

*This is the first in a series of articles about the USEA Training Level Three Day Series. Interest in the USEA's Training Level Three Day Event has been growing since the format's introduction several years ago. This year there is an additional national sponsorship by SmartPak Equine, which joins Stackhouse saddles, Maui Jim Sunglasses, and Nunn Finer Products. This article (and others that follow) will relay information about why you might want to compete in one and what you should do to prepare if you decide to try it.*

The Training Level Three Day Event (or "T3D") is a unique combination of a competition and an educational opportunity. It follows the "Classic Three Day" format, with both roads and tracks (phases A and C) and steeplechase (phase B) in conjunction with cross country (also known as phase D) on endurance day. The overall purpose of the T3DE is to provide an educational competition based on the classic format that gives riders an opportunity to develop their horsemanship skills and to take their riding to a different level. The competition is run using USEF's Training Level specifications for fence heights and the length of phase D. There are also guidelines for the lengths and speeds for phases A, B and C of endurance day under development.

From the beginning to the end there are educational hands-on opportunities for riders conducted by upper level riders and coaches, veterinarians, dressage judges, grooms, and technical delegates who are in the forefront of eventing. The education starts as soon as the rider and the horse pull onto the grounds and the horse receives its first veterinary inspection. From then on the T3D provides a special environment where riders are assisted by experts as they learn and practice the different phases before they go out and perform each portion of the competition. The education continues through the jog, followed by lectures on dressage, how to ride phases A, B, and C, what should happen in the vet box, managing your horse the night after endurance day, and finally how to perform the final jog and show jumping course. Riders get to hear first-hand from the experts on how each of the components within the Classic Three Day format fit together. The competition is run in conjunction with the USEA Rules of Eventing under the auspices of the USEF. Riders receive more points for placing just like the FEI CCI's and CIC competitions. Furthermore the courses do ask the harder questions in conjunction with usually providing black flag options.

The horse and his welfare are at the center of this unique educational competition. The T3D strives to create good horsemen and horsewomen who have created the ultimate bond with their horse by rising to the challenge of the full format. Competitors who successfully complete the T3D are able to go on and make the step up to Preliminary. So far, some competitors that have completed the T3D have gone on successfully to the Intermediate level. With safety at the forefront of Eventing these days the T3D seems to be an place to provide that "extra" education that sometimes seems to be missing from riders education.

Here's what past competitors have to say about the T3DE:

"One beautiful thing about the long format at training is that you focus on fitness. By creating a schedule, usually months out, it is a commitment unlike any other horse trial. The result is that you spend more time in the saddle, more time on the ground with your horse (the old adage of knowing your horse's legs in the dark) and more time learning good old horsemanship--respiration, heart rate, temperature. I also became really attuned to bpm, in fact hit the exact optimum time on D. The result of all this, as mentioned above, is also two-fold. First the amazing part of a full endurance day with a conditioned horse...the thrill of steeplechase, the forward thinking horse that turns up for D. Second is also seeing your horse transform into a fit, confident, and truly tuned event horse. My horse's confidence soared after his three day, so much that he did his first P with a clean xc shortly thereafter. I learned a great deal, mostly that great preparation gives great results, and I have been better prepared for all my events since then."

*Nancy Koch, Area VIII (South Farm)*

"On the endurance day, after you have done Phases A, B (steeplechase) and C, the horse that you ride out of the box for phase D (cross country) is a more confident horse and very forward thinking and a blast to ride!!! They finish thinking that they are Superman and nothing can hurt them!! I did the T3D last year with my five year old and he was awarded best conditioned and this year we came out at prelim and have never looked back!! I am hoping to do a long format CCI\* next fall!! And can't wait!!!"

*Cindy Wood, Area II (Waredaca)*

"The number one reason to do a training 3 day for me is to learn to ride a different horse on x-c. Sure, there are tons of other reasons but that does it for me. You don't understand until you've been there that you have a different horse under you at a 3 day. A T3DE teaches you how to cope with that without the hugeness of a [one star] and up."

*Lisa Burnett, Area II (Winner of 2005 Waredaca)*

"I learned an ENORMOUS amount prepping my horse for the T3DE -- he was not your typical event horse (big WB transitioning from an all-dressage life) either in his mental approach or in his physical makeup.

By the time we crossed the finish line on [phase] B, he was keener and more forward than he'd ever been in his life, a change that turned out to be permanent. I was whooping like a fool.

By the time we went out on [phase] D, I had proof that he was fitter and stronger than he'd ever been in his life -- his numbers in the box were terrific, despite being a heavy 17.1 hand warmblood.

And, much to my surprise, jumping around clean and sharp on SJ day felt like a true achievement; it wouldn't have happened without all the months of prep we put in.

It was the best thing I've ever done with horses."

*Nancy Seybold, Area II (Waredaca)*

You can learn more one the USEA's website at

<http://www.useventing.com/competitions.php?section=training3day>

Watch for further articles that will discuss the different components of the classic three day format! There will be upcoming articles about roads and tracks, steeplechase, the vet box, the jog and all of those components that make the Classic Three Day the ultimate test.