BESSAT - Patrick GALLOUX - Philippe MULL** | 08.11.2017 |

Translated from french by : Karen Duffy

Technical level   



Matthieu Van Landeghem riding Trouble Fête© P. Chevalier

Introduction

Training is a capacity booster that aims to get the best performance from the horse-rider partnership by the improvement of their physical, physiological,

tactical and mental qualities. It allows both to tolerate the intense demands of competitions and to increase training loads through a more sustainable recovery. Notwithstanding a widespread idea in horse riding, well thought out, it contributes to the preservation of the athlete's health.

In programming and planning training sessions, the coach must ensure:

- Progression of the preparation according to periods (macrocycles) and cycles;
- Work balance in each microcycle and consistency in the succession of sessions;
- Good management of recovery.

In time spent in the preparation imposed by the competition season, it is essential to plan training and to set up for each period, cycle and microcycle, a consistent programme in tune with the defined objectives. This is how you can :

- Train in a constructive way;
- Check on your work;
- Evaluate your level of preparation;
- Regularly and efficiently adjust your amount of work;
- Assess the results at the end of the season comparing results with those of the past years, noting what has been a success and what's been a hindrance or a failure;
- Prepare new objective(s) on better bases.

Programming and planning your training

Programming your preparation or training

It's evaluating the means that need to be set up in order to organize and contemplate the future **after having defined achievable objectives** for the horse/rider partnership. « Knowing where we come from, where we are going and what we want to achieve »

Planning the training

This means making the programme operational. In order to organize regular supervised and progressive training work, it is essential to adapt it according to the training period, by setting out different parameters such as frequency, regularity, intensity and volume of the training you wish to implement.

- **Frequency and regularity** : progress can quickly appear when training twice weekly at least... but they can also disappear very quickly after a break in training sessions of one or two weeks.

- **Intensity** : this notion refers to the percentage of energy or to the level of effort required. It's directly related to demands on the energy channels-. The greater the effort, the less time should be spent on the exercise and vice versa.
- **Volume** (quantity) : one of the most important points of training is its dosage. Generally, we gradually increase by multiplying the number of series, of exercises therefore repetitions or number of sessions.

As soon as you adjust these parameters, you start planning and programming, which is essential if you have clear objectives.

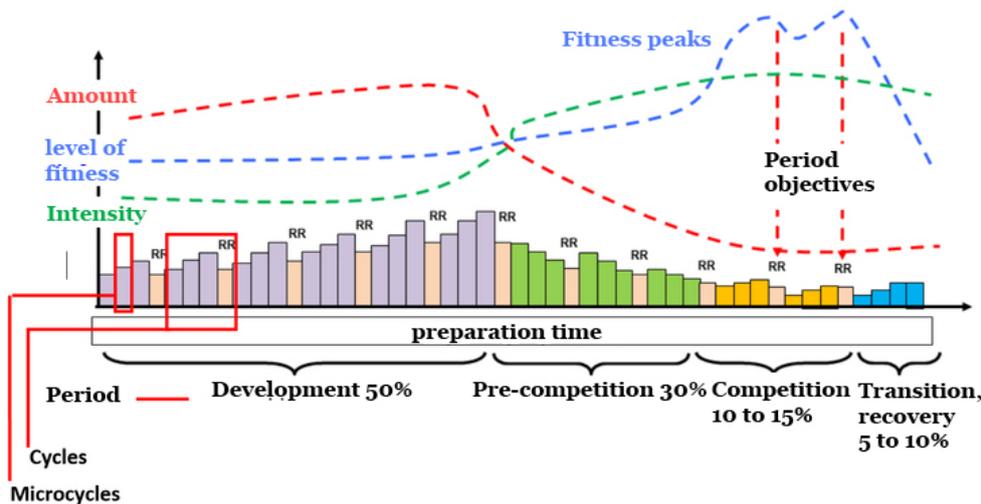
How to plan the training ?

No matter what the sport, and regarding equestrian sports, in order to be consistent training must be organized over time according to objectives. Thus a sports season can be prepared on 1, 2, 3 or even 4 sequences (hardly more), each one of them being divided in the same manner : there are **4 major periods**, called :

