

The A B Cs of Cross Country Day at a Classic Event
By Max Corcoran with Anastasia Curwood

Max Corcoran is well-known as a world-class event groom and a past winner of Waredaca's T3DE. In her role as caretaker to Karen O'Connor's competition horses, she has traveled to the Olympic Games, the World Equestrian Games, and the Pan American Games, not to mention multiple upper-level three day events in the United States and overseas. She is an avid supporter of the T3DE, and has given lectures at Waredaca's T3DE since its inception in 2003. "The Training Level Three Day Event will teach you to ride," she says. "I did one a few years ago after joking around with Karen and David that I might be able to ride in one. To my horror they took me seriously—Karen insisted that I do it and David even lent me his horse. At the time I thought, 'what have I gotten into?' But it helped my riding a lot and I loved doing it."

In this article Max explains what to bring and what to do on Speed and Endurance Day at a Classic format event.

In preparation for a classic format speed and endurance day, I do my packing first. I pack two sets of gear: a steeplechase bucket and what I'll need for the 10 min box in a muck tub. The steeplechase bucket comes with me to the ten-minute box from the assistance area after Phase B, so I don't need to duplicate what I have in it. The weather dictates whether I bring some items, but the basic packing lists remain the same.

Steeplechase Bucket

The bucket itself can be dumped out and used for water

Sponge and scraper

Towel

Scissors

Duct tape (always very good!)

Spare shoes (or easyboot if no farrier available)

Spare reins

hole punch,

water for rider,

halter with number on it.

Cooler or rug for horse (if weather is cold, in case horse has to stand for hoof care)

Sometimes riders at Waredaca have asked me whether they should bring spare stirrup leathers and other tack items. Whether you do so is optional, but if you break a piece of equipment that is not listed here, things probably have gone wrong enough that you need to go home and try another day.

Ten-Minute Box

Steeplechase bucket and contents

At least 2 to 4 water buckets (depending on weather)

Extra studs and wrench

Extra horse boots
Extra bell boots
Extra whip
Extra bridle with a different bit (if you need one)
Cooler or rug if weather is cold
Rain sheet if weather is wet
Chair for rider
Jacket for rider (yes, you can get cold in ten minutes!)

The Big Day

One hour before my horse starts phase A, I go out to the ten-minute box and leave my equipment, placing a rain sheet over it if it is rainy. I don't go sooner than that because I don't want to take up space that other competitors who go earlier might need. I'll leave it in a compact pile and will return to set it up after phase B.

Then I return to the stable and tack up the horse for steeplechase, because there is no time between the end of phase A and the start of B to change equipment. Phase A is a warmup phase for horse and rider, so the rider might wear a jacket if it is cold. He or she will trot and perhaps canter, and should plan to get to phase B a minute or so early in order to shorten stirrups and check that the horse still has the same number of shoes he left the barn with.

After phase B, the rider will start phase C and then pause at the assistance area. We will again check the shoes, and if the horse had a funny jump on the steeplechase, we'll jog the horse to make sure he is sound. If the weather is warm, it is well worth it to take two or three minutes to sponge and scrape the horse. There is plenty of time for phase C, and this step can be crucial to cooling a horse out quickly after steeplechase and before reaching the ten-minute box. While the rider is on phase C, I take the steeplechase bucket over to the ten-minute box, and I am there in time to meet my horse with a halter at the finish of C.

The ten-minute box is a time to cool the horse and to allow the rider to regroup after the first three phases. You don't want it to be intense, but sometimes it can be. Try to be as calm and quiet around the horse as possible, as first timers might be puzzled, and old-timers will be excited about phase D ahead! More people there helping is not always better—and for hot, excitable horses, the fewer the people the better. At the most there should be three people on the horse: one person will stand at the head, and will halter and walk the horse, and two other people will stand on each side to sponge and scrape. And, if the rider's dad, mom, spouse, or other relative does not know anything about horses, it is best to leave them out of the box. Remember that this is probably a big competition for the rider, and it is her time to regroup and refocus on what lies ahead—so it is best for her to sit down and do whatever mental preparation she needs without distraction.

When the rider arrives at the box, I (if I am the designated person at the horse's head) put the halter on over the bridle and loosen the noseband and girth if necessary. The vet will

take the temperature, pulse, and respiration immediately. I try to find out these values if possible—especially the temperature—so that I know how much cooling the horse might need.

Then I walk the horse over to my station and start cooling out. I put the reins up by the poll so that I can avoid getting them wet as much as possible. I check over the boots and shoes, making sure that the boots are on straight, all shoes are present, and for nicks or cuts. Then the people sponging and scraping will wet the horse with sponges and scrape the water off as quickly as possible. Scraping is critical because the water heats to the temperature of the horse and scraping it off helps to shed heat. Cold water, especially if the weather is warm, will help cool the horse (it is a myth that one should not put cold water on a hot horse!). I will also walk the horse in large circles to help keep air circulating and his muscles moving. Usually, the vets will want to see the horse jog after about six minutes. At this point I snug up the girth if necessary, to prevent the saddle from slipping. Once the horse has been jogged, it is up to the rider when to remount, but two to four minutes before the start of D is the norm. Just before the rider gets on I check the saddle position, tighten the girth and noseband if I have loosened them, and towel off the reins.

Sidebar: timing in the ten-minute box

XC time minus 10: arrive and get horse's TPR

XC time minus 9: begin cooling horse (ice water on, ice water off, and walking)

XC time minus 6: return to veterinarian for TPR recheck and jog

XC time minus 2: remount and head to Phase D start box

Many events have the end of phase D next to the ten-minute box. I will meet my horse there, do a quick assessment for cuts, and allow the vets to take the vital signs immediately. I get the tack off to allow for as much cold water as possible to reach the horse's skin (but I always take studs out before taking boots off). And if the horse wants water, she can drink as much as she wants. It is another myth that hot horses should not drink water—in fact, the higher heart rate will allow quicker rehydration. If the weather is cold, I quickly bundle the horse up in a rug or cooler. I keep tabs on how the horse is cooling out, and once she is ready to return to the barns, I pile everything into my muck tub, ready to be taken back too.

Once we return to the stables, I always give the horse at least 20 minutes alone, unless there is a critical veterinary issue. This allows him some time to have a pee, eat a bit of hay, and get his composure back. If the horse is sound and healthy, it is best to allow him as much rest as possible. After this period I will begin cold therapy. However, not all horses will tolerate ice—some find it (especially the noise) scary. So I will have tried it at home first and, if necessary, I will use commercially available wraps that hold ice instead. Then I wrap the horse over liniment (in my case Lona's Leg Liniment) with a little bit of baby powder sprinkled over it. I prefer not to use poultice, because I've had too many horses develop big legs from a small invisible cut or boot rub that I have unwittingly covered with mud overnight, but you should use what you prefer (as long as you have tried it at home first). That night, I'll ask a friend to watch the horse jog in

hand, and take him for a walk to stretch his legs. Then he gets the rest he deserves for a job well done.

Anastasia Curwood and T3DE Committee chair Cindy DePorter thank Max for her generosity in sharing her knowledge. We are certain that there are many future T3DE competitors reading this article who feel the same way.