

## MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Safety campaigns could take advantage of riders' concerns for their horses' safety, in addition to their own.
- Increased training opportunities for jumping at speed could be explored.
- Increased access to experienced riders and mentors could provide an opportunity for riders to learn from others' experiences and incidents.
- The ability to assess the 'safety' of horse and rider combinations in general, on any given day, and in relation to the grade of competition and/or training course, is essential. This complex task requires further research and consideration.

## WHY WAS OUR RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

- This was the first study of eventers' subjective perceptions of risk.
- Most sports research acknowledges human relations with inanimate technology and tools like ropes, surfboards and the environment. Little, if any, acknowledge intimate human relationships with other living creatures, as our study did in relation to horses.



This project was led by Dr Kirrilly Thompson with the assistance of honours candidate Chanel Nesci, together with Dr Sophia Rainbird and Dr Matthew Thomas from the University of South Australia. It was funded by the University of South Australia's Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences Divisional Research Performance Fund.

The researchers wish to thank the following members of the Project Steering Committee for their invaluable advice and support: Julie Fiedler, Executive Officer of the Horse Federation of South Australia; Gillian Rolton OAM, Olympian, Chairman of Equestrian Australia Eventing Committee & Director of the Australian International 3 Day Event; Greg Bailey, President of Pony Club Australia; Nina Arnott OAM, Executive Officer of Horse Safety Australia; Denzil O'Brien, Research Associate at Flinders University; and Wendy Hunt, Chairman of Equestrian SA, together with Angela Yeend, Equestrian SA, who was involved in the early stages of the project.

We are grateful to Bonnetts Saddlery for providing discount vouchers for participants.

Finally, we wish to make special thanks to the 22 riders who generously volunteered to take part, gave us a glimpse of their eventing worlds and shared their thoughts and experiences.

Photos courtesy Denzil O'Brien

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# Project summary Risk Perception amongst Eventers



# BACKGROUND

Whilst there has been research into the type & frequency of injuries that horse riders and eventers are likely to sustain, there has been little research asking eventers about their experiences and perceptions. In 2010, we undertook research with eventers to learn more about how they perceived risk.



## WHO TOOK PART?

22 riders, who self-identified as eventers volunteered to take part in this study. This included 17 female and 5 male eventers, aged between 14 and 54. The participants' levels of competition ranged from Pony Club Grade 5 through to international competition.

## WHAT DID WE DO?

We carried out field observations at a range of eventing competitions in South Australia and we interviewed 22 riders at events, in offices and in homes. We also accompanied 8 riders on course walks, so we could learn about their decision making 'on the course'.

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## WHAT DID WE FIND?

Our findings were organised into the following three areas:

### 1. HOW DID PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVE RISK?

- All participants thought that eventing was risky and that the cross-country phase posed the most risk.
- Most riders did not consider themselves risk takers.
- However, all participants took action to minimise risk and many felt that they didn't take risks.
- Participants worried about injuries to their horses that would affect soundness or longevity such as strains to legs and tendons.

### 2. HOW DID PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE RISK?

- Whilst all participants felt that risks were involved, and took measures to control for risk, participants spoke about the need to put all negative thoughts from their mind whilst riding. In fact, many riders felt that thinking negative thoughts whilst riding could increase the chance of an accident or injury (by contributing to a refusal, for example).
- In contrast to other high risk or 'extreme' sports, risk (and safety) in eventing is shared between a human and an animal.
- The horse was seen paradoxically as the source of both risk and safety. Whilst horses were considered to a certain extent unpredictable and therefore potentially dangerous, a good relationship with a horse was considered to increase safety.

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS continued

## 3. HOW DID PARTICIPANTS RESPOND TO RISK?

- All participants took measures to reduce or control risk.
- Participants emphasised the importance of training with qualified instructors in cross-country situations.
- Experienced riders felt that they had learnt about risk minimisation through personal experience over time, including 'learning from their mistakes'.

## OTHER FINDINGS

- Not all participants were 'fearless'. Some recalled being extremely nervous or fearful during competitions.
- Many participants liked the speed experience of cross-country as much as or more than the jumping experience. For these riders, what happened in between jumps also made the sport attractive. However, very few participants would have liked to specialise in racing or jumping only.
- Participants liked the challenge in eventing that is linked to the need to master the three basic phases of competition.

