

Middle California Region USPC

Preparing For Your C-3 Test

Conditioning

For the C-3 test, The USPC C-3 Standard requires that the candidate:

- **Know normal vital signs of own mount at rest and after work, as it relates to his/her conditioning schedule.**
- **Discuss different methods of conditioning for various activities.**

Some questions to consider for the C-3 test:

- What is your horse's condition?
- Can you take your horse's vital signs?
- Do you know the TPR of your horse at rest and after work?
- How long would it take to condition a horse for a novice level event? (Include starting condition, age, weight, experience, etc.)
- What feed changes would you make when conditioning a horse? Why?

There are three basic categories for condition:

Soft

This would be a horse that has not been in work, or is just starting work. The horse is likely to be overweight, have poor endurance and breathe heavily with just a bit of work. A soft horse will generally sweat easily when worked and tends to have a sloppy, thick, sticky or foamy sweat. The soft horse cannot be worked very long. This horse has little or no muscle and needs a progressive program of slow work to develop fitness. This horse may have an elevated pulse and respiration for awhile during cool-out and must not be overworked.

Working

This horse is in work. The horse should be able to work an hour or more without becoming tired. A working horse will not become out of breath and will tend to have a clearer, more watery sweat. This horse could handle regular pony club lessons, clinics and training without fatigue. This horse has muscle and endurance. This horse's TPR should drop within ten minutes after stressful exercise.

Hard

This horse is extremely fit. He can handle stressful and longer work without becoming tired. His respiration and pulse will drop down quickly after work and his sweat is clear. You can feel the hardness of his muscles when you feel his neck or quarters.

Horses will often fall somewhere between these categories and it is important to analyze your horse's physical appearance as well as his ability to work when determining his level of fitness.

Temperature, pulse and respiration at rest and after work

- Normal temperature is 99.8 to 101.8
- Normal pulse is 28 to 42 beats per minute
- Normal respiration is 8-16 breaths per minute

You need to take your horse's temperature, pulse and respiration before work and then immediately after work. The numbers may surprise you, as some horses have a dramatic rise in pulse and respiration after work. The important thing is that the horse can recover quickly.

Every horse is different and you need to take the TPR often to establish what is normal for each horse. Know that some horses invert, meaning that their respiration exceeds their pulse after hard work. This is not okay if their respiration does not go down immediately and can signify a horse in distress. A horse is also considered in distress if his pulse or respiration does not drop significantly within ten to fifteen minutes after stopping work and walking

What is conditioning?

Conditioning is a program of exercise for your horse that leads to fitness. It allows your horse to do more work with less effort and strengthens his body to prevent injury that might occur from over-exertion. Conditioning develops the horse's heart, lungs and muscles. Your focus in conditioning is to strengthen the horse's cardiovascular, respiratory and muscular systems.

Types of conditioning for different activities

Interval training

This means that you combine periods of work with periods of rest. The rest is walking and the walk time should never be longer than three minutes and never less than one minute. For example, you would trot your horse for five minutes, then walk for two minutes, then trot for five minutes, then walk for two minutes, then canter for four minutes and then walk for two minutes.

Long, slow distance

Long slow distance is exactly that, working your horse over a longer distance at a slow, even pace. This type of work develops your horse's endurance and strengthens his muscles. It could also be called road work.

Hill work

Hill work develops your horse's strength and endurance. Slow trotting or walking uphill or downhill is good. It is important to stay off the horse's back to allow him to use his back and haunches.

Wind work/galloping

This is fast work done once a horse has a solid base of fitness. Gallops and sprints help to develop respiration and circulation.

Flat work/dressage

This type of work develops the horse's muscles as well as his balance, coordination and responsiveness to aids.

Jumping

Jumping strengthens the muscles, heart and lungs. In the interest of keeping your horse sound, you should use jumping as schooling and not as a main method of conditioning. It is best not to jump more than three times per week.

Aerobic vs. anaerobic work, swimming, trail work, longeing

What makes work more difficult?

As your horse becomes more fit, you can vary the work to make it more stressful (physically not mentally!) The factors that increase difficulty are: greater speed, greater distance, more repetitions in interval training with shorter rest periods, more difficult terrain, time of day (hotter times are more physically taxing, weight carried (if you are light you can add weight to your saddle with a weight pad).