

Horse conference looks at ethics

10 July 2009



Last month the Danish Equestrian Federation banned the punishment of horses using bits, whips and spurs: now Australian experts are now calling for the same measures to protect horses from harm in Australia and abroad.

Associate Professor Paul McGreevy from the University of Sydney's Faculty of Veterinary Science will join the world's top experts to talk about these issues at the [International Society for Equitation Science Annual Conference](#), starting this weekend (12-14 July) at the University.

Some of the issues that will be discussed include:

"Whipping horses for failure to perform may one day be considered abuse, regardless of the context."

"Are novice riders sometimes a threat to the welfare of the horses they learn on? Should sentient beings be exposed to complete novices who are not simply learning to ride but primarily learning to balance?"

"Are sport horses willing participants in the heavy slog and self sacrifice that we generally associate with human athletes?"

"The debate about what defines ethical use and, in particular, ethical equitation, has yet to be heard."

This year's theme is Ethical Equitation- a sustainable approach, and participants will be considering how horse sport and horse welfare can go hand in hand.

What is the effect of different training regimes on the physical fitness of the equine athlete? Can the mere presence of a human help to calm a nervous horse? How does rider position affect stride length during canter? How is the temperament of a future sport horse accurately assessed?

The world's leading experts in horse behaviour and physiology have the answers to these questions and many more. And the good news is that the Equitation Science Conference is open to everyone involved in training and caring for horses including coaches and competitors.

The three-day conference will feature a lively combination of keynote and academic presentations, alongside practical demonstrations from some of Australia's leading horse professionals including:

- Top international show jumper and coach **Colleen Brook**;
- Horse trainer for stage and screen **Steve Jeffries** - whose breathtaking gallop onto the centre stage with his Stock Horse signalled the start of Sydney's Olympic Games;
- Paralympian and clicker training expert **Georgia Bruce**;
- The Australian Equine Behaviour Centre's **Warwick McLean**.

These internationally acclaimed horse people will be working with leading theorists and new technology such as rein tension meters and gait analysis software to unpick the mechanisms common to all clear animal training.

The three keynote presenters are:

- Dr Bidda Jones, Chief Scientist at RSPCA Australia;
- Emeritus Professor Bob Boakes, one of the world's leading experts on learning in non-human animals;
- Professor Leo Jeffcott , long standing veterinarian to the Australian Olympic Eventing team.

The 5th Equitation Science conference is convened by Associate Professor Paul McGreevy from the University of Sydney, one of the world's leading experts on companion animal behaviour and welfare. He was recently awarded the UK's prestigious British Society of Animal Science/RSPCA Award for his innovative developments in animal welfare.

"The inclusion of practical demonstrations as part of the conference is important because it enables us to show that these are not just theories, they actually work", says Dr McGreevy.

Equitation Science provides a refreshingly clear and horse-centered approach to understanding how horses learn and interact with humans on the ground and in the saddle. It undertakes the measurement and interpretation of the interactions between horses and their riders, and, most importantly, it explores the welfare consequences of training and competing horses in all the disciplines, from the Olympic sports of dressage, show jumping and eventing through to racing, reining, endurance, driving and pony club activities.

What: Ethical Equitation -A Sustainable Approach. International Society for Equitation Science Annual Conference.

When: Sunday 12 to Tuesday 14 July, 2009.

Where: Conference Centre, Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Sydney.

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