



AN ARTICLE BY CLIVE POLLITT

## HITTING THE WALL & ELECTROLYTES

In a recent ride at St Fort, I had the pleasure of riding with a group of 40 milers, one of which was using the ride as a Silver qualifier. This was to be her first 40 miler and she was full of confidence that, based on previous rides, both rider and the horse were well prepared and would have no problem doing a 40.

Those who were at St Fort will remember it as a steamy close day with the cooling of horses high on the agenda for those wanting to attain good speeds and qualify. As the ride progressed, I became more and more concerned that we were seeing little of our silver medallists crew, and soon Penny, my crew, started crewing both of us. On the first lap I believe we saw her crew on only two occasions.

The first lap of 20 miles was completed without a problem with all four horses passing vetting. As the conversation and company had been so good on the first lap, (and lets face it riding with Gregor McGregor and Cheryl can be highly entertaining), we all started out together on the second lap. It was only then that problems started to show with our budding silver medallist.

At about the 25-30 mile point both horse and rider began

dropping back from the party. We'd ridden together so far and so I decided to drop back and help her keep pace. I saw the rider was not in good shape, thirsty and beginning to feel a little dizzy. She'd forgotten to put on her Bum bag at the vet gate which contained her drinks and was now showing signs of dehydration. Between Cheryl and myself we were able to give her drink and a bar of chocolate and soon we were able to move on a little better. The horse however was starting to flag.

During conversation, I discovered that she knew little about the need for electrolytes for both rider and horse competing at longer distances, and had made the classic mistake of believing that there is little difference between a 30 and a 40 mile ride. You can get away without electrolytes for the shorter distances, but for longer rides on hot, humid days when you need the best out of both horse and rider, it's a must.

At our next crew point, (our silver medallists crew was again nowhere to be seen) we took time to give electrolytes to both horse and rider and re-hydrated both before moving on. I also had a spare drinks container in the car for the rider. It was about this point that I suggest she should seriously consider sacking her crew, however when it was pointed out that her crew was

her mother and that she had many other assets unrelated to crewing I had to concede it to be reasonable to keep her on.

The effect on both horse and rider of the 15 minute stop for electrolytes, food and water was marked. The rider perked up considerably, the horse got its second wind and we started cracking the jokes again. Later Penny managed to capture the “crew mum” and held on to her for the rest of the ride, which we all finished with a respectable speed of just under 8mph. Our silver medallist also managed to pass the vetting and qualify.

By her own admission, our Silver Medallist has learned more on this one ride than any other she had been involved in.

### **Firstly**

The need to understand and use electrolytes. There’s a lot of hype and mystic about electrolytes. You can over do the salts, but this is rare and really takes some doing, on the other hand almost everyone is the opposite and either gives no salt or less than needed.

For a horse to stay in electrolyte balance, you must take into account the journey to the ride. Often this is a couple of hours and in a trailer with a rug on. During the journey the horse is often sweating either due to overheating or nervousness. Because of the wind factor in a trailer the sweat is often not seen, or just passed off as the horse being a bit on the warm side. Often for the longer rides, the distances to be travelled to the venue is also greater, so the sweat loss is greater and the electrolyte balance even more in the minus. Pre-travel and pre ride electrolytes can often be given in the horse feed and I as a rule give a half load in each case.

Electrolyte balance during the ride is a little more tricky and can’t be given by the clock. As a general rule, providing the horse starts the ride in balance, then you should only give electrolytes once the horse has had a big drink. For me this is often after the first Vet gate, and so my crew are prepared at each crew stop from that point on. Alternatively I carry a syringe of electrolyte mix with me. When it’s hot, like at last years championships, as the horse sweats more you’ll need to electrolyte more often.

### **How to mix & give electrolytes.**

During a ride I use a cattle syringe to give electrolytes orally, the large ones with a thumb ring in the end (£2.50 from Thainstone mart). I mix my electrolyte with honey (really cheap at Lidl). From the jar of honey I draw out the number of syringe-fulls I need for the ride. This goes into a bowl and for each syringe full I add 1 full electrolyte dose. Mix it up well and re-fill the syringes. Grey tape is good over the end to seal it. Don’t use the plastic caps provided, I’ve had more than one go down the horses throat. If, like me you often ride without a crew, carry at least one with you. The honey makes it taste a little better and is an energy boost for the horse. I always use EquestSolulyte, Endurolite, or Enduromax. Low Salt simply doesn’t cut the mustard no matter what people say. Also beware many brands do not have the correct balance. (See table below) Don’t worry about the colour change if you mix it the day before, it often goes Brown but that’s OK. - Note. On a 100 mile ride the fluid (sweat) losses can be in excess of 100 litres.

### **Secondly**

The rider must also stay in electrolyte balance. I always ride with a Camel Back, which I believe to be the most reliable way of maintaining electrolyte balance in the rider. It also allows you to drink easily on the move. After careful consideration I came to the conclusion that what’s good for the horse is good for me, and I use Enduromax horse electrolyte for myself. Most of the proprietary brands of electrolyte drinks are not what they claim. I half fill my water container with squash and add the electrolyte until I can just taste it, then I fill the container. That way you get electrolyte as you drink, and I drink a little and often.

### **Thirdly**

Plan your ride carefully with either crew stops or gear drops on the route. If your crew is inexperienced, plan for them not making a crew stop due to map reading errors by simplifying your needs and giving them longer time between stops. There is no point in unloading the car with feed and drinking water when the horse has only done 5 miles.