

Fitness comes first

IN THE FIRST OF HIS EXCLUSIVE COLUMNS FOR *NZ HORSE & PONY*, LEADING EVENT RIDER JONATHAN PAGET SETS OUT A BASIC FITNESS PROGRAMME FOR RIDERS HEADING FOR THE RICHFIELDS THREE-DAY EVENT

There are many theories on getting horses fit, and none of them are necessarily wrong, but you do need to make sure you give your horse recovery days, especially after competitions and canter days. Sometimes, if you run your horse hard at a weekend event, then it's a good idea just to trot them out on the Wednesday afterwards, instead of doing canter work.

The competition season in New Zealand is pretty intense; most events are just a week or two apart, so you have to rely on match fitness a bit. This makes it hard to follow a specific programme, but here is a guide that might work for you:

Stage 1:

Working on the theory that you bring your horse back into work after their winter break around mid-August, start off by working lightly on the flat, not putting any pressure on but just easing back into full work. Hack out a couple of times a week to mix it up a bit, trying to build some basic fitness. Then, once your horse feels back in the swing of things, increase the workload a bit and start thinking about your first competition for the season.

Stage 2:

By mid to late September you should be ready to go out and start doing some one-day events. From there, you can get an idea of how fit your horse is and how much work you need to do to get them three-day event fit. It's important that you monitor how your horse feels when you come back from cross-country at the one-day events, and how



Jonathan Paget with Clifton Promise: 'Monitor how your horse feels after cross-country'

long it takes them to recover. Each horse is different; some are naturally fitter than others. If you are out competing every second weekend, that in itself will do a lot for your horse's fitness. You just have to make sure you let them down with some easier work for a couple of days after each event, and have a day off each week.

Stage 3:

There is more than one way to get your horse fit for a CCI*. The sort of going you have available to you might help you

to decide your best option; living next to Muriwai beach works well for us. We count back six weeks from cross-country day and begin canter work, starting with three sets of four-minute canters at 400 metres per minute, with a two-minute walk break in the water between each set. After the last set we walk them through the water for about 20 minutes (it's a great way to 'ice' their legs), doing this once a week for three weeks. Then we step it up to three five-minute canter sets with the same walk breaks. On the last canter session we do three three-minute sets and move up to 600 metres per minute for the second minute of each set, again with the same walk breaks in between. Ideally, you work it so Wednesday is your canter day, so your last session will be four days before cross-country day.

If lots of trotting and hill work is your preferred option for fitness, then you can start this a little earlier; trotting up and down hills a couple of times a week and adding more time to your session as your horse feels up to it. Give them tougher and longer climbs to make them work harder as you progress. Be careful not to do too much though - you don't want them feeling flat by the event. With a consistent mixture of hill work, flat work, jump sessions and competitions, you should find your horse will cope well with the physical demands of a CCI*. H&P

Next month: Jonathan continues his countdown to Richfields

The Richfields three-day event has long been an innovator; and this year, in order to support young stars of the future, the CCI* class will carry no entry fee.

The class is open to riders aged 14 to 18, with much the same format and conditions as the open one-star class, and will be sponsored by Frances Stead's well-known eventing stable, Clifton Eventers, with scholarship prizes offered to the first three placegetters.

The prize The first placegetter will win a 10-day scholarship at the Clifton Eventers' purpose-built base at Muriwai, north-west of Auckland, valued at \$2000. They will be allowed to bring their own horse, train with Jonathan Paget, and ride some of the Clifton event horses.

The second placegetter will spend seven days at Clifton Eventers (valued at \$1400) and the third placegetter will win a five-day scholarship (valued at \$1000). Each scholarship is to be taken up at a time mutually agreeable to the winners and Clifton Eventers, and transport to and from Muriwai is at the winners' expense.

Entry requirements Horse and rider both need to be registered with the NZEF for eventing. See the NZEF website, www.nzequestrian.org.nz, for details.

In order to compete at FEI one-star level, both horse and rider must have three national Novice-level qualifying results. To qualify, you must complete an event with a minimum of 50% in the dressage, a maximum of 20 jumping faults and 36 time faults (90 seconds) in cross-country, and 16 jumping faults in show jumping. These qualifications do not need to be completed as a combination.

For more information, see the website www.richfieldseventing.co.nz