

# WHAT'S IN A WARM UP ?

## A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF HOW FRENCH DRESSAGE RIDERS AND SHOW JUMPERS WARM-UP THEIR HORSES FOR COMPETITION

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### INTRODUCTION

Warming-up before intense exercise is acknowledged as an effective way to lower the risk of injury and increase performance in human athletes. Dynamic warm-ups regimes prepare the body for exercise, increasing heart rate and blood flow, stretching muscles and loosening joints, yet despite potential links between inadequate warm-up regimes and increased risk of injury and poor performance, equine warm-ups have not been widely studied. Previous work has shown that warm-up duration varies between disciplines with showjumping (SJ) warm ups reported as 5-10 minutes and 12-27 minutes, and dressage (DR) ~29 minutes.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** To evaluate rider decision-making when planning and implementing warm-up regimes in DR and SJ



### METHOD

Participation was voluntary via a questionnaire, written in French, which was distributed via equine related social media pages.

The survey comprising closed and open questions including asking riders their age, competition level and riding experience.

Further questions focused on warm up practices, separated into show jumping and dressage sections: time spent warming up at home vs. at competitions, and to identify riders key goals from the warm up period.

Differences between DR and SJ rider for warm up duration were identified using Mann Whitney U analyses using SPSS.

### RESULTS

257 riders completed the survey; 49% SJ (n=126) and 51% DR (n=131); the majority were female (96%, n=247).

Most DR and SJ riders agreed/strongly agreed that the warm-up should relax the horse, make the horse supple, make the horse more reactive to the aids and to decrease injury risk (Figure 1).

23% (n=30) of DR and 30% (n=38) of SJ riders used a fixed warm-up regime, whilst only 39% (n=51) of DR and 21% (n=26) of SJ riders felt warm-up length should depend on the horse.

Optimum length for the warm-up did not vary between disciplines (Mann Whitney U: 1917.5, P>0.05; median DR/SJ: 10-20 minutes).

Most riders (98%, n=128 DR, 99%, n=125 SJ) reported they warmed-up their horse symmetrically (equal time on both reins). DR riders used the walk as the main warm up gait (65%, n=56) while SJ riders used the trot (46%, n=41).

DR and SJ riders reported they warm up less (10-20mins) after competing a previous class at a show (DR 77%, n=66; SJ 71%, n=65).

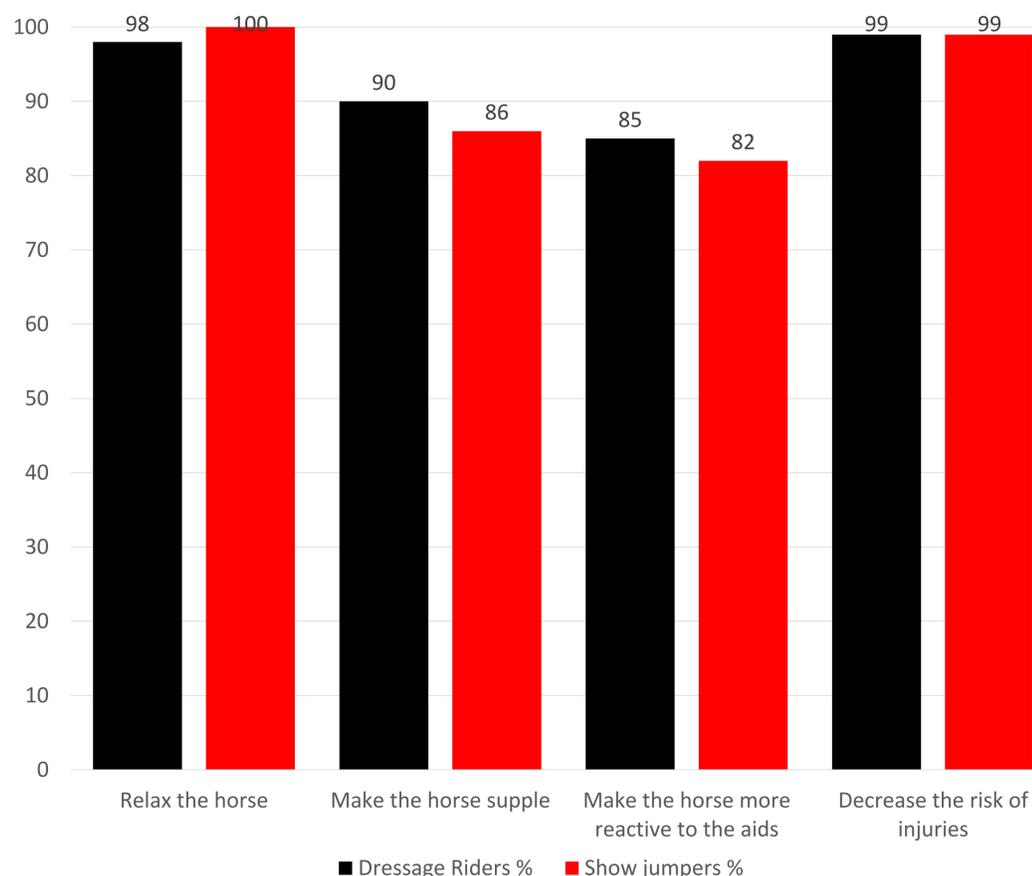


Figure 1: Reasons for using a warm up routine in SJ and DR

### CONCLUSIONS

This preliminary study shows that DR and SJ riders use warm-up regimes to prepare the horse physiologically and psychologically for competition to enhance performance and reduce injury risk. Warm up duration varied depending on whether riders were at home or at a show and if they have competed in a previous class. These findings were recorded via survey, therefore future work is needed to evaluate if riders' perception of how they warm-up is accurate in practice, and if warm-up strategies should be designed for the individual horse, or if 10-20 minute warm-up duration is sufficient.

**REFERENCES:** Dyson, S., Tranquille, C., Walker, V., Guire, R., Fisher, M. and Murray, R., 2018. A subjective descriptive study of the warm-up and turn to a fence, approach, take-off, suspension, landing and move-off in 10 showjumpers. *Equine Veterinary Education*, 30(1), pp.41-52.  
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