



## Cross Training to Ride Your Best

Sandra Sokoloski

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Riders commonly think that riding is enough to stay fit, especially if they ride a few horses a day. Unfortunately this is not true. Most other sports incorporate cross-training into their programs, even at the amateur levels. Why should riding be any different? The best athletes, including riders, are the ones who know how to give themselves an edge! Here is why cross-training gives you an advantage:

- 1) The more well-established a movement pattern is, the less energy it requires. This means that the more a skill is performed, the less fitness it provides. Research has shown that riding is not sufficient for good cardio fitness or general strength. Riders are generally less fit than athletes at similar levels in other sports. Also, jumping in competition often has a higher cardio-respiratory demand than training does and can cause a dangerously high heart rate if the rider is unfit.
- 2) Doing more of the same can lead to overuse of certain body parts. This often goes unnoticed until a small spook or minor fall causes the problem to become symptomatic. Using the same muscles over and over can cause repetitive strains and joint wear and tear. (i.e. groin strains and lower back pain). The more you ride, the better you get, but the more easily you will become injured! Cross-training takes into consideration that many muscles in different parts of the body contribute to a single activity. To get the most out of any activity, and to do it safely, you must pay attention to all the muscles in your body that are involved, not just the ones directly related to that activity.

**Andrea Strain**, trainer and Grand Prix rider, feels strongly about the benefits of cross-training. *“Working out gives me additional body awareness, especially when targeting weak areas. Doing uni-lateral exercises with a mirror draws my attention to any asymmetries. I can see differences such as a wobble of my knee, or a dropped shoulder... things that are likely also occurring on take off or landing of a jump. I can modify these movements in the controlled atmosphere of the gym, helping the new movements become more natural for when I ride. I also find that working out gives me an edge in my fitness level. Horse shows can be tiresome, and being fit for them is essential to being as successful at the end of the week as at the beginning!”*

- 3) Injuries can be prevented.
- 4) If injured or are not able to fully train or compete, cross-training can maintain a level of fitness that allows a more speedy return to full form as well as assisting with the healing process.

After recovering from injury, **Ben Asselin**, Canadian team member, noted that, *“Cross-training and doing rehab exercises really helped improve my stability in the saddle and enabled me to understand and feel how my whole body is used to ride. Pinpointing my areas of weakness has allowed me to be even stronger than before.”*



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For riders, cross-training can mean any activity outside of riding and many different activities can be used to ensure total fitness. Some research is indicating that exercises targeting the ability to hold a position for a prolonged period (i.e. plank and wall squats) and that improve power (the ability to be strong with speed), are the most beneficial for improving riding abilities. Cross-training takes time, but can be fun and will lead to becoming the best rider that you can be!

See next edition for good rider exercises.