



## DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE VET BOX

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Volunteers are an extremely important component for any carriage driving show, and an internationally-rated competition such as Live Oak will require the services of over 100 volunteers! Many people have expressed doubts about their ability to volunteer, but anyone can do it! This document describes the duties of the Vet Box personnel.

At a CDE, there are a number of times when veterinarian assistance is required. At FEI-level events, there is a mandatory veterinary inspection the day before the competition. At this first inspection, horses/ponies are presented in their bridles, with their competitor numbers. Equines are not permitted to wear bandages or rugs, and cannot have any paint or dye applied. The initial observation is with the horse standing still. Then the horse must be walked in front of the committee, then trotted 30 meters away, and then return to the committee at a trot. The Ground Jury has the right to eliminate any horse that appears markedly lame, injured, or in poor physical condition.

At any level CDE, during the marathon, there are two veterinarian visits. The first is during the compulsory 10-minute rest after Sections A (free) and D (walk). The second visit is at the end of the marathon after Section E. At both of these visits, TPRs are recorded – Temperature, Pulse, and Respiration. Additionally, the vet will look for lameness, injury, and sweat levels. It is the duty of the veterinarian and ground jury to determine if the equine is fit to continue the competition. In 3-day CDEs, there will be another vet inspection prior to Cones.

**Vet Box Duties:** You may have multiple duties in a vet box. One is to time the hold. Competitors should have a timer started when they enter the vet box and should immediately proceed to inspection. At about 8 minutes, they should return for re-inspection and then be released. Vet box personnel may also be required to scribe. The temperature, pulse, and respiration of each horse must be recorded each time they are inspected. This can be a real challenge when a four-in-hand arrives! At the FEI level, each horse is tagged with their own individual horse competitor number, so it is a bit easier to call out a number when reporting TPRs, but at lower levels, you should be familiar with “location” terminology – “wheelers” are horses closest to the carriage, “leaders” are the front horses, “offside” are horse on the driver’s right, and “nearside” horses are on the driver’s left. Now you can call out the temperature of the “offside wheeler,” for example. *Be familiar with this vocabulary!*

**Equipment Needed:** You will need pencils, clipboard, rectal thermometer, stethoscope, and watch with a second hand or stopwatch, buckets of water, and towels, but all equipment should be provided by the show management (though just in case, I always bring my own equipment). You should also have a list of competitors, as well as recording sheets for writing down all TPR information and any other notes from the veterinarian. To make yourself comfortable, also bring along a cooler with water (no alcohol!), sunscreen, raingear, bug spray, snacks, and a chair. Plan to get dirty – you may be slobbered on, slimed with sweat, or worse. The buckets of water and towels are to keep you and your equipment clean, not to assist the horses.

**Skills Needed:** You will need some level of confidence around horses, because you may have to quickly take measurements from a plunging 4-in-hand of warmbloods! You should be familiar with the physiology of the horse so you can take the temperature, pulse, or respiration. A quick thinker at math is helpful as well. If you are scribing, fast but neat handwriting is a plus.

**Temperature:** The normal “resting” body temperature of a horse is around 100 degrees F. A horse who has been working will be 102-103 degrees. Heat problems are taking place at 104-105, and anything over 105 will be cause for concern if the horse doesn’t cool down within 10 minutes. Temperature is taken with a rectal thermometer. Talk to the horse as you approach and pat them on the hip. They can’t see you because of their blinders, so make sure they know you are there. Some horses dislike having their tail lifted or a thermometer inserted, so take care and watch for potential kicking. Never stand behind the hooves – stay beside the hip and reach around.

**Pulse:** There are several places to take the pulse of a horse. The first is the maxillary artery that runs around the lower border of the jawbone up onto the face. To take the jaw pulse, press lightly at the throat with your fingers until you feel the artery where it crosses the jaw just below the heavy cheek muscles. The radial pulse can be taken at the inside back of the knee. You can also take the pulse by listening to the beat of the heart itself with a stethoscope placed over the chest just above the point of the elbow. The resting heart rate of a horse is around 44 bpm (and anywhere between 23-70 bpm). A horse who has worked will likely have a pulse rate around 80 bpm, and anything over 100 bpm is cause for concern. When taking the pulse, measure for 15 seconds and then multiply times four to get the beats per minute.

**Respiration:** To measure breathing rates, you can either watch the side of the horse, place your hand in front of a nostril to feel the breaths, or listen to the lungs with a stethoscope. Count breaths for 15 seconds and then multiply by four to get the breaths per minute. The average horse respiration rate is 12 bpm, but can be anywhere between 10-20 bpm. A working horse can easily be breathing at 40-80 bpm, and above 80 bpm is cause for concern if the breathing rate does not slow down in ten minutes.

**Other issues:** Check to be sure horses are sweating well. A good healthy sweat will be like dripping water. A sticky or tacky sweat or a dirty foam indicates the horse may be unfit. Check for injuries on the lower legs where errant hooves may be striking each other. Check the gums to see if they are a healthy, bright pink. Brick red gums indicate severe heat stress, and bluish grey gums indicate the horse is not getting enough oxygen. Cooperate and work around the ground crew who needs to cool off the horses. They may be dousing the horses with water, feeding electrolytes, spraying with alcohol, etc. Plan to get all these substances on your clothes (think about bringing a change of shirts!). The ground crew's first job is to cool the horse, and for the health of the horse, your TPR measurements become secondary.

Assisting in the vet box is an important job. Be sure you don't get distracted by chatting with friends or spectators. Although this is an important job, you can also have fun!

If you are not driving at a show, you should volunteer, because it is one of the best ways to learn! Volunteers help make shows happen, so please contribute your time, so at the next show, you can drive!

**Bibliography:**

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