

## 09 Horseback riding

The only Olympic sport to involve an animal, equestrian events take place in Versailles. In an area laid out as an extension of the landscape perspective of the Grand Canal. At the same time, a major exhibition entitled "Cheval en majesté, au cœur d'une civilisation" (Horses in Majesty, at the heart of a civilization) was presented at the Château de Versailles.

Represented in prehistoric caves, sculpted in hieroglyphics, trained for chariot races in Greece and the Gallo-Roman world, trained for war, adapted for transport, the horse has become part of our common vocabulary.

"The horse is dangerous in the front, dangerous in the back and uncomfortable in the middle", Winston Churchill's famous quote specifies the three parts of the horse that athletes are called upon to control: "the forehand, the hind hand and the body in the middle"

This big, fat, "racing beast" weighs up to seven hundred kilos and can measure almost two meters at withers height (bone at the base of the neck), and as much in length. Straddling the horse, rider, boots, saddle, rug, stirrups and harness add up to some eighty kilos and a height of over three meters. We still use the term "cavalier perspective" to represent volumes on a flat surface, while limiting deformations.

The "equine-human" habituation is graduated according to sensitivities, reciprocal reactions and shared objectives. Couples tame each other in motion. They agree on a language of morphological contacts: heels, knees, legs, linked to the costal... Body and body in search of constant balance... hands forward or backward, caressing or whipping... voice of indication and always of relaxation...

The image shows a horse and rider pair in Olympic show jumping posture. At the bottom of the format, the three parallel horizontals mark the fences in the background that mark out the course. The more raised vertical line reflects one of the poles supporting the bars mentioned in cross-section by the successive circles on this pole. The height of each of the twelve to fourteen obstacles can vary between one meter forty and one meter sixty-five, with a variable spacing distance proportional to the height. The entire course must be completed in a set order and in a set time.

Any fall from the bar, refusal of an obstacle or loss of time is penalized. Athletes are ranked according to the number of penalty points accumulated. In the event of a tie, they are separated by a "jump-off", i.e. all or part of the same obstacle course completed without fault, with speed being the overriding criterion.

Above the obstacle, across the entire width of the page, the horse and rider are shown in the air, in profile, clearing the top bar.

The head is drawn in profile, with a lock of hair protruding from the helmet, looking to the right, focused in the same direction as the horse. Let's follow the rider's outline. She's leaning forward to accompany her mount's movement, legs slightly bent, feet resting in the stirrups, heels close to the horse and toes towards us.

On either side of the knees, the elements of a saddle adapted to this type of competition can be discerned, itself resting on a mat linking with the horse's "fullness", i.e., sternum and ribcage.

To keep saddle and rider in balance, whatever the movement. The girth, made of leather, is longer and wider than other harness components, and includes a bib. This flap protects the horse's belly from the possible impact of the shoes on its own front legs, should it come to a stop on the obstacle.

Note that the shoes are very close! In front of the girth and to the left of the chest: shoulders, forearms, knees, cannon, fetlock, pastern and hoof are folded.

Further up and to the right, you can see the buttoned sleeve of the rider's arm, her gloved hand gently holding the reins positioned on either side of the horse's neck.

These reins are connected by metal rings to the "bit", a small cylinder fitted into the mouth at the corners of the horse's mouth. The leather bands of the noseband, which runs around the nostrils, the headpiece, which runs vertically around the head behind the ears, the forehead piece, which runs in front of the ears, and the under-throat, which runs from under the ears to the bottom of the cheek. These ties make up the harness.

On the left, the horse's hindquarters are fully extended behind the saddle, the loins are straight, the croup is firm, and the couard detaches the tail composed of large manes. The buttocks, thighs, legs and hocks are taut from the effort of jumping. The joints, chestnuts above the hocks and fetlocks above the hoof, are in slight relief.

To protect the health of the assembled horses, competitors from certain foreign countries will have to comply with quarantine procedures before entering the Olympic stables. At the same time, training areas where horses and riders can practice and prepare their performances have been set up at Versailles.