

# Q & A

## Our panel includes:

### Susan Schoellkopf

Susan operates SBS Farms with Jennifer Alfano in Buffalo, New York. She is an R-rated United States Equestrian Federation judge, and has trained numerous horses to USEF Horse of the Year honors. Susan is also a USEF board member and serves on various USEF and USHJA committees, including USEF's Equine Drug and Medications committee.



### Andrew Ellis

Andrew is a show manager who resides in North Carolina and holds an R judge's card with the USEF. He takes an active role in the governance of the sport by serving on the USEF's board of directors and several committees, including the safety, ethics and hearing committees.



COURTESY USHJA

### Steve Soule, VMD

Steve is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and runs a private practice in Florida devoted exclusively to "A" circuit show hunters, jumpers and dressage horses. He is currently a member of the American Association of Equine Practitioners and has served as the United States Equestrian Team's veterinarian on numerous occasions since 1978.



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*During your time in the industry, what improvements have you seen with regard to horse welfare?*

**SUSAN:** I think people are definitely more aware of the welfare of the horse in the sense that there are a lot more organizations out there now like the American Horse Council that keep welfare a focus. Organizations like that make people aware of the abuses that horses are undergoing, and I think a lot of legislation has changed through them, also. Rescue groups are also emerging all over the country in an effort to make more people aware of horse welfare.

**ANDREW:** From the competition management perspective, I would say that the requirement of safety products like safety cups has played a big role in improving the welfare of the horse. I also think that the comprehensive drugs and medication program and the implementation of it at events keeps the playing field fair and the horses safer. In recent years, we've started having more thorough reviews of accidents and monitoring the statistics of competition, which creates a safer overall environment for the horse and the competitor.

**STEVE:** The simple fact that horse welfare has gotten talked about is an improvement, and because it has gotten a voice, I think stewardship has also improved.

*In your opinion, what is the number one area in which welfare needs improvement, and what can the USHJA do to help?*

**SUSAN:** We need more clinics to make trainers and riders aware of simple, basic horsemanship. An understanding of fundamental horsemanship translates to good horse welfare. So we need to go back to the basics that help with the welfare of the horse, whether it's rough hands, too much spur or just a lack of knowledge on the riders' and trainers' part.

**ANDREW:** The main area of [needed] improvement lies with trainer responsibility and accountability. For its part, the USHJA can continue to improve its licensing and accreditation program for trainers. I believe in strict peer review, where high-level trainers with proven backgrounds monitor actions of maybe less accomplished or beginner trainers; a sort of mentor program.

**STEVE:** The administration of two non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and corticosteroids is at the forefront of what needs improvement in the industry. Currently, seven NSAIDs are approved by the USEF to use in competition including: 1) bute (phenylbutazone); 2) Banamine (flunixin); 3) Arquel (meclofenamic acid); 4)

Three industry professionals discuss the advancement of horse welfare in the sport, areas that still need improvement and what the USHJA membership can do to improve the lives of horses.

Ketofen (ketoprofen); 5) Surpass (diclofenac); 6) Equioxx (firocoxib) and 7) naproxen. This isn't a topic that's going to be easily dealt with, but it definitely needs our attention. I don't think we should be giving horses two NSAIDs and corticosteroids and injecting their joints all at the same time.

*As an active industry official, what would you like to see exhibitors and trainers give more attention with regard to horse welfare at competitions?*

**SUSAN:** Again, I would like to see them pay more attention to good horsemanship.

**ANDREW:** I'd like to see them not longeing and running the horses into the ground to the extent in the hunter divisions [that] they go around in an almost trance-like state. It would also be beneficial to see the judging opinion change so that if the horse wants to be a little athletic or spirited, it's not penalized.

**STEVE:** I would like to see them take more personal responsibility and not be afraid to open their mouths and call out abusers. You should be proactive with your fellow exhibitors and trainers. It's self-discipline, but also not being afraid to say, "Don't do that." It's twofold: Regulate yourself and your peers.

*What's the biggest misconception involving the welfare of horses in the industry today?*

**SUSAN:** I think that people think that if a horse has a stall, hay and water, that's all that's needed to keep him healthy. There's a real lack of knowledge on [the importance of] blacksmith, dentist and veterinarian care, the value of a good nutrition program, and just all the basics. Too many people are skipping over the basics. Pony Club used to be so strong in teaching the basics to kids, and I think that today we've skipped a lot of steps.

**ANDREW:** Just because trainers are successful in [terms of] accolades and awards doesn't mean that they're automatically the correct choice for the person who puts the horse's welfare before [his or her] own personal interests. Owners and parents need to thoroughly research the trainer they invest their time, money and energy into.

**STEVE:** Trainers are demanding and veterinarians are injecting multiple joints on horses at a high rate of frequency without any indication for doing so. It's a terrible practice. It's

malpractice on the part of veterinarians who do it, and I think there are a huge number of owners/trainers who are demanding that it be performed. There's a phrase, "absent a diagnosis, medicine is poison, surgery is trauma and alternative therapies are witchcraft." And that's the key; if you don't have a lameness or diagnosis, why do you administer medicine? It's a bad thing to do, but it's happening rampantly in our industry. I think veterinarians are guilty of promoting that kind of activity to make money, and I also think that trainers and owners are demanding that all these horses' joints be injected on the off shot that one stride that was a quarter of an inch short that cost them a rail could have been prevented if the horse had his coffin joint injected.

*Discuss the importance of keeping the horse's best interests in mind throughout his athletic career.*

**SUSAN:** A lot of a horse's instincts are to run from fear and to run when he's scared of something. People need to keep in mind that horses need to be rewarded and trained correctly. The problems that horses have come from us training them poorly and riders riding them poorly; it's not the horse being horrible. Every horse, no matter if he's a show horse or not, wants to be a good horse in whatever his job is.

**ANDREW:** The horse is an athlete who doesn't really have a choice in the sport. They have to be treated with the utmost respect and care because we ask them to do something they don't elect to do voluntarily. It's important that we always keep that in mind and treat them with above and beyond common courtesy and make their welfare a priority.

**STEVE:** It's an emotional topic, because the question is: What is in the horse's best interest? If you go to the far left, no horse should ever be touched by a human being. They should live on the range in Wyoming and spend their days eating, breeding and galloping away from wolves. That's one side of the issue. The other side, then, is how do we manage a horse's athletic career? There's really no simple answer to that, because it's a combination of multiple factors. It's being mindful of his medication, over-longeing, [the] number of classes he competes in, downtime, wellness and nutrition. All of these things contribute to keeping the horse's best interests in mind.