



## THE 'DREAM' SHOW

The International Grooms Association (IGA) is working to represent the interests of all FEI level grooms, and to implement changes that will best serve the grooms' wellbeing as well as increasing public and professional recognition of the vital role they play.

One aspect of this task is to help all FEI level shows operate in a way which takes consideration of the grooms; their schedule, the challenges they face, and how show organisers can mitigate some of these challenges.

Through our work with our Show Supporters we collaborate with show and event organisers to make sure their show is as 'groom friendly' as possible. With the recognition that not every competition has the budget or infrastructure to implement all of these ideas we have created a blueprint of a 'dream show'.

Where appropriate these suggestions are structured as 'Minimum', 'Optimal' and 'Gold Standard'. The list has been created from groom feedback, including our member only surveys, the input of our team and directors (all international grooms) and some of the ideas and initiatives created by our Show Supporters.

Together we can find a way to make all FEI shows a good working experience for grooms around the world.

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# PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

## CATERING

The priority for grooms' catering is flexibility and accessibility.



Grooms need to be able to quickly access food and drink so that they can fuel themselves without having to stop working.

What might seem a suitable solution to show organisers, in practice often just doesn't work well for the grooms, e.g. meal tickets/vouchers to use at public catering. This is fine until the groom has a window of time to leave the stables to get food, and then they discover this is peak ingress time of the public audience and every concession has a 15 minute minimum queue wait time.

### MINIMUM

- Free tea/coffee/water available in, or at the entrance to, the stables.
- Food facilities (whether provided or paid) close to the stables (no more than 5 min walk).
- Takeaway/grab and go food options available from sit-down provided catering option.
- Flexible mealtimes and long opening hours.

### OPTIMAL

- Variety of food options available including healthy meal choices.
- Catering options available only to grooms to lessen queues.

### GOLD STANDARD

- Tea/coffee/snacks/sandwiches taken around the stables.
- Grooms able to order food via an app or barcode; either to collect or to be delivered to the stables.
- Grooms' Rep responsible for assisting grooms who can't leave stables to have food brought to them.
- A grooms' lounge next to the stables, with a microwave and a fridge which has a variety of options for a quick reheat.

#### Best practice examples:

At Mechelen CSI\*\*\*\* sponsor Cavalor provided a coffee cart that once in the morning and once in the afternoon toured the stables and handed out refreshments.

**Benefit:** It gives the grooms another point of contact from event organisers, as well as potentially significantly improving a busy groom's day!

# ACCOMMODATION

Groom accommodation provided by shows and events has been problematic in the past.



Using the Minimum Standards set for racing staff hostels in the UK, and feedback from our recent survey we have created a set of guidelines for organisers to ensure grooms living on their showground are comfortable and safe.

Accommodation must be planned with an awareness of safeguarding issues as well as the safety of grooms possessions.

Groom accommodation should be of a 3\* hotel minimum standard, i.e. the same as the riders and judges.

## MINIMUM

- Provided accommodation must be close to stables OR grooms must have access to a regular/on demand shuttle service throughout their working day.
- If the lorry park is between 0.5-1km away, then bikes/scooters must be permitted.
- The accommodation must have doors fitted with locks.
- Lockers with keys should be provided for grooms to store valuables, either within each room or in a communal area.
- Clean sheets and bedding must be provided.
- Rooms must be warm and comfortable; for instance, they should have normal amenities such as curtains on windows.
- Clean toilets and showers with hot and cold water must be available at all times.
- Power points and plugs must be available.
- If it is necessary to share, grooms or NFs should be contacted before the show to confirm arrangements. This is a safeguarding issue.
- If grooms are living in lorries there must be enough hook up points; the lorries should be parked in a safe location with a safe and well lit route between them and the stables.

## OPTIMAL

- Accommodation should be cleaned daily.
- Ideally provided accommodation should have good Wi-Fi.
- Single occupancy rooms.

## GOLD STANDARD

- Provision of soaps and other toiletries.
- Ensuite.
- Grooms provided with television, maybe in a communal area.

### **Best practice examples:**

Gothenburg 5\* places grooms in a hotel within the immediate area of the show; comfortable accommodation close to the stables.

**Benefit:** Well-rested grooms are happier, more efficient and safe for the drive home.

## **LIVING PROVISIONS**

The conditions of the stabling are key to every groom's working day; there are a few further facilities which may be considered for the grooms' comfort during their time on the showground.



