



## Equine Bowen

# Warming Up Prior to Competition

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### DEFINITION

**WARM UP:** early stage of a workout in which a gradual increase in exercise intensity is used to facilitate the body's adaptation from rest to exercise.

It is not uncommon to see horses competing without a warm up session. An effective warm up has the dual benefits of enhancing performance and reducing the risk of injury. It will also delay the onset of fatigue due to lactate accumulation in high intensity sports such as campdrafting.

At the start of a warm up, the immediate objective is to establish a state of physical and mental relaxation in the horse, so that the movements of the limbs become free and elastic and the horse can then begin to work through its back.

The warm up begins slowly with the horse walking on a long rein. The duration of the walking phase is adapted to the individual horse and its recent level of activity. For a horse that has been standing in a yard for several hours, they will benefit from a longer walk. Older horses often come out a little stiff and require a longer, slower warm up.



Following the initial period of walking, the exercise intensity is gradually increased by moving the horse forward in an active trot or canter. The key word is ACTIVE, since the aim is to work the skeletal muscles hard enough to stimulate an increase in blood circulation. The decision on whether to trot or canter depends on the horse. Some horses are more relaxed and balanced in a trot, others prefer to canter. Choose the one which establishes the most relaxation.

After 5-10 minutes of active forward movement, the muscles should be warm enough to start some suppling exercises.

Suppling exercises in campdrafting help keep the horse sound because the increased range of joint motion absorbs more concussion and causes rapid tissue stretching. Mobility of the vertebral column allows the horse to bend through its turns and in the shoulders it maximises the crossing of the outside front leg during roll backs.

Suppleness in the lumbosacral and hip joints allows the horse to engage its hind legs correctly.

Regardless of whether you are campdrafting or doing dressage, all disciplines require the basic suppling exercises. These include turns, circles, serpentines and leg yields. As the warm up progresses the suppling exercises become more specific to campdrafting and more demanding. There should be an increase in speed of movement and a decrease in the size of the circles. Lateral movements including leg yielding, shoulders in/out, and hindquarters in/out should be used at all gaits.



It should take on average 20 minutes to thoroughly warm your horse prior to competition. So remember to start off slow with easy exercises then slowly merge into the more intensive phase of the warm up which incorporates the suppling exercises.

Things to remember:

DO NOT allow your horse to get cold in the interval between warming up and competing as there will be the risk of injury to cooling muscles.

DO NOT perform suppling exercises at the start of warm up while the tissues are cold because the fibres in the muscles, tendons and ligaments are more susceptible to overstretching injuries.

Good luck!

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