



Ask the Course Designer

Peter Grant

[Back to Articles...](#)

Question:

Why is the 'time allowed' so much more difficult for some classes than others when the 'speed' is posted as the same?

Answer:

Thank you for your question. In my opinion there are a few reasons for this. First thing that happens occasionally is that sometimes course designers make a mistake, especially when the first two or 3 horses in the class go very slow or very fast. This can also affect competitions later in the week as it does not give the course designer an accurate gauge to see where the level of competition is. Unfortunately, as in any sport, human error does come in to play.

Mistakes aside, the number one reason the time allowed can feel so much different is the personal taste of the course designer (CD), which has two primary influences. The first is how short the CD likes to see the approach to fences off the turn and how quickly they want to see riders turn after fences. It can be a subtle difference, but turning even a half stride sooner after a fence when the course is asking for a 270' turn, can add 2, 3 or even 4 strides to that single turn. That equates to around 1.2-3.0 seconds difference for each turn of that type. More than one 270' can quickly make the time much more difficult. Similarly, any time the track turns the horse off the forward track, there is a possibility for variance in track length.

The course designer's personal taste in stride length also has a great effect on the difficulty of the lines. Without getting into a long drawn out explanation, it is important to know that when a horse increases its velocity, it does so primarily through stride length. There is a small increase in the frequency of their stride, but the main difference is the stride length. While it does not make much difference for National level competition, at the International level, shorter distances in the lines mean that the horses are unable to carry the speed of 400 metres per minute, which is the top speed for FEI competition. That means that they have to go even faster between lines. It may seem like a small thing, but even 1 second to a top level rider makes a huge difference.

Of course we also often see variance in the 'time' difficulty from the same course designer (myself included). This can be partly due to the variety in our own courses where some will ask the horse to turn more than others, or have a couple lines that are less forward than normal. However, sometimes it is a calculation. Often, especially in larger competitions, it is a way to increase the difficulty of the course in order to get a more sporting result, while not overdoing the technicality of the lines. This can help prevent large jump offs where the riders are continually try to better the faster and faster times, which can lead to unsafe sport. This is simply done by shortening the turns as mentioned before, and thus reducing the reaction time between fences.



Ask the Course Designer

Peter Grant

[Back to Articles...](#)

Ultimately, whether the time is too tight or not, you as a competitor have no control over it. The most important thing is to be aware of it, and saving 3 seconds is finding a way to leave out 4 or 5 strides over the entire course. Most course designers will give you an idea of what their plan is with the 'time' during the course inspection. Furthermore, you will get to know different course designers and their preferences in time. Hopefully this answers your question and helps to make sense of how to make up some time on course.

Regards,

Peter Grant, FEI Level 3 CD

Please send us your questions in our 'Ask the course designer' column at info@albertashowjumpers.com and we will post his answers ASAP!