

Gordon Dressage Group Code of Conduct & Welfare Policy

Last Reviewed: February 2025

Gordon Dressage Group follows the British Dressage Code of Conduct for Horse Welfare which can be found at:

<https://www.britishdressage.co.uk/our-sport/british-dressage/equine-welfare/>



British Dressage (BD) adopts the FEI Code of Conduct for Horse Welfare in all respects in order to maintain standards in both international and national competition. BD welfare rules and policies have been developed in consultation with World Horse Welfare.

In all respects, the welfare of the horse must come first. Horse welfare involves common sense and following the basic rules of horse management, horsemanship and horse behaviour.

BD and the FEI require all those involved in international and national equestrian sport to adhere to this Code of Conduct and to acknowledge and accept that at all times the welfare of the horse must be paramount and must never be subordinated to competitive or commercial influences.

BD has a nominated Honorary Veterinarian who is consulted when necessary on all appropriate matters when relating to horse welfare. In the first instance, the Sports Operations Manager should be contacted and made aware of any concerns, who in due course and where necessary will consult with the nominated Veterinarian and relevant BD Committee Welfare Representative.

1. At all stages during the preparation, training and competing of horses, welfare must take precedence over all other demands:

- a) Good horse management - stabling, feeding and training must be compatible with good horse management and must not compromise welfare. Any practices which could cause physical or mental suffering, in or out of competition, will not be tolerated.
- b) Training methods - horses must only undergo training that matches their physical capabilities and level of maturity for their respective disciplines. They must not be subjected to any training methods which are abusive or cause fear or for which they have not been properly prepared.
- c) Farriery and tack - foot care and shoeing must be of a high standard. Tack must be designed and fitted to avoid the risk of pain or injury.
- d) Transport - during transportation, horses must be fully protected against injuries and other health risks. Vehicles must be safe, well ventilated, maintained to a high standard, disinfected regularly and driven by competent staff. Competent handlers must always be available to manage the horses.
- e) Transit - all journeys must be planned carefully, and horses allowed regular rest periods with access to food and water in line with current FEI guidelines.
- f) Microchipping - Microchipping of all horses is a legal requirement in England from October 2018. Horses competing internationally are required to be microchipped and vaccinated in line with FEI regulations.

2. Horses and athletes must be fit, competent and in good health before they are allowed to compete:

- a) Fitness and competence - participation in competition must be restricted to fit horses and athletes of proven competence. Competence and fitness to compete is assessed by the Judge during the test. Please see rule 108 for guidelines on the maximum number of tests a horse/pony may compete in per day.
- b) Health status - no horse showing symptoms of disease, lameness or other significant ailments or pre-existing clinical conditions should compete or continue to compete when to do so would compromise its welfare. Veterinary advice must be sought whenever there is any doubt.
- c) Doping and medication - abuse of doping and medication is a serious welfare issue and will not be tolerated. After any veterinary treatment, sufficient time must be allowed for full recovery before competition.

- d) Surgical procedures - any surgical procedures that threaten a competing horse's welfare or the safety of other horses and/or athletes must not be allowed.
- e) Pregnant/recently foaled mares - mares must not compete after their fourth month of pregnancy or with a foal at foot.
- f) Misuse of aids - abuse of a horse using natural riding aids or artificial aids (e.g. whips, spurs, bit, etc.) will not be tolerated.

3. Events must not prejudice horse welfare:

- a) Competition areas - horses must only be trained and compete on suitable and safe surfaces. All obstacles must be designed with the safety of the horse in mind.
- b) Ground surfaces - all ground surfaces on which horses walk, train or compete must be designed and maintained to reduce factors that could lead to injuries. Particular attention must be paid to the preparation, composition and upkeep of surfaces.
- c) Extreme weather - competitions must not take place in extreme weather conditions if the welfare or safety of the horse may be compromised. Provision must be made for cooling horses quickly after competing in hot or humid conditions.
- d) Stabling at events - stables must be safe, hygienic, comfortable, well ventilated and of sufficient size for the type and disposition of the horse. Clean, good quality and appropriate feed and bedding, fresh drinking water, and washing-down water must always be available.
- e) Fitness to travel - after competition, a horse must be fit to travel in accordance with the FEI's guidelines.
- f) Tack and equipment must be correctly fitted as poorly fitting, over-tightened or inappropriate tack can cause pain, injury and discomfort. In the event that this is identified, the steward/organising committee will be consulted.