### **MINIMUM**

- Well-signed and clean toilets close to the stables.
- Grooms' lounge or at least a sheltered space with somewhere to sit which is either heated or cooled depending on the season, charge phones, etc. This can happen as access to a Rider Lounge.

### **OPTIMAL**

- Wi-Fi available in and around the stables.
- TV's in either the grooms' lounge or stables showing what's happening in the arena.
- Grooms' parties or dinners organised by show and/or show sponsors.

### **GOLD STANDARD**

- Access to basic cooking facilities i.e. microwave, kettle, fridge.

### **Best practice examples:**

FEI World Championships Herning 2022 provided grooms with a lounge where they could get tea/coffee and snacks all day. There were TV's and sofas so grooms could relax and socialise.

### **Benefit:**

Giving grooms somewhere to relax and socialise helps them take work breaks when they can recover during their working day. Having TV's in and around the stables helps grooms keep in touch with how the competition is going, making it easier to judge when to go to the ring or whether they will be needed for prize giving; moreover, it just helps them feel more included in the competition.

## COMMUNICATION

Good communication between show organisers and grooms can make a huge difference; grooms can waste significant time and energy walking to and from the show or stable office to check information boards.



### MINIMUM

- Detailed arrival instructions to be distributed and also available on the show website; providing grooms with only a postcode can be unpredictable.
- Toilets and catering clearly signposted from stables.
- Information such as start lists distributed within stables.
- Named contact for grooms in the show office.

### OPTIMAL

- WhatsApp group to communicate with all grooms, generated using a QR code that grooms sign up to.

### GOLD STANDARD

- Assigning a named Grooms' Representative\* to work throughout the show whose remit would be to:
    - Manage the grooms' lounge and any parties/events run for the grooms.
    - Make contact with grooms and check on general welfare.
    - Assist grooms where possible for instance by bringing snacks/drinks to stables if grooms are busy and cannot get away.
- \*this role does not include anything horse related.

#### **Best practice examples:**

London International Horse Show used a WhatsApp group to inform grooms about classes/prize giving's/grooms parties.

There were two Grooms Representatives from the Organising Committee. IGA Representatives at the show were able to assist grooms by bringing food to the stables for those who had been too busy to stop and eat.

#### **Benefit:**

Grooms are easily kept informed of events and schedules, saving them time and making their day smoother.

Having a named person looking after the grooms helps grooms feel part of the event or show; and makes it easier for newer or younger grooms to ask questions etc.

Assisting grooms with their 'living needs' at shows where the catering cannot be located close by helps to ensure that they at least eat and drink during busy days.

## ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES

The arrival and departure procedures at a show or event are very important for grooms. On arrival they have potentially been driving for days, and need to get their horses out and settled swiftly. Equally when leaving it is a priority for them to be able to make a quick and smooth exit from the showground.



### MINIMUM

- Detailed information provided on the schedule and the website regarding arrival location, timings and the procedure.
- Enough staff/vets working to ensure a smooth arrival and quick unloading of horses from the lorry.
- Horses should be allowed to stable overnight at the end of the show if rider and groom feel they need a few more hours to rest before travelling.

### OPTIMAL

- Assistance from show to un/load trucks.
- Welcome gift for grooms:
  - Show mascot.
  - Chocolate/sweets
  - Sponsor merchandise
- Leaving package for grooms:
  - Soft drinks
  - Sweets/snacks for the journey home

### GOLD STANDARD

- Stables already bedded down with appropriate bedding.

\*If arrivals/departures are limited by outside factors such as traffic management within towns, it is recommended that the show issue time slots for departure.

This could be managed by grooms selecting a slot as they would for lunging times, therefore allowing those who finish earlier to make their departure and those who wish their horses to rest to book a later slot.

#### **Best practice examples:**

Helsinki International Horse Show have teams of helpers to assist grooms unload trucks when they arrive on the showground, and again when they leave.

**Benefit:** Horses are more quickly and easily settled in their stables; grooms' workload is eased after driving.



## STABLES

Stabling requirements are largely covered by the FEI rules.

Our IGA member surveys have repeatedly shown that the stable facilities are the grooms' biggest priority at the shows or events they go to; if they are unable or struggling to look after their horses as they would wish it makes the whole experience stressful and frustrating, no matter how good other facilities are.