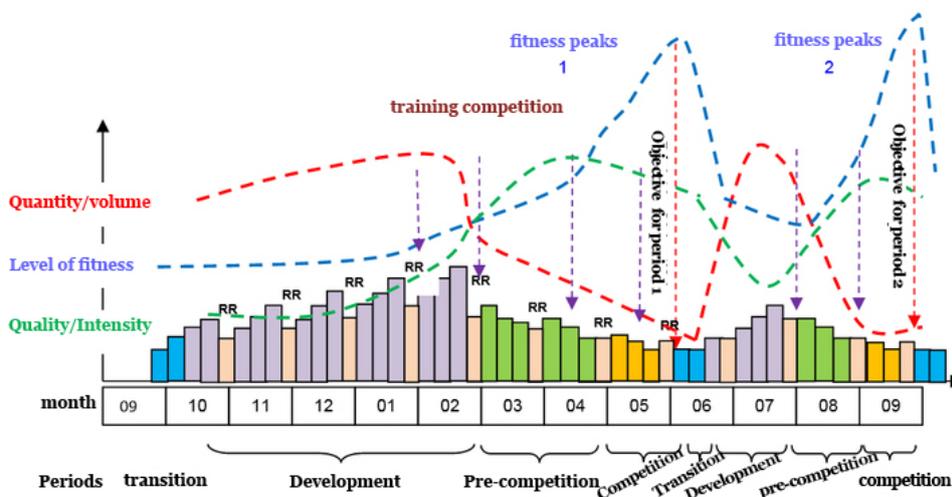
- **Development** : Generally it's the longest (about 50% of the overall training or the sequence). The distance from the objectives is greatest, it relies on a significant amount of work. The horse and its rider acquire the essential basic stamina for a successful season. Sessions are rather long (**more volume than quantity**) but not intense (**less quality and intensity**) / work on technique and general physical preparation (GPP) .
- **Pre-competition** : It's a transition period between « development » and the « competition » period (about 30% of the training or the sequence). This part is more explosive, needs more power. Sessions are shorter (**less volume/quantity**) but more intense and technical (**more quality/intensity**) / working on techniques and more specific preparation (SP).
- **Competition** : « Fine tuning » period (about 10 to 15% of training time or sequence), it's the result of all your efforts and the expression of the achievements. If training has been correctly conducted, it should allow your « fitness peaks » to coincide with the « objectives ». Sessions are shorter (**less volume/quantity**) with an intensity close to the intensity of a competition (**lots of quality / intensity**)/ very specific work. This period always ends with a « goal competition. »
- **Transition or recovering** : Period at the end of the sequence or of the season, during which the body recovers from the efforts made after an important objective or after the principal objectives of the season (about 5 to 10% of the training or sequence). First physical and psychological recovery can be a full rest period (activity with no particular physical

constraint) that will last from 3 days to 3 weeks maximum. Then the transition progressively becomes active in order to launch a new sequence, geared towards new goals or the next season.

This simple training plan is essential to protect yourself from under-training or, on the contrary, from overtraining, or even from certain injuries.



Graph 1 : Schedule for the preparation of an objective with periods, cycles, microcycles and rotation work/rest.



Graph 2 : planning over two sequences for a season with 2 objectives/ periods, cycles and microcycles with a work/rest rotation

When the overall training plan is defined, organising each component each then needs to be done by increasing the work loads for each of them, in the successive microcycles and cycles while ensuring that the work / rest rotation is always repeated.

Organization of work throughout the training schedule

Progression

Programming training starts from the return to work at the end of the transition or recovery period and ends with the recovery and/or resting period that follows the main objectives or at the end of the season.

In the pattern suggested here, which as previously mentioned can be modified to suit requirements, each of the periods is related to the duration and to the particular work that is required, it is built and progresses around three major axes : volume, intensity and recovery. It is sequenced in cycles (of a month for example) and microcycles (of a week for example) (see graphic 1 and 2). This enables to progressively increase volume and intensity of work, level of physical condition and therefore performance and to reach the fitness peak(s) in time to coincide with the objective(s) by alternating work and relative rest.

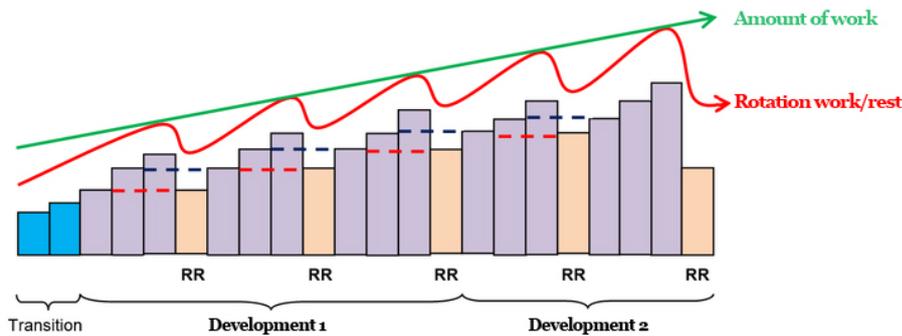
Cycles and microcycles

Each cycle is the sum of the work scheduled within the period. Each microcycle in the cycle is the marker of volume progression and of planned intensity. The work loads have to be consistent with one another (see fact sheet «Assessing the amount of training »).

In the example below we have chosen cycles that include 3 microcycles for progression to one of relative rest (RR). The latter is a regeneration microcycle involving a work load equivalent to the load of the first microcycle ----- (red discontinuous line – see graph 3)

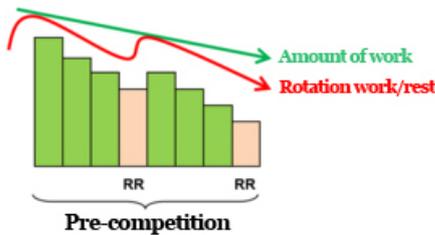
The following cycle will begin with the same amount of work as that of the second microcycle in cycle 1 -----(blue discontinuous line – see graph 3)

If it's a long period (over more than 3 months), it can be cut in two. For example, during the winter season, we can choose to set up a « first development » period (essentially based on the long distance technical work, development of the fundamental capacities, the GPP) and a « second development » period (based on more specific work by increasing intensity over the volume). These two periods can be interspersed by one or two indoor competitions or an intensive schooling clinic... (see graph 3).

