

"The Ten Minute Box"

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The Ten Minute Box: the designated recovery stage of the Three Day Event. Ten minutes: it seems a long time when you've got nothing to do but all of a sudden you find yourself at the end of phase C approaching that inevitable 'box'. You will have just ten valuable minutes to accomplish a feat most need an hour to do - cool your horse down, stabilize him, prepare him for the cross-country, cope with the (expected) unexpected and convince yourself that you are ready to take on what may be the biggest test of your eventing career! At this stage of the game the two key words are **preparation** and **foresight**. Hopefully your horse has been well-prepared physically and has successfully negotiated the first three phases, yet without a basic consideration of foresight, phase D may end up in the 'wastebasket of unattainable goals'.

The Ten Minute Box plays a paramount role in the success of your entire event. When we examine the first three phases in detail, Phase A, Roads and Tracks, is traditionally a warm-up for Phase B, Steeplechase, and the second roads and tracks, Phase C, is designed as a recovery period after the steeplechase. Body temperature, heart rate, respiration rate and various breakdown products of muscle metabolism will have higher readings than normal following Phase B. The thirty to fifty minutes of trotting on Phase C allows these parameters to return to a recovery level in the fit horse (the operative word here being fit.)

It is imperative that the horse be prepared for the rigours of the three day event speed and endurance phase, It is only with a truly fit horse that an acceptable level of recovery can be achieved prior to setting out on the cross country, (Phase D). This invariably leads us to the importance of the hands on organization required in the Ten Minute Box, to ensure the horse is safe, physically (and sometimes mentally) to continue. The management of your horse's health in the Ten Minute Box actually begins a few hours prior to the start of Phase A: organising skilled helpers; assembling your equipment in the box; and locating the farrier and the veterinarians needs to be done early in the day. Find your personal area in the box, preferably in the shade (at the time of the day when you enter the box), close to the ice/water and farrier, and arrange your equipment in an organised, easily accessible fashion.

NORMAL READINGS

Body Temperature: 99.5 to 100.5°F / 37.8 to 38°C

Heart Rate (at rest): 32 to 40 beats per minute

Respiratory Rate (dependent on humidity and temperature): 12 to 16 breaths per minute .

EQUIPMENT CHECK LIST

At least four buckets per horse

Ice/water Multiple sponges, towels, sweat scrapers (rubber backed to cover greater surface area)

Extra pre-fitted shoes, studs and shoeing gear

Extra tack (saddle, bridle, stirrup leathers, bell boots, etc)

Extra clothing (gloves, whip, spurs, etc)

Sweat sheet and wool rug

Extra head collar and lead Hoof boot

Ice boots, bandages

Grease and gloves

Water-proof sheet (to cover gear/sit gear on)

chair drinks

VET KIT

Thermometer, scissors, bandaging material, and stethoscope. The weather will be a significant factor on your horse's recovery, so it is advisable to make a note of the forecasted humidity and temperature prior to starting Phase A.

At the end of Phase B you are allowed assistance in 'No-man's Land', located at the start of Phase C. You should use this area as foundation for the Ten Minute Box. Two helpers armed with sponges, towels, bucket, extra shoes, an Ezy-boot or strong tape, and a thermometer would be sufficient. On entering 'No-man's Land' one helper immediately takes the temperature of the horse and checks his shoes and studs. The other helper loosens the noseband and overgirth and sponges the horse's neck and between his hind legs. This whole process should take no more than two minutes if done efficiently. If the temperature of the horse is especially high (over 106°F/41°C), you may need to walk for a longer period of time on Phase C, and your helpers can prepare themselves in the Ten Minute Box for aggressive cooling of the horse.

THE ROLE OF THE VET IN THE TEN MINUTE BOX

The official veterinarians at the Three Day Event are stationed in or near the Ten Minute Box. They have the final veto over whether or not a horse may continue onto Phase D. The vets are to evaluate each individual horse compared to the others, with consideration given to the weather and the fitness of the horses. The final evaluation should be based on the overall recovery of the horse, from when it entered the box up until it is required to leave. The vets will normally take readings on the horse as it enters the box, and then again at the six minute point. Some vets also ask for an official trot-up of the horse prior to the start of Phase D. In International competitions the team vets usually collaborate with the competition vets to establish a final assessment.

THE COUNTDOWN PROGRAM IN THE BOX

Three helpers minimum are required per horse in the box (NB. Too many chefs ... but just Mum helping can also be inadequate). Helper A holds the horse, either in a head collar or by the reins (with a towel to ensure reins don't get wet), this person may need to be the strongest out of the three helpers, especially with a fit horse. Helper B is the most experienced out of the three and issues the orders, monitors the temperature of the horse, checks shoes and studs, saddles/girths up the horse, checks the gear and also applies water and ice to the horse. Helper C aggressively cools the horse as required and applies the grease to the legs (if desired).

