

A Test of Condition and Stamina: Endurance Riding

Endurance riding is one of the eight FEI competitions that will take place this year at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. This sport is unique in that it doesn't take place in an arena or on a field, but over a long distance trail. It also isn't judged on conformation, style or technique, but on the stamina and endurance level of the horse.

Endurance rides are either 50 or 100 miles long. The first horse to complete the ride first and passing on veterinary checks is considered the winner of the competition. However, many people compete in endurance to improve their horse's personal best and consider passing all vet checks to be a "win."

Although the competition is open to all breeds of horses, the Arabian tends to be the most predominant choice for riders. This is due to the Arabian's natural endurance and stamina that has been created over the hundreds of years of breeding in the Saudi Arabia desert. Arabians tend to dominate the competition at the top levels of endurance riding.

Prior to the start of the endurance ride, all horses are inspected by a veterinarian. This is to ensure that they are healthy and fit to perform the long distance ride. The rider is also briefed and given a map of the route. The map shows the vet check stops as well as natural obstacles, which may include water crossings, ditches and steep hills.

The ride is broken into phases and at the end of each ride, the horses must stop to be vet checked. The horses are checked for dehydration and soundness. Their pulse and respiration is taken as well. To continue the ride, the horse must pass the examination and meet the required heart rate. The required heart rate may vary depending on the terrain, weather and altitude.

After each vet check, the horse and rider must stay at the inspection site for a predetermined length of time. The horses are fed and watered prior to starting again. Horses that don't pass inspection are eliminated from further competition. Horses typically fail inspection due to lameness or excessive fatigue.

Throughout the course, the riders are free to choose their pace and to adjust to the terrain. They may also choose to dismount and walk or jog with their horse instead of ride throughout the competition depending on the horse's level of fatigue. However, they must be mounted when they cross the starting and finish lines.

The endurance portion of the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games will take place on September 26-27th with the award ceremony taking place on the 27th.