



International Society  
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# The International Society for Equitation Science

[www.equitationsscience.com](http://www.equitationsscience.com)

Sender: Dr Andrew McLean,  
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HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein  
President, FEI  
Fédération Equestre Internationale  
Av Mon-Repos 24  
1005 Lausanne  
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2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2009.

Your Royal Highness,

**Subject: Hyperflexion and the problem of relentless pressure**

In the light of concerns raised at the recent World Cup Dressage competition in Odense, it appears that the current definition of hyperflexion is too complex to be useful to stewards and therefore unworkable in any bid to safeguard horse welfare. We are sure you will be feeling some pressure to act in the interests of the competition horse and we wish to offer some scientific insights into this issue; insights that may help to move the debate forward.

Hyperflexion, in this case with added ischaemia of the tongue, is but one obvious illustration of the bigger issue on horse training which has to do with relentless pressure. In effect, the posture is not the issue so much as behavioural conditioning that produces it. Constant unsustainable pressures dull the horse's sensitivity and increase the need for more rein tension in future.

Best practice in behavioural conditioning defines outstanding horsemanship and so it is appropriate for the FEI to develop a strategy that rewards horsemanship and safeguards horse welfare. If you can shift the focus from the horse's neck movements to rider's hands, you will benefit both the sport and the horse.

That said, there is rigorous evidence that judges cannot detect lightness and struggle with submission so we should not be surprised that stewards are troubled by the need to define and police against excessive and prolonged interventions. There is a clear need for an objective measure of lightness.

The good news is that rein tension meters are now at a stage where they can be unobtrusive, telemetric, time-date stamped, tamper-proof and transferable from one set of reins to another.

By measuring rein contact in warm-up, we can guard against abuses in the public domain and even estimate the practices applied at home. We respectively propose a trial of rein tension meters in warm-up arenas prior to FEI dressage competitions. Such a trial would permit an assessment of:

- riders' tendency to practice hyperflexion
- whether riders who advocate (and so practice) hyperflexion have horses with habituated mouths.

We look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Andrew McLean BSc, PhD (President, ISES)

Prof. Natalie Waran BSc (Hons), PhD (Acting Senior Vice-president, ISES)

A/Prof. Paul McGreevy BVSc, PhD, MRCVS, MACVSc (Junior Vice-President, ISES)