- On arrival: Loosen the girth (take the saddle off if it is a hot day), take temperature, heart rate, respiratory rate. Get horse into the shade/put wool rug over the loins if it is cold. Horse may be examined by an official vet at this stage. Start cooling the horse.
- 9 minutes: Application of ice/water all over the body followed immediately by scraping off water, alternate with walking in shady area. Check shoes, studs, boots and all saddlery.
- 8 and 7 minutes: Take temperature and if not decreasing • Sufficiently apply ice • water more aggressively - between walking. Keep calm.
- 6 minutes: Take - temperature, cool • Accordingly. In most cases, an official examines the horse • At this time. Minutes: Trot the horse up, assess unsoundness/stiffness. •
- 4 Minutes: Saddle/tack on/tighten girth, check bridle/ noseband. Continue aggressive cooling if required. Change studs if desired.
- 3 minutes: Grease on legs - be careful of reins and saddle!

- 2 minutes: Rider on, warm up the horse...
- KICK ON!

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS THAT MAY ARISE IN THE TEN MINUTE BOX:

High temperature

Phase B is the sole miscreant for this. It is quite normal for a horse to enter the Ten Minute Box on a humid/hot day with a temperature of up to 40.55°C, but it must decrease sufficiently over the ten minute period for it to be safe for the horse to continue. Aggressive cooling is vital at this stage... standing wearing a large square saddle pad and sweat sheet only increases the horse's body temperature due to meagre dissipation of heat. It is vital at this stage that you know the normal parameters for your horse - some horses 'run hotter' than others and are perfectly safe every horse is an individual and there is no true optimum temperature of all horses, however there is a danger point, and that is a lack of recovery. At The Hague the FEI vets decided on a base of 40°C as being too high to continue on phase D, it was very humid and obviously some horses entered the box with a temperature higher than this, which did not decrease quickly enough to please the FEI vets. In the States, we prefer to examine the recovery rates of the vital signs, as well as the overall condition of the animal before a final assessment is made. Using just one parameter to decide the fate of a horse is not always a justified method.

High respiratory rate

This is not a worthy indicator of the overall recovery rate, as it is dependent upon its relationship with the weather. On a hot/humid day, a horse will exhibit an increased respiratory rate. Entering the Ten Minute Box with a respiratory rate as high as 120/minute is acceptable, on a hot day, as long as it decreases to at least 80/minute within six minutes.

High heart rate

Partly related to heat and stress, but also due to excitement - some aggressive going horses will enter the Ten Minute Box with very high heart rates and show only a minimal level of recovery but may not be overly stressed (this again displays how kowtowing to just one parameter is misleading in determining the fitness of a horse.)

Lame

A small percentage of horses finish the steeplechase somewhat lame in one foreleg, this is quite acceptable, especially on hard going, and usually due to muscle fatigue. If the horse remains lame halfway through Phase C his welfare should be addressed and withdrawing from the competition may be a consideration.

Coughing

This would be a totally abnormal occurrence in the Ten Minute Box - coughing after a stressful workout traditionally indicates a sign of EIPH (Exercise Induced Pulmonary Haemorrhage) or bleeding from the lungs. There does not always need to be blood in the nostrils for EIPH to occur. This would be a decision for the FEI vet.

Tying-up

Muscle cramping can manifest in the forelegs, the hindquarters and can also be one-sided. If tying-up occurs, the horse requires immediate attention and would not be able to continue.

Lose a shoe

If the horse loses a shoe before 'no man's land' there is usually a farrier there, however an Ezy boot or strong tape can be used until the horse reaches the Ten Minute Box. Be prepared with pre-fitted shoes.

Not enough time

No matter how badly you time yourself on Phase C. your horse will always receive a full ten minutes in the Ten Minute Box. Should you be rushing (because you need a shoe replaced) the horse does have to be walked to recover adequately - keep cooling the horse even if it means risking that revered relationship with the farrier!

Too much time

By entering the Ten Minute Box early you have unintentionally stressed your horse, however whether you have ten minutes or twenty minutes rest is not important - the efficiency and composure of your helpers is what distinguishes adroit management from incompetence.

Towels on neck area

Simply, the heat cannot escape through the cloth. It only takes a few seconds for the towel to heat up to the same temperature as the skin.

Cold water on loins

There is an old wives tale that this causes tying-up! It has recently been proven that aggressive cooling all over the horse's body is preferred and will not cause tying-up.

THREE SCENARIOS OF HORSES IN THE TEN-MINUTE BOX

- (A) The perfect world. The horse enters the box with a temperature of 38.88°C, heart rate (HR) of 100/min and a respiratory rate (RR) of 90/min. In six minutes the temp is 38.33°C, Heart Rate is 55/min and the Respiratory Rate is 30/min.
- (B) Running hot. The horse enters with a temperature of 40.55°C. HR of 90/min and RR of 100/min. After six minutes his temperature is only 39.44°C, HR is 70/min and RR is 50/min. As long as the HR keeps decreasing, and his condition seems alert and bright, this horse should be allowed to continue.
- (C) Worst case scenario. Horse enters with a temperature of 40°C, HR of 120/min and RR of 120/min. After six minutes his temperature is 39.94°C, HR is 110/min and RR is 100/min and the horse appears lethargic. This horse is obviously not recovering and should be withdrawn.

For many fledgling eventers, the challenge of the Ten Minute Box may seem bewildering at first. Yet, with basic preparation, foresight and a little 'hands-on' experience, you and your horse will depart the Box unscathed and ready to tackle the cross-country - which leads us to next month's topic: Management of the event horse post cross-country.