

Letter from John Crandell to AERC

I hope that we are just beginning to climb out of the era of exceptional corruption at many levels of the FEI. It is important that we don't allow ourselves to accept a legacy of fundamentally biased and ill-conceived rules born of this depravity.

Many of the cornerstone rules and policies that we have been forced to accept are little more than the remainder of what is left when all the most effective solutions were thrown out early in the development process due to the influence of powerful special interests. Time and time again the large remainder of the endurance community has been appeased with the opportunity to make comments and have just final stage influence on the detail of new rules, when the most intelligent concepts had been filtered out long before. No matter how obvious the ideal solution, the FEI endurance community has received a criterion that misses the mark in effectiveness, and often is one that can be over-come by simple volume.

Over the past decades we have seen a proclivity to forward superficial, quantitative rule remedies for qualitative issues. When a problem is identified, we should sensibly want to identify the simplest attributes to base a remedial rule upon. This has been exploited the extent that the resulting rule is so simplistically quantitative that it fails to perform as purported. We must endeavor to develop actual quality standards for issues of performance qualities, and accept that rules are supposed to be inconvenient for those unwilling to uphold the desired standards.

For a concrete example, consider how the FEI rider/horse qualifications and elite rider status definitions developed from their earliest constructs:

In the time these rules were developed, it was becoming all too obvious that some riders were advancing themselves into levels of performance for which they were incompetent. Under the banner of concern for the welfare of horses, and in quieter but more significant concern for public image of the discipline, a need for qualifying rules was identified.

Most of us around the world at the time inherently understood that such a qualification should be based on a history of quality performance. Many also understood that the actual safety of the horses was primarily dependent on riders judgment and ability to rate the steed within the riders skill and the horses physical limits. Most horses can safely complete endurance test at some rate, therefore any concern for the speed of the performance is an independent matter of public image, and not an actual concern of equine welfare.

If horse welfare is a truly the paramount, then the logical approach would have been to base the primary qualification criterion, those which targeted safety of the horse, on a riders ability to consistently complete events without injury to the horse, and secondly to identifying horses with (much less common) congenital risk factors. An expression of such a quality criterion might have simply been something like "*Riders or horses with greater than X% successfully completion in the top Y% of the field in Z or more events may advance to the next level*". Any variation of this example criterion formed by a factor of frequency (%) of a specific outcome has a much higher correlation to a quality than any simple quantity assay. In this one simple phrase, we have a standard for risk tolerance (too reckless), limited advancements by being

uncompetitive (too slow), and would be required to track data only the last “Z” events of a competitor to validate the rule. Notice that this formula identifies relative quality performance, without bias toward availability of the fastest, least technical course possible. Alternatively, a qualitative measure could be expressed in terms of relationship to fastest time on a given course. There are many ways to make more qualitative expressions that are event referenced, and thus useful comparatives across varying course performance conditions and technicality. A truly international criterion should have these features.

Adopted instead was a qualification system that is entirely focused on simple speeds (quantity of time) and quantity of completion. This system based on such simple quantities is grounded only on the very errant assumption that quantities of performances always imply quality performance. Furthermore, all of the earliest “quantifications” were entirely pinned on the horses, and all that have been added are also actually quantitative, not qualitative assessments. As this system has proven to be inadequate and ineffective at actually protecting horses, only more layers of the same philosophy have been applied to fix it. Insanity defined.

The quantitative qualification system immediately created economic and competitive bias in favor of regions with geography that supported access to the fastest and courses possible. Immediately, large regions of the world, even regions with ancestral horse heritage and culture were effectively shut out of the equal participation in the FEI endurance system. Classic endurance events that had been developing effective equine welfare policies for decades were isolated out of influence, while power and influence of a few regions was enhanced.

From early in the development of FEI rule, criterion hinged on quality of rider performance has been just too unpalatable for strong Persian Gulf influences. Riders in that zone customarily put the responsibility of the horse welfare completely on the veterinary panel, and accepted no concern themselves as the rider focuses on doing a pre-ordained pace that has more to do with previous statistics for winning than the actual current condition of his mount. Any rider criterion that would shift some of that responsibility back to the rider in a manner that cannot be overpowered simply by more financial expense has been a lead balloon in FEI rules.

This bias is particularly evident in the detail of the more recent elite rider status. The previous incorporation of qualifying criterion for horse and rider combinations momentarily represented an inconvenience to the largest stable owners as it disabled some of the advantage they could otherwise afford. Adding an incentive to become an “elite rider” is a nonetheless plausible concept that could have provide incentive to strive toward highest quality horsemanship. Instead, once again we have been handed a quantity criterion that only compounds on the inherent advantages of concentrated wealth and large stables. According to the current elite rider criterion the most callous and sadistic among us, persons that cause the destruction of an exceptionally high percentage of the horses they compete on, can attain the extra privilege of riding (consuming) a new and unfamiliar horse in major competitions if they only do more of what they do. Elite Rider status by the current FEI definition is only a matter of the willingness to expend the quantity of money and horses required meet the criterion. This quantitative elite status criterion distorts what could be a positive influence into depraved incentive. It’s ultimately a “buyable” mark with little correlation to consistent qualities that would actually protect the horses. Horses are abused BECAUSE of misguided rules like this.

