

EQUINE SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL

BE AS GOOD AS A DUTCH OLYMPIC RIDER (PART 2)

By Lynn de Rest



THE DUTCH TRAINING SYSTEM IS A COMBINATION OF PATIENCE, SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHALLENGING THE RIDER AND THE HORSE. BUT MORE IMPORTANT, IT'S THE WHOLE MANAGEMENT AROUND THE HORSE THAT MAKES THE DUTCH TRAINING SYSTEM A SUCCESS. BECAUSE OF THIS, THE NETHERLANDS HAS BEEN ONE OF WORLD'S BEST DRESSAGE COUNTRIES, FOR MANY YEARS. IN THIS ISSUE WE WILL HELP YOU MASTER THE KEY ELEMENTS OF YOUR HORSE MANAGEMENT.

TRAINING SCHEDULE

To break the daily grind of doing the same thing day after day, the Dutch use a training-schedule. This is an easy way to identify the training and it helps prevent the horse from getting injured. Since, together with your own trainer, you function as your horse's personal trainer you determine the intensity and duration of each training session during the week. There is no single schedule, each schedule is unique and depends on the capacity of your horse.

Having said that, there are some guidelines to help you in the right direction;

Before you design the training schedule you look at the condition score of your horse; **is the horse too thick or too thin? Has it had an injury recently or in the past? What's the age of the horse and how do the (back) muscles look?**

Determine your final goal. For example having a **perfect canter** is the goal you want to reach with this training schedule. Make sure that the goals you set are realistic!

Bring variation in your training schedule by adding cavaletti training or trail rides.

Plan your training and recovery days. A horse can't process a highly intensive training day in and out. **Recovery training can be lunging the horse or doing light work on only a contact rein in a stretching forward downwards position after a day of intensive training.**

DAILY ACTIVITY

Monday: A heavy training, which includes after warming-up 4 x 5 minutes in intensive exercise and then back to stretching on an active rein. Duration: 40 min.

Tuesday: A light training, which includes some light gymnastic work. Duration: 60 min.

Wednesday: A heavy training, which includes after warming-up 6 x 5 minutes in intensive exercise and then back to stretching on an active rein. Duration: 40 min.

Thursday: An active resting day, which includes lunging and walking for about 30 minutes.

Friday: A normal training, which includes after warming up some lateral work in some short speed changes in trot and canter. Duration: 50 min.

Saturday: A light training which includes some light gymnastic work. Duration: 45 min.

Sunday: Competition

INNOVATIVE TRAINING TOOLS

Additional to the training schedule, innovative training tools are being used. Not only are the horses trained but also the riders. In order to perform well, both the rider and the horse have to be in good shape. In Holland, this is called "**rider's fitness**" which includes exercises that help the rider to get better body control and balance on the horse. It's a combination of sports, such as ballet, rope skipping and gymnastics. Another device to measure and train the physical aspects of riders is the 'flex chair', which makes you aware of the mobility of your pelvis and increases body awareness.

Another tool is the rein tension meter, which measures the amount of tension the rider has on each rein. This gives the rider insight into the quality of the acceptance of the bridle. In line with the rein tension meter is a heart rate tool. **The heart rate tool**



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is often used in the eventing sport and now also in dressage. It measures the heartbeat of the horse or the rider and gives a good view on the intensity of exercises. This prevents the rider from training longer than the horse can actually handle.

FEEDING SCHEDULE

When the training part is set you can help your horse to improve his performance by creating a nutritious diet. A competition horse has to be in good shape; not too skinny, not too fat. Your horse is in a good body shape when you can feel the ribs but you don't see them. This can be achieved by giving your horse enough roughage and fresh water. **Start the day by giving your horse roughage prior to the concentrates;** this helps the body to start-up and get some energy. To maintain the digestion it's important to give frequently small portions (not more than 2 kg per portion) of concentrates. Divide the concentrates over 2-4 portions per day but be aware of the fact that a horse needs roughage or concentrates at least every six hours. Roughage is the base of the ration and can be given as much as possible. But the roughage needs to be of good quality, which means that it isn't mouldy or dusty. A lot of sports horses get supplements to support their health and improve their skills. Those supplements are only to support the body; they don't give a great result by themselves. An example is Selenium, which helps the muscles recover after an intensive training. **Warning! Do not just try something but get advice from a veterinarian or trainer.** One thing that's more important than the food is the possibility for the horse to drink unlimited fresh water during the day. Make sure there are water-bowls in the stable and in the paddock.

THE HEALTH OF THE HORSE

The horse needs to be healthy and physically fit to perform well. This includes good training, enough and good quality feed and regular visits from a veterinarian and farrier. In order to ask optimal performance from your horse, the teeth, the hoofs, the limbs and the overall health of the horse deserve a regular check.

HEALTH CHECKLIST:

- Teeth every half-year to the age of 5 after this age once a year.
- A yearly vet check
- Farrier each 8-9 weeks
- Physiotherapist

HAVING GOOD TACK

All the preconditions mentioned above are checked, but your horse's optimal performance still fails to appear? In this case, a tack-check might help. Because the horse is constantly changing in his body a well-educated saddler to measure a properly fitting saddle is needed. A saddler looks at the horse's body and the body and riding skills of the rider. This determines the type of saddle that the horse needs. A properly fitted saddle gives comfort and balance to the horse and the rider.

A badly fitted saddle though, has a bad influence on the performance and could eventually result in a horse that limps or other injuries. The same goes for a bridle that is too tight or too loose. A bridle that is too tight gives pain on the cheeks of the horse or pain in the mouth, which results in a striking horse. A bridle that's too loose shifts and gives friction, which results in injuries to the head of the horse. It's important that the bridle is in line with the head of the horse and that the noseband is not fastened too tightly.

Each bit has its own function and can either help the horse or have a bad influence on the skills of the horse. Often, a bit-fitter will be called who checks the bit and gives advice.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts. Many horses need perfectly organized horse-management, which includes all the preconditions mentioned above. Keep in mind that there is always room for improvement, both towards your goal and when you have reached your goal. **Different horses take more or less time to get a happy athlete!**

EQUINE SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL

ESI educates equestrian people all over the world to increase the level of equestrian knowledge. This helps horse owners, stables, educational institutions and federations to take a step forward in horse wellbeing and sport. ESI provides unique custom-made solutions such as national talent programs, training programs for children and adults, train-the-trainer courses and aftercare programs.

To make sure that you get the most optimal solution to your question we work together with only the best specialists of the Netherlands. 🇳🇱