

© 2022 Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK
www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2022, 31: 437-446
ISSN 0962-7286
doi: 10.7120/09627286.31.3.005

Is a mounted award ceremony in equestrian sport relevant to animal welfare?

H Gehlen^{†}, C Thöne-Reineke[‡], R Merle[§], S Pichon[#] and H Linnenbrügger[†]*

[†] Equine Clinic, Free University Berlin, Oertzenweg 9b, D-14163 Berlin, Germany

[‡] Institute of Animal Welfare, Animal Behaviour and Laboratory Animal Science, Free University Berlin, Germany

[§] Institute for Veterinary Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Free University Berlin, Germany

[#] Private veterinary practice, Sommerhausen, Germany

* Contact for correspondence: Heidrun.Gehlen@fu-berlin.de

Abstract

Severe accidents befalling both horses and riders have been observed during award ceremonies in equestrian sports. We hypothesised that such ceremonies and subsequent laps of honour pose a significant risk to the well-being of horses, riders and third parties. Tournament riders' opinions were sought and analysis of accidents undertaken via an online questionnaire completed by 700 tournament riders participating in dressage and showjumping in Germany. While 31.3% of the riders reported feeling tense themselves during award ceremonies, greater tension was reported in the warm-up area and throughout the competition itself. In contrast, 48% of horses were at their most tense at award ceremonies and displayed the greatest amount of stress during the lap of honour. Sixty percent of survey participants felt award ceremonies created an increased risk of injury with riders citing stressed horses as being the principal cause. Only risks associated with the warm-up area were noted by a greater proportion of riders (66.6%). The most frequent cause of accidents at award ceremonies was deemed to be kicks. Horse participation at award ceremonies was deemed to be important for spectators and sponsors and, although over half the riders were in favour of compulsory participation with a horse, they expressed the desire for exceptions to be permissible by judge(s). This study supported the hypothesis that mounted award ceremonies have a negative impact on horse welfare.

Keywords: animal welfare, award ceremony, equestrian sport, horse, injury, stress