The over-arching point is that the above are just examples from a rule structure that has been created in an undertone of bias and distorted logic. This issue permeates the entire endurance rule system. This has resulted in fundamental rules and qualification constructs that are only thinly veiled as protections for the horse, while the effective reality is that they only incentivize more consumption. It is becoming more publicly apparent with every new layer of rules and edits that must be added that something is deeply, and fundamentally wrong with the system, and that it's more than a just matter of the growth of the discipline. Our current FEI rules are founded on ethical compromise, bias, and the warped sense of reality of powerful people that do not represent the perspective of the endurance community worldwide.

What is most important is not just the particularly flaws that can be pointed out, but the loss of the wiser, more effective concepts that could have, should have been applied from the beginning. Intelligence and logic is not something that fits neatly between the lines of existing irrationality. Any attempt to do so will only create an unwieldy and tangled literary mess. This will require a comprehensive re-write.

We do not need more layers and tweaks on the existing rule structure. We do need a much more comprehensive re-write of the entire endurance rules. We need to redirect editorial energies toward development of a strategic plan for the eventual obsoleting of the much of the rule book at once, to replace it with a fundamentally new version. Of course that can only come after the current issues of integrity within the FEI ranks is resolved, but we should be preparing to implement a comprehensive rules change-over as soon as possible afterward, as this is the best window of opportunity to do so.

The cancer of drug abuse cannot be purged from the system without a very comprehensive strategy. The likelihood of success is very small if we attempt to tackle ethical compromise one aspect at a time. The scourge will just regrow back from each tentacle we leave aside intending to treat at a later date. A systemic problem needs to be dealt with systemically. If we attempt to improve rule enforcement without a comprehensive redevelopment of the rule system in process, we will continue a paradox of expecting to find ethically uncompromising persons to enforce a rule system that is inherently biased and of questionable ethical effect.

Too many people are aware of FEI's endurance's open history of putting image ahead of real effectiveness for the public to be satisfied with a few targeted actions, rule tweaks, and some propagandous posturing now. Core constructs of the FEI rule system were forged in a crucible of ethical poverty clouded by the smoke of bureaucracy. The current document and many related articles are fundamentally depraved, politically terminally ill, and do not warrant our investment of band-aids and aspirin at this time. We need a new birth.

If a structure is built on a flawed foundation, no matter how many coats of whitewash and layers of trim we apply, it's still a flawed structure, and is only more difficult to visualize the repair by the layers of illusion.

We will be part of a totally new beginning, or of a continuing embarrassment to equestrians worldwide.

If the *Endurance Strategic Planning Committee* does not have the power or the courage to include strategic planning for transition to a fundamentally new rules paradigm as part of its charge, then who will?

This is an entrenched issue that is not going to be solved within the standard rules committee procedures. Even those on the relevant committees that are not already corrupted will have an inherent personal conflict against abandoning so much of a document they have been charged with nurturing for a long time. If voices beyond those of the regular FEI committee structure do not assert authority here, then nothing significant will change.

The worldwide equestrian community has long passed its limit of tolerance for FEI rules and enforcement policies that distort and abuse the basic principles of fair sportsmanship and the ethical regard of equines. It is beyond obvious that the FEI endurance rules are constructed under the influence of self-serving powers, and in a philosophy that is inconsistent with the much of the world.

The challenge before the FEI is more than just a matter of controlling some forms of injustice and enforcing the rules it now has. The environment of self-interest and injustice has been present for so long that it has permeated the very foundations of the rule structure as well.

The current rules are fraught with pretenses of equine welfare that have been distorted into the opposite effect by desires to generate organizational expansion and additional favor for the most financially influential. The rest of the world should not accept the FEI and its Federations in continued support of a rule structure that insidiously INCOURAGES the wasteful consumption of equines as it degrades the disciplines potential for creating valued knowledge that could benefit that species. Much of the world senses this in some manner, and is increasingly wary and tired of the bureaucratic smoke screens and shallow public image gestures.

The world endurance community needs an international organization with the integrity to uphold competitive standards, justice and elemental respects for life. Power and greed have always presented challenges to otherwise noble minded organizations and always will. The FEI has done a particularly mediocre job of resisting those forces for decades. The re-invention of the endurance rules will be an integral and essential part of any effort by the FEI to genuinely restore its integrity and respectability.

There is little enduring value in “strategic planning” anything else in FEI endurance if the discipline is to remain underpinned by such a fundamentally miss-guided rule structure.