... WITH DENNY EMERSON

Real Rules For Real Eventers

Everybody has rules for eventing. The Federation Equestrian International has rules for international events, and the American Horse Shows Association and U.S. Combined Training Association have rules for domestic events. But there’s another set of rules that could be called “Real Rules for Real Eventers.” You won’t read about these in any propaganda literature from the Pony Club, USCTA or USET, though.

No, they want to lure you into the web first with sunny platitudes about “happy horse and happy child” or visions of lithe young bodies on sleek Thoroughbred horses galloping across springy, green turf. However, anyone whose involvement with eventing has lasted for more than 47 minutes will have at least begun to learn these unwritten but immutable laws, some of which are revealed here in print for the very first time!

“The morning before cross-country is scarcely worth living.”

• Rule #1 This was best expressed to Dr. Mary Alice Brown by an English innkeeper when Mary Alice told the woman that the purpose of her visit was to watch the Badmington (England) Horse Trials. "Osses!" the woman exclaimed. "I know all about 'osses. Me 'usband 'ad 'osses. 'Osses is always lame. And when they ain't lame, they cough!"

• Rule #2 Your horse will go lame or develop his cough just after the closing date of the event you’ve entered so you can’t get your money back.

• Rule #3 If you Louise up your dressage test, you will go clean on cross-country. If you have a great dressage test, you will have a cross-country refusal.

• Rule #4 Your stall is either the one with the tent pole in it or the one farthest away from the water tank.

• Rule #5 It won’t be until the opening day for entries that you’ll discover that your Coggins’ test is out of date.

• Rule #6 If, by some remarkable fluke, you have an absolutely superb dressage test, Bruce Davidson will be in your division and he’ll beat you.

• Rule #7 You’ll get lost going to the event in a place where it’s impossible to turn your truck and trailer around.

• Rule #8 (For female riders) Your boyfriend will only pretend to like horses and eventing while he’s actively wooing you. After you’ve married him, he’ll start to whine and complain about all the time and money horses require. (Just hope for his sake he doesn’t ask the all-time stupid question, “Who do you like more, anyway, me or that horse?”)

• Rule #9 Officials at three-day events only dress up to look like penguins. Real penguins won’t eliminate you or give you 4s in dressage.

• Rule #10 At three-day vet inspections, the transparency of some of the girls’ outfits will be in direct proportion to the unsoundness of their horses.

• Rule #11 Just as you have finally reached a firm decision about how to jump fence 6, you’ll overhear some famous coach tell his students to do it differently.

• Rule #12 The morning before cross-country is scarcely worth living.

• Rule #13 At the party the night after cross-country, assuming you’re still alive, your wave of euphoria will induce you to perform various rash acts that you’ll probably later regret.

• Rule #14 There is always another way to get eliminated.

• Rule #15 Food at events is basically inedible. The hamburgers, in particular, taste like recycled snow tires. You, however, won’t care because you’ll be too nervous to eat.

• Rule #16 You’ll snarl and complain at your mother or spouse if they’re idiotic enough to try to help you at an event.

• Rule #17 You’ll either smear your white breeches with shoe polish or with grease from your trailer hitch.

• Rule #18 You will always do something stupid, inept or embarrassing in front of the largest gathering of cheering and appreciative spectators.

• Rule #19 You will never be able to explain what eventing is to your family and friends. On the contrary, they’ll be pretty sure that you have lost it.

• Rule #20 If you are a Real Event Rider, you’ll pretend that rules #1-19 don’t exist, and you’ll persevere as though you believed there really was some hope to eventual success.

These 20 rules represent only a small fraction of what eventing life is really like. I could go on for volumes just about rules #14 and #18. One of my particular specialties, shared by Mike Plumb, seems to be either missing a fence or jumping the fence for another division.

I once had jumped around the entire advanced course at Kentucky, and the last advanced fence (blue numbers) was right next to the last preliminary fence (green numbers). They’re almost identical, right? I came galloping through the finish, got off and started telling everyone how great I was, how well the horse had jumped; you know the routine.

Jack Le Goff walked over to me. "Denny," he said, "when the gods rained stupidity on the earth, they forgot to give you an umbrella."