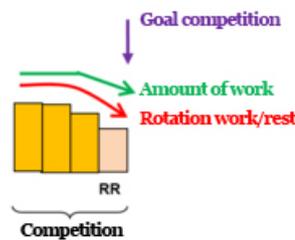


Graph 3 : example of an organization over a long development period (divided into two) of 5 cycles (3+2), of 4 microcycles each including 1 of relative rest (RR) allowing to alternate work and rest. Regular progression of the amount of work.

Two examples of organization for « pre competition » period and « competition » period are presented on graphs 4 and 5.

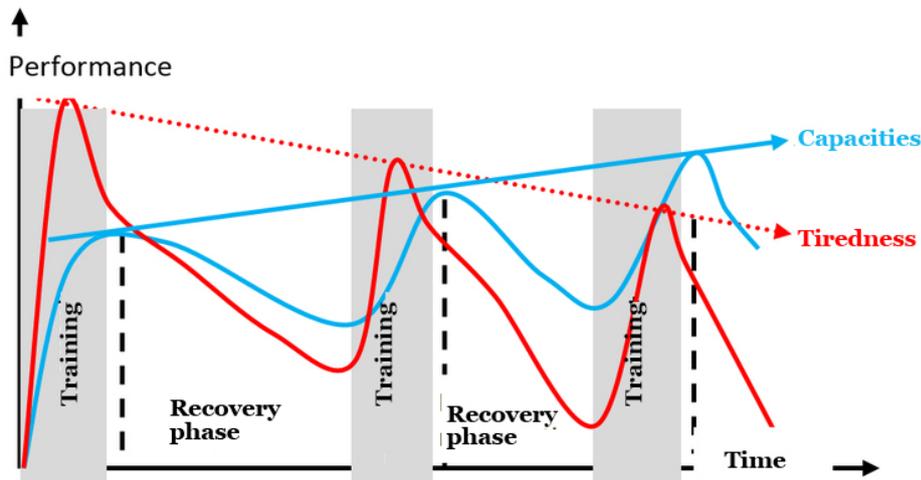


Graph 4 : organization example over a pre-competition period of 2 cycles and 4 microcycles each of them including 1 relative rest microcycle allowing to alternate between work and rest. Reduction of the amount of work but more intensive and respecting the rotation work/rest.



Graph 5 : organization example over a Competition of 1 cycle of 4 microcycle including 1 of relative rest (RR) allowing to fine tune the horse. Reduction of the amount of work but more intensive and respecting the rotation work/rest. Competition period always ends by a goal competition.

Work and judicious rotation of the sequences and the increase of the amount and/or the intensity in each microcycle will progressively increase the capacities by reducing the effects of tiredness (see graph 6). However, an « overcompensation » phenomenon can not work indefinitely. We consider that after 3 microcycles of increasing amount and/or the intensity, it's essential to respect a period of relative rest that will allow recovery of the metabolism but will also enrich the effects of the past trainings in order to have a better start on the next cycle.



Graph 6 : Training promotes overcompensation phases linked to the dominant effect of gaining in capacities. The tiredness effect will decrease progressively and quicker. But this phenomenon isn't illimited hence the usefulness of alternating working microcycles with one relative rest microcycle.

Conclusion



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Planning is the diversification of the practise programme, an intellectual approach that every coach or rider should go through at the beginning of the season after an analysis of the past season and the performance criteria. Starting a season with no objectives and no programme is a random and risky approach. Scheduling the work throughout the season is mandatory to implement a balanced training programme. It's an organization scheme that

should be adjusted whenever necessary with regard to the work done, and to objective measures regarding the effects of training.

A programme without daily monitoring in a « practise notebook » will be a theoretical exercise with limited benefits.

The common tendency in horse riding, especially in eventing, is to moderate the intensive sessions and even suppress them in order not to tire the horse, this is a mistake. It will alter the basic qualities and will put horses into trouble by putting them through extreme constraints during a competition, which they have not being prepared for during training. Practise is the only way to progress. But through the planning it has to be well thought out, well dosed, progressif and most importantly objectivised.

Development and improvement of performance cannot be achieved without practise, without tiredness and therefore recovery. Management of the recovery phases and alternating them with work is the key to a training programme.

Practising, means taking care of :

- Individualization of the training parameters;
- Defining initial objectives for each session;
- Ensuring the quality of work and eliminating useless or damaging situations;
- Encouraging technical and physical work based on the objectives;
- Constantly diversifying situations with regard to the schedule;
- Any gesture used should be as close as possible to the gesture used in competitions;
- Alternating effort phases with rest phases and ensuring the quality of the rest;
- Also developing mental and motivation capacities.

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