### MINIMUM

- Stable opening hours must correspond with exercise times.
- Easy to find hay/bedding store with flexible opening times and flexible payment options.
- Reliable Wi-fi so grooms can monitor classes from the stable and fulfil their FEI Health Requirements.
- As soon as the stables are open for horses to arrive it is important that all facilities such as electricity within stables, hook up for lorries, catering should be operational.
- It is vital to have appropriate footing in wash bays, particularly if they are uncovered or sited on grass- for example use of robust rubber mats to help drainage and non-slip surface.
- Attention should be paid to good footing on horse walks:
  - Carpet can cause a hazard if it pulls up, rubber matting may be a more durable solution.
  - If horse walks are also used by small vehicles they should be on hard standing rather than sand or grass.

### OPTIMAL

- Access to warm water for washing horses.
- Access to ice is a major priority for grooms. Stables need to have either enough power points for the majority of attendees to attach freezers OR a system for storing ice within show freezers.
- Ideally FEI stables should be located slightly away from the national stables, and not on the main path to and from the arena to minimise noise and disruption for the horses.

#### **Best practice examples:**

Riesenbeck (CSI 2\* upwards) have modern permanent stables with a grooms' café located in the centre.

**Benefit:** Good stabling and wash bays make it easier for grooms to properly look after their horses.



## SCHEDULING

This is a complex issue as we understand shows need to run a certain number of classes, and evening performances are part of a successful show.



There are a few areas for attention when considering show schedules.

### MINIMUM

- Catering, vet box, and stable opening times (i.e. the lights being on) must correspond with exercise and competition times.
- Management of competition finishing times should be balanced with exercise times; it is unfair for grooms to finish competing at midnight and then need to prepare for exercise four hours later.

### OPTIMAL

- Classes not beginning before 8am and all competition activity finished by 10pm.
- Horses/grooms that are competing in late classes on the last day of the show should be allowed to stable overnight if they wish.
- Clear breaks during the day on showgrounds where there are multiple rings running.

#### **Best practice examples:**

MET Oliva Tour- all competing is finished by 5pm every night.

Although they are a World Cup show, so compete until late, at Lyon 5\* catering remains open with hot meals available until 1am.

**Benefit:** Grooms are better able to manage their day, when they are not continuing to compete until late at night.

If they do have to keep working until late it is very important that they still have access to catering and other facilities.

# GROOM RECOGNITION

Recognition is essential in the mission towards improving conditions for grooms and ensuring the sustainability of equestrian sport.



By highlighting the vital work of grooms in FEI level sport we both thank them for their contribution and help to inspire the next generation to see working as a groom as a viable and aspirational career option.

We have several suggestions for improving the visibility of grooms during FEI level shows and events:

## GROOMS PRIZES

The most important point when considering grooms' prizes is to give a prize that will benefit the groom themselves; sponsors' gifts of grooming products or similar are nice but do not directly benefit the groom:

- Prizes for the groom could include edibles, money, or vouchers.
- Some shows or events award a 'Horse Care Award' or turnout prize. This may be judged by the ground jury and stewards across the show/event.
- Tours and other shows have the opportunity to run 'nomination' type prizes; possibly awarding one prize each week of the tour:
  - Tbird Show Park, in the US, has prizes in which grooms are nominated by other grooms/riders.

## ON THE SHOWGROUND

There are a number of changes that can be made on a showground that have little financial implications, but that are game changers and often applauded by the visiting public:

- Grooms named on start lists.
- Grooms named by commentators when their horse starts.
- The role of grooms mentioned and discussed during commentary between horses or during longer events such as cross country phase.
- Grooms attending and named during prize givings.
- Grooms featured around the showground:
  - Wellington International use a 'thank you wall' featuring images of grooms.
  - Herning 2022 used large banners with images of grooms and the slogan 'Thank you to the grooms, the heroes of our sport'.
- Providing grooms with some sort of feedback facility regarding the show; FEI ECS forms are only employed at 4\*-5\* shows, but it is possible to use short

surveys etc. to gather information about the experience of working at your event.

## ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Winning grooms named alongside horse and rider on announcements.
- Images of grooms shared with their names.
- Space within the social media schedule for groom-centred posts i.e. reels, interviews with grooms.
- Images of arrivals; trot up; warm-up arena; behind the scenes stories.

## OTHER MEDIA

- Grooms named and shown on TV graphics.
- Space for groom-focused media in the show programme or on the website with groom profiles or behind-the-scenes stories.
- Interviews with grooms featured on TV/radio/audio apps if the show/event has these.
- Grooms featured in 'Live Zone' interviews.

