



# GOING FOR GOLD

The difference between being very good and being world class is the smallest of margins. Competitively only a very few make that final toughest push, to take them onto the world class stage. The basic ingredients all have to be in place to be a contender, natural talent, commitment and, in the equine world, the right horses. Twenty-year-old International show jumper, **Ryan Prater**, has proved he has all of these attributes and Horse Health are following his progress in a series of features, as he reviews his practices and attends to the fine tuning, which he hopes will help him make that transition.

## How Ryan is setting out on the route to success...

RYAN's first area of focus was on fitness and competition strategy. Dr David Marlin, world renowned consultant in equine exercise physiology, spent some time with him reviewing training methods and assessing the fitness levels of two very different horses and looking at how Ryan prepared and managed his horses at competitions.

The day began with a general discussion of Ryan's achievements, his goals, routines at home and when travelling and competing, and, the two particular horses David was to review.

Considerable time was spent on the preparation leading up to competition.

David explained in detail about the importance of muscular strength in jumping and how muscle fatigue could develop during a single round of jumping or, over a number of days at a show and suggested ways in which Ryan could tailor pre-competition work to maximise the horses' performance.

To optimise blood sugar levels so that they are not too high or too low and to minimise the adverse effects of food being in the stomach (which can cause discomfort and affect



Ryan tests the latest GPS technology

Pictures courtesy of Sue Carden

breathing), he recommended giving a hard feed and fibre meal at least four to five hours beforehand.

The first horse Ryan rode was a 16.1hh bay gelding that tends to

become anxious before he jumps, and has been with Ryan for just over a year.

Ryan feels they have made great progress but that the horse needs to

learn to relax more.

Of the two horses he was the fitter and more experienced.

The second horse was the opposite, a 17hh stallion, he was extremely laid back and although still very inexperienced he was a big bold jumper, with powerful canter.

Firstly David fitted a Polar RS 800 G3 heart rate monitor. It was simple to attach inside the girth and the readout of the horse's heart rate and speed was relayed to a wrist monitor worn by Ryan so it was easy for him to see what was happening.

The second device David had elected to use was the Pegasus stride monitoring system. This worked via a GPS unit fitted inside a special hat cover which fitted over Ryan's normal hat, and a second unit which fitted under the front of the saddle.

All the information was recorded in the instruments and could be studied later after downloading to a pc or laptop. The measurements confirmed the differing temperaments of the two horses, with the second horse working at a consistently lower heart rate than the first, which combined with the stride analysis showed that he has a great deal of potential yet to be fulfilled. **Continued, Page 23**

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## Nasal strips can reduce airway resistance – study

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The benefit of using this technology allows a clear analysis of factors such as fitness, anxiety/temperament, and stride consistency, frequency and length, to be recorded.

This can be kept as a baseline to assess improvement or to identify possible changes that might be associated with a gradual decline in performance which would need further investigation, but might not otherwise become apparent until much later.

As a part of a pre purchase analysis, this sort of information is also useful to help determine potential ability.

A horse that is already working at its physiological limits jumping 1.3m is unlikely to progress much further even with more training, whereas one that is finding this easy is likely to have more scope.

David then introduced Ryan to Flair nasal strips.

He explained how the self-adhesive strips support the nasal passages during exercise to improve the horse's airflow when most needed.

A horse, unlike its rider, can only breathe through its nose and as it works harder the tissues overlying the nasal passages are sucked in, reducing the airway diameter and causing a greater resistance to airflow into the lungs.

Therefore, when the horse most

needs increased respiratory capacity it is in fact reduced.

Studies have shown that nasal strips can reduce airway resistance and peak tracheal inspiratory pressures by supporting the skin overlying the nasal passages, thus preventing collapse or narrowing of the upper airway at its narrowest point.

He went on to talk about research which shows that stride and breathing are closely related in horses. The horse takes one breath perfectly in time with each stride at canter, but when it is in the air over a jump it holds its breath, not breathing out until it lands.

However, if it is in a combination the horse may not get a chance to take a breath again until it has cleared the last part.

The day opened opportunities to better understand the fitness and performance capabilities of the two horses and introduced Ryan and father Vin to the technical advances now available as performance analysis tools.

In this instance, employing scientific techniques may not have revealed anything that they had not already suspected about these two horses.

It did however confirm their thinking and gave them a clearer idea of the two horses' fitness levels, potential ability and some ideas about future training methods and competition strategies.



Arnie on the jumps sporting a nasal strip.



## Ryan's Update

"During 2006 I was jumping in the teams and competing abroad for much of the year.

"This was a great experience for me but we realised that my main two horses had been doing most of the competing and my other horses, which needed more experience, were staying behind.

"Therefore, during 2007 we had to make some strategy changes in

order to develop the second string so that they were in a position to relieve the pressure on the other two.

"With this in mind we took a conscious decision to stay at home more this year.

"The Renault series provided an excellent opportunity to jump in a good series and financially it was worthwhile.

"We were never out of the placings and finished an overall second to Will Funnell; his seasoned experience caught me at the last possible moment.

"Again, at HOYS the pressure was on my two greys.

"They performed brilliantly and I came away with two thirds and several other places.

"I qualified for the Grand Prix on

the final night with Otage, to finish eighth.

"The boys had a hard show and did well, so I am very pleased with the achievements for 2007.

"My other horses are now in a better position to take the pressure off Otage and Vahagn de Lozana, so we are looking forward to 2008."