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Document Type:	Eventing Fall Review Summary (H1) 2023	Summary:	01

Introduction

Hi TDs and CDs

At their annual meeting in January (sponsored by High Performance) the Equestrian Australia FEI accredited CDs decided to begin a review of all horse falls to look for factors that could potentially reduce their incidence in the future.

This has only been possible with the generous support of Rider Video and Eventful Life in providing the data and the hard work of our Technical Delegates in collecting it.

Over the last 6 months the group has reviewed 7 horse falls that occurred in the period as well as some rider falls and a few horse falls from the previous year.

The summary below reflects the thoughts of the group.

- In many (but not all) of the cases reviewed rider error was a contributing factor with the rider not delivering the horse to the fence correctly or with not enough impulsion for the fence to be jumped.
- Encouragingly there were no cases where an obviously tired horse contributed to the incident.
- There were a number of general observations around helping the clarity of question for the horse:-

Ditches: ensure the ground lines on the ditch are significant and contrast sufficiently with the surrounding ground-avoid poisoning the grass around groundlines rather than trimming as this can cause the two to blend together.

(A specific recommendation has been made to Eventing NSW re SIEC in particular to avoid poisoning the surrounding grass on the ditch in the hollows and to make the groundline more prominent.)

Jumping into water: reflection on the water can sometimes affect the way the horses perceive the landing. Unfortunately, this can occur even just momentarily when the cloud cover sun etc are in just the right position

Something as simple as a hose running or some movement in the water can help eliminate this. Tossing a stone on the edge of the water as the horse approach etc. to remove the glass like effect.

Spread Fences

Painting several stripes on the front leading edge can be confusing-better to have a single solid horizontal stripe rather than multiple narrow horizontal stripes.

Brush Fences- falls at brush fences appear to be on the rise globally – It is important for the horse to be able to distinguish the hard rail from the brush. Where the rail is dark this can be helped by painting a light colour or grinding marks on the rail.

This is particularly important where the rail is brown, the brush is old and the light is low eg cloud cover.

Fences late in the course-there was quite a lot of discussion around the falls in the last fence in the 3* at Adelaide . The conclusion (in most of the cases by the riders own admission) was that the falls were caused by rider error -there was discussion about the possible influence of shadow on the fence and whether the fence was off a turn (it was). Both these items are covered in the FEI Guidelines.

- **End:** 3 or 4 easier interesting fences/easier questions to aim to finish on a good note. Quite often these fences take a lot of thought in order to keep Athletes and Horses paying attention and interested whilst at the same time managing the speed/pace.. At the end of the course these fences/questions should if possible be off a turn to control and manage pace
- Course designers and officials must be mindful of the position of the sun at the time of year that the competition will be running and the effect that a low sun in particular can have on the line of a fence and also the shadows that that can be cast

MIM Fences- on a couple of occasions the MIM fences demonstrated their value in mitigating mistakes by horse and/or rider by either preventing a horse fall or significantly reducing its impact.

Standard of Qualifying Events- there were some examples of rider/horse error from combinations that had done only a few qualifying events- this illustrates the reason why we need to keep the standard up in the grades that get people qualified.

Appropriate use of warnings- there was some discussion about an instance where it was felt the GJ should (but didn't) issue a warning after a rider fall and also a rider who had (in the opinion of non-officiating officials) ridden dangerously and struggled at several events before obtaining the required MERs yet had received no warnings. Review by GJ (or TD/CD at National) of video footage could help in a more consistent use of warnings to let riders know when their approach is prejudicial to the sport and themselves.

The horse fall rate year to date in Australia as a percentage of starters is less than half the rate for the full year 2022-hopefully these suggestions and continued support from riders will help keep it there for the rest of the year.

EA NHSM for dissemination to all EA TDs & CDs.