4. Every effort must be made to ensure that horses receive proper attention after they have competed and that they are treated humanely when their competition careers are over:

- a) Veterinary treatment – at international fixtures, veterinary expertise must always be available at an event and national competitions must have a vet on call. If a horse is injured or exhausted during a competition, the athlete must dismount and a veterinarian must check the horse.
- b) Referral centres - wherever necessary, the horse should be collected by ambulance and transported to the nearest relevant treatment centre for further assessment and therapy. Injured horses must be given full supportive treatment before transport.
- c) Competition injuries - the incidence of injuries sustained in competition should be monitored. Ground surface conditions, frequency of competitions and any other risk factors should be examined carefully to indicate ways to minimise injuries.
- d) Euthanasia - if injuries are sufficiently severe the horse may need to be euthanised by a veterinarian as soon as possible on humane grounds and with the sole aim of minimising suffering.
- e) Retirement - every effort should be made to ensure that horses are treated sympathetically and humanely when they retire from competition.

5. BD and the FEI urge all those involved in equestrian sport to attain the highest possible levels of education in their areas of expertise relevant to the care and management of the competition horse.

Members' attention is drawn to Annex XIII of the FEI Manual for Dressage Stewards with regard to pre and post-competition training techniques incorporating flexion and extreme flexion.

British Dressage Statement:

Those in the sport of dressage are very caring of their animals, and welfare-related incidents are usually due to a lack of knowledge and understanding. Therefore, by adopting a more proactive approach to welfare and its implementation, we can help prevent these situations occurring.

It will be for the Technical Committees e.g. Judges, Trainers, etc. to make policy recommendations on welfare issues relating to their areas of responsibility and to implement these policies which will be reviewed annually. Each technical committee is to have a member whose specific responsibility is welfare representation.

BD Welfare procedure

Any distress caused to dressage horses is almost always due to ignorance or overdetermined, or in the most extreme cases, aggressive riding. Riders are usually very concerned when they are told that their actions amount to abuse and are anxious to cooperate. The person on the ground must keep this in mind when assessing the situation and act accordingly.

If a horse is deemed to be in imminent risk of harm, by a style of riding considered to be unnecessarily aggressive and deliberately forceful, or due to excessively hard or prolonged riding in a way that compromises the welfare of the horse, then this would require immediate intervention from any BD officials present (including judges, stewards and organisers). Where it has been observed by a member of the public, it should be reported immediately to one of these BD officials in order for appropriate action to be taken. **(Identifiable at GDG events as officials wearing GDG purple / pink tabards)**

If the incident is observed directly, then the rider should be cautioned about their future conduct and any action taken in accordance with BD rules - including the submission of a formal report. If reported by a third party, then the incident should still be logged and referred to BD Head Office, along with as much supporting evidence as possible, including photos, videos or witness statements.

Welfare report forms are available via the British Dressage website and should be submitted to the Chief Executive for further investigation and follow-up action by BD's independent Welfare Panel. There are also welfare representatives on all technical and regional committees, should you wish to raise any specific concerns or escalate issues through these channels.

We take all breaches of our welfare policy seriously and the Welfare Panel will review all cases where transgressions have occurred to determine whether any disciplinary action is necessary. It is important to stress that appropriate sanctions can only be imposed where clear evidence is provided in support of any complaint or incident with due respect to the sensitivity of such situations.

Individuals who have submitted reports will receive an acknowledgement of receipt, but no further updates on the outcome of any investigation will be provided. All welfare matters will then be dealt with confidentially, and with respect to the sensitivity of such situations, directly with the member in question. It is important to recognise that at times officials may witness inexperienced riders that may have less balance and / or are perhaps finding it difficult to ride fresh, young horses. In such instances some riders may temporarily demonstrate a way of going that is not deemed to be correct, or a rider may need to act in a way to manage a situation that maintains the safety of themselves, others around them and the horse. In these circumstances, we would expect all BD officials to act in a way that is supportive and encouraging, to enable corrective action to be taken, rather than being unnecessarily punitive in response. If the horse is not at risk of immediate harm, but poor practice is observed, a welfare report form can again be submitted, together with supporting evidence. These instances will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the Welfare Panel. Disciplinary action is not normally taken on these occasions, but the Panel may caution the rider as to their future conduct or recommend further education or advice to support their development and training. The Panel may still deem it necessary to intervene where they feel harm could be caused, or if they see repeated incidences with individuals or common themes emerging.

