Fuelling a 5* Eventer: Top Tips for Feeding the Competition Horse



Eventing stands out as one of the most demanding equestrian sports, requiring peak physical fitness and mental focus from both horse and rider across the three disciplines of dressage, cross-country, and show jumping. Achieving peak performance in this multi-discipline sport requires meticulous attention to detail, particularly when it comes to nutrition. In this blog we'll share essential tips for feeding your event horse to ensure they have the energy, stamina, and resilience needed to excel in the eventing arena.

The Role of Forage

For any horse, the importance of forage cannot be overstated. It forms the cornerstone of their nutrition, ensuring optimal digestive health and sustained energy levels vital for peak performance. High-quality forage, be it grass, hay or haylage, provides essential fibre, fostering a healthy hindgut environment and facilitating gradual energy release. Moreover, forage serves as a significant source of hydration, as it binds water in the gut, crucial for maintaining fluid balance during intense competition. Neglecting forage can lead to digestive issues, ulcers, and compromised performance. Thus, prioritising ample forage intake is fundamental in supporting the wellbeing and success of elite eventing athletes.

Balancing Energy Sources

One of the key challenges in feeding event horses is striking the right balance between energy sources. While horses need ample energy to perform, providing too much can lead to excitability and loss of focus. Conversely, insufficient energy can result in fatigue and reduced performance. A crucial aspect of this balance is selecting the right combination of energy-providing foods.

Oil serves as a valuable energy source due to its slow-release properties, offering sustained energy without the risk of excitability. High-fibre compound feeds supplemented with oil and low in starch are excellent choices for meeting an equine's energy needs while promoting calm behaviour.

Conversely, cereals offer quick-release energy, suitable for activities requiring bursts of power, like show-jumping. However, overfeeding cereals can lead to digestive issues, emphasising the need for moderation.

Ultimately, finding the optimal balance of energy sources involves understanding the horse's individual needs and adjusting the diet accordingly. By incorporating a variety of energy sources in moderation, riders can support their event horses in achieving peak performance while ensuring their well-being and focus are maintained throughout competition.

Protein for Performance

Quality protein, rich in essential amino acids like lysine, is essential for supporting muscle growth and repair. While work and training are crucial for muscle development, the protein content in the diet plays a pivotal role. Horses utilise protein continuously to build and repair tissues, particularly muscles.

Performance feeds, formulated with optimal lysine profiles, are specifically tailored for horses in rigorous training, such as those competing in 5* events. Balancers, which supply

essential vitamins, minerals, and amino acids, are beneficial for horses maintaining condition on reduced rations.

Essential Nutrients and Micronutrients

Alongside providing sufficient calories and protein, attention to essential micronutrients is paramount. Calcium fortifies bone strength, vital for the rigorous demands of eventing, while minerals aid in energy utilisation and hoof integrity. Antioxidants like vitamin E and selenium are indispensable in neutralising free radicals generated during intense exercise, promoting recovery, while B-vitamins stimulate appetite. Conversely, excessive supplementation can pose risks, particularly with iron, selenium, and iodine, necessitating particular care when choosing feeds and supplements.

Micronutrient requirements vary based on factors like age, fitness level, and diet composition. Tailored competition feeds cater to increased nutritional demands, but some horses will maintain their weight easily on less than the full recommended ration. These horses can be fed a reduced amount of feed topped up with SPILLERS™ Original Balancer to ensure that levels of essential nutrients are maintained to meet demands but without additional calories.

Hydration Matters

Hydration is paramount for the optimal performance and well-being of an event horse. Dehydration not only hampers performance but also poses significant health risks. Post-exercise, immediate access to water is crucial as it aids in rehydration and prevents potential health complications. Electrolytes play a vital role in muscle function, and their imbalance can lead to various issues such as heat stress and fatigue. Regular sweating necessitates electrolyte replacement, with salt being a cost-effective solution.

Forage, apart from being a source of energy, also aids in hydration by binding water in the gut. Practical tips like carrying water from home, soaking feeds to increase water intake, and utilising specialised products such as SPILLERS™ Perform & Restore Mash can aid in maintaining optimal hydration levels and supporting the horse's overall health and performance.

Avoid Sudden Changes

While some modifications may be unavoidable, especially during international travel, sudden or frequent shifts in feed and forage should be minimised to mitigate the risk of colic and digestive upset. Whenever feasible, bring forage from home to reduce digestive upset and strive to maintain consistency in hard feed.

Preparation for optimal performance and recovery starts well before competition day. Resist the urge to make last-minute dietary changes, recognising that the foundation for success lies in consistent feeding practices.

Expert Insights from William Fox-Pitt

William Fox-Pitt, a legendary figure in the world of eventing, has long relied on SPILLERS™' products to fuel his horses' performance. With a remarkable career spanning over several decades, Fox-Pitt's trust in SPILLERS™ feeds underscores their effectiveness and reliability in supporting his equine athletes.

Central to Fox-Pitt's regimen is his reliance on SPILLERS™ feeds to meet the unique nutritional needs of his horses. One of his preferred choices is the SPILLERS™ Alfalfa-Pro Fibre, an alfalfa blend perfect for supplementing compound feeds and balancers. Its high oil content promotes coat shine and sustained energy. Featuring short-chopped alfalfa which provides quality protein and calcium to help buffer stomach acid whilst extending eating time. It's also low in sugar and starch to support digestion, ideal for ulcer-prone equines. In addition, its enhanced vitamin E level provides an important antioxidant to complement the high oil inclusion.

In addition to Alfalfa-Pro Fibre, Fox-Pitt also incorporates SPILLERS™ Ulca Power Cubes into his feeding program. SPILLERS™ Ulca Power Cubes are formulated for racing and performance horses susceptible to gastric ulcers. Featuring marine-derived calcium to help buffer stomach acid, alongside lecithin and pectin to support the stomach lining. Probiotic live yeast and prebiotic MOS and FOS support a healthy microbial population in the hindgut. Fortified with vitamin C for respiratory health, and bio-available vitamin E for immunity and muscle health. Rich in quality protein and chelated minerals for optimal absorption.

When asked about his choice of feed, Fox-Pitt emphasises the importance of quality nutrition in maintaining his horses' condition and performance. "SPILLERS™ products have been an integral part of my feeding program for years," he says. "Their commitment to excellence and scientific expertise give me confidence that my horses are receiving the best possible nutrition."

For William, feeding his horses is not just about meeting their basic dietary requirements but optimising their performance and wellbeing. By partnering with SPILLERS, he ensures that his equine athletes receive tailored nutrition that supports their unique needs, whether competing at the highest levels or training at home.

In conclusion, fuelling a 5* eventer requires careful attention to detail and a well-thought-out nutritional strategy. By prioritising forage, balancing energy sources, and ensuring adequate protein and essential nutrients, you can support your horse's journey to the top of the eventing world. Remember, every horse is unique, so tailor their diet accordingly, and

consult with experts like SPILLERS™ for personalised advice. With the right fuel, your equine athlete can reach their full potential on the competition circuit.

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