Examples of abuse (this is not an exhaustive list and other incidents or injuries may be considered to constitute abuse or the result of abuse):

Bit – the bit must never be used as punishment.

Spurs – to use spurs excessively or persistently so as to injure the horse. If a judge/steward sees a spur that is likely to cause injury they can ask the competitor to remove them.

Over-working – to ride/compete an obviously exhausted, lame or injured horse.

Whip – excessive and inappropriate use of the whip (such as location or frequency) is not acceptable.

Lameness – riding an unsound horse.

Tack – tack should be correctly fitted to avoid pain

Distress – to manifest distress of any horse of pony whether caused by the rider or external factors

Sensory hairs - trimming of a horse's sensory hairs around the mouth, nose, eyes, and ears is not permitted as this may reduce the horse's sensory ability (please refer to the FEI rules for international competition).

Hyperflexion

Hyperflexion or 'rollkur' is not permitted or tolerated from any rider or combination. In competition conditions, BD stewards will now refer any hyperflexion seen to the judge at C or the organiser immediately. The combination will be eliminated from the competition. Anyone who witnesses this practice at a BD competition, or any other action that contravenes the BD equine welfare policy, is requested to use our Welfare Form available via the BD website to report such instances to the BD office. Please include any available evidence (witness statements, video, photos, etc.) which can be used by the designated Welfare Officer who may then refer the matter to the Disciplinary Panel for action.

Blood

For all competitions: If the judge at C suspects fresh blood anywhere on the horse during the test, he/she will stop the horse to check for blood. If the horse shows fresh blood, it will be eliminated. The elimination is final. If the judge, through examination, clarifies that the horse has no fresh blood, the horse may resume and finish its test.

Competitions where a BD steward is present: In addition to the above, if blood is noticed on a horse during the warm-up, the BD steward will approach the rider, make them aware of it and inspect the horse. If the horse shows fresh blood, the BD steward will advise the rider to retire.

If the rider fails to do so, the BD steward will report the matter with evidence to the judge at C and the horse will be eliminated from that class. The horse may be presented for subsequent classes but the BD steward must be satisfied the horse is fit to continue.

Any fresh blood found by a BD steward during the post-test inspection in the horse's mouth or area of the spurs will be reported to the Judge at C with evidence and the horse will be eliminated from that class. If there is blood on any other areas of the horse's body, the BD Steward in consultation with the Judge at C will decide if the horse should be eliminated and/or is fit to continue in any further competition(s) in the event.

Any horse which has a 'sore patch' (an area where hair has been rubbed off and the skin is inflamed) in a location where there is a danger that the skin could be broken if the horse were continued to be ridden, it must be withdrawn from competition. If the sore patch is not noticed until after a test has been completed, then elimination will only occur if the skin is broken. The horse may not continue to compete for the remainder of the competition thereafter, unless approved to continue by an independent vet.

Members Code of Conduct:

Gordon Dressage Group Members shall not:

- a) Conduct themselves in a manner which is or could be considered as offensive or inappropriate to the public or any member
- b) Argue, threaten, behave with contempt or use abusive language towards any member
- c) Post inappropriate words or images on Social Media that can be deemed offensive, intimidating or threatening to other members
- d) Discriminate on the grounds of race, colour, religion or belief, disability, sex, marital status, age, sexual orientation, nationality or ethnic origins
- e) Use the action of the whip, spur, or the bit as a means of punishment, and / or misuse any item of tack and equipment in a manner likely to cause pain, discomfort or harm to the horse or pony
- f) Ill-treat a horse or pony under any circumstances
- g) Knowingly allow a horse or pony for which they are responsible for to compete in any dressage competition under the influence of prohibited substances as stipulated by the FEI every January, or

a metabolite thereof, or any substance which cannot be traced to normal ordinary feeding and which by its nature is likely to affect the performance of the horse or pony in competition

- h) Compete as a rider in any dressage competition with a prohibited substance or its metabolite in their system
- i) Compete in any competition where the rider or horse are not eligible
- j) Allow a stallion for which they are responsible for to attend any event without taking adequate precautions to ensure the safety of other members of the public
- k) A person who ceases to be a member will remain subject to this code for any matter that arises prior to cessation of their membership

It is the responsibility of all members to read, understand and be aware of the codes of conduct that apply to Gordon Dressage Group, and to comply with the rules. It also the members responsibility to ensure that any person who assists, represents or acts on behalf of the member at any Gordon Dressage Group event or training, complies with the above code of conduct