

WARM-UP TIPS THAT WILL HAVE YOU CELEBRATING THREE-DAY SUCCESS

How you warm up your horse for each discipline at a CCI can mean the difference between success and failure. AIMI CLARK finds out how leading Italian Giovanni Ugolotti gets the best from his rides when it matters



When working in for the first phase Giovanni always focuses on the canter work before trotting. Here he prepares Punchline II for a two-star test. His CCI ride Coco Ocean warms up in the same way

MEET... GIOVANNI UGOLOTTI



ITALY'S Giovanni Ugolotti, 28, was shortlisted for last year's World Equestrian Games with Stormhill Kossack. This horse took him round his first four-star track, Pau, in the same year where they finished 12th. Giovanni is a Blue Chip supported rider and is based in Kettering, Northamptonshire with his girlfriend Kathryn Robinson and he currently has 10 horses of all levels to event.

Usually he likes to be back on board 45 minutes before his test.

"I spend the first 10 to 15 minutes in walk," he says. "To start with the horse is on a long contact to help her relax through her body. Then I gradually ask for higher head carriage and start to work her in a more correct dressage position."

Depending on the level of the test, Giovanni asks the horse to do some lateral work.

"If it's a one-star class there isn't a lot involved so I don't do too much but as the levels increase the movements get more difficult and it's important to do the lateral work. It helps to make sure the horse is switched on and listening to me."



DAY ONE DRESSAGE

By the time Giovanni enters the dressage arena he has already ridden Coco this morning. Typically, he lunges the horse first thing and a short while later he backs around the venue to familiarise her with the atmosphere.

"I don't worry too much about whether the horse is on the bit at this stage. The main goal is to get her to relax," says Giovanni.



HANDY HELPER

AT three-day events Giovanni assists his girlfriend Kathryn Robinson with her warm up. He was on hand to help at Houghton where Kathryn was contesting her first CIC*** aboard Let It Bee (left).

"He's a hot horse who needs a lot of work before the dressage to help him chill out," explains Giovanni.

Kathryn's test is on Friday afternoon and the pair arrives on Wednesday. 'Bee' is ridden that afternoon and on Thursday morning he is lunged before a jumping session at lunchtime. In the afternoon he is schooled

- On Friday he is hacked in the morning and lunged one hour before his test. Kathryn mounts approximately 40 minutes before she is due in the arena
- "If Bee doesn't get the work he worries about his surroundings and the other horses and is very tense," says Giovanni. "This preparation works because it is varied and he never does too much at one time. Little and often stops him standing in his stable fretting"
- Giovanni is Kathryn's eyes on the ground during her warm up. She works Bee in all three paces and practises different movements before running through the test. Giovanni can spot things that she might not feel

"I think that works better than someone trying to have a lesson in the warm-up arena," adds Giovanni

Next Giovanni picks up canter.

"I always leave the trot work until last," he says. "It might not suit every horse but for mine I've always found that it improves the trot."

Giovanni spends between five and 10 minutes working in canter. "It's not a solid block of canter, though. The horse starts off long and low and then I shorten her up and ask her to engage her quarters and really push from behind. Transitions help if a horse is naturally laid back and flat."

Although Giovanni always applies one warm up regime at an event he adapts it to suit the different horses he rides.

"If they tend to fall behind the vertical I will ride them more forward and on a looser contact for longer. Or if they are hot they might get extra work and if they are nery I'll give them

more time to wander around with no pressure in order to adjust to their surroundings."

When he is happy with the canter Giovanni spends time working Coco in trot before riding through the test. "Some riders don't like to do this because they think the horse will anticipate what is coming next in the arena but that isn't a problem for this horse."

THE FINAL MINUTES

In the last few minutes before going into the arena Giovanni's helpers remove his horse's boots and do a final tack check and wipe over (below). Then he heads into the arena. Usually this is in a new area for the horse and at major events there are spectators, a loud speaker, photographers, white boards and flowers among many other things for horses to get used to.

"I always go into the arena the day before when it's offered," says Giovanni. "If your horse tends to be flat it might be best not to do that so that he gets a lift when he goes in for his test but if there's a chance he might find it spooky or exciting make the most of going in when it's quiet."

While waiting for the judge to signal the start of his test Giovanni trots Coco around the outside of the arena. "Let the horse see the white boards, flowers and the judges' cars and anything else he might take exception to."

Reestablish your horse's rhythm and don't panic when you hear the judge's horn. "If you're at the other end of the arena there is time to get to A. Don't react by kicking the horse forward to get back quickly — he will tense up, lose his rhythm and undo all of your preparation work which there isn't time to do again."

Giovanni rides his horses at least once before his warm up to help them relax and avoid moments like these



DAY TWO CROSS-COUNTRY

How Giovanni prepares for this phase depends on the level at which he is competing.

"At a three- or four-star event I take the horse for a stretch first thing in the morning. I'll give them a canter to get their lungs open and raise their heartbeat and maybe pop a couple of fences but nothing too strenuous or for too long. If it's a one-star horse, though, I don't think there's any need to do this."

Giovanni doesn't ride for longer than an hour in total before his round. "For the first 10 minutes I trot and don't ask too much of the horse. I want Coco to be long in front and stepping up to the bridle and taking me forward."

Five minutes of canter work follows (below). "There is no point in aimlessly cantering around in circles, though, as there has to be a point to it. Once we've established a good forward rhythm I push the horse on and ask her to lengthen her stride. Then I'll ask her to shorten and come back to me. I need to know that she's switched on and listening."



Next Giovanni steers his mount over the warm-up fences.

"Usually I'll do everything that's there. I jump off a straight line and string a couple together, then angle two fences, ride a turn tight off each rein and tackle a skinny and a combination if there are any."

Giovanni feels that between 10 and 12 fences is plenty.

"I think over-jumping is a common mistake. Some horses need a couple more than others but some will switch off if you over do it. Remember they have a lot to do out on the course so don't waste their energy and enthusiasm before then," he adds.

The quality of the jumping is more important than quantity.

"Clearing a simple log once at an angle and then off a turn is more beneficial than clearing it 10 times in a straight line."

Giovanni prefers not to tackle show jumps if they are offered in the warm up.



How you jump a fence in the warm up is more important than how many times you do it. Giovanni tackles it at an angle and off a tight turn to get Coco Ocean listening to him

Enter the warm-up area for both jumping phases with a clear structure to follow



"You need a different canter for those and there is a tendency for people to jump them too big. There is no benefit for my horses so I don't do them. I also worry that it might make them less careful the next day."

Giovanni has been going for 10 minutes now so he lets Coco walk and relax. "Now I'm thinking about the course, where my minute markers are and what lines I intend to take."

Giovanni likes his last practice jump to be about 10 minutes before he is called into the start box. If things are delayed he will clear one more fence before setting off.

"During the last three or four minutes I only walk so that both myself and my horse can catch our breath: I do a last girth check

STARTING SUCCESSFULLY

GIOVANNI tries not to spend too much time hanging around the startbox.

"It can wind up some horses because they are excited while others can hang for home when they set off. Coco walks in and out once or twice when we have a minute to go and then when the countdown gets to 10 I walk in, stand her still and we're off. Some of my other horses don't go in until it gets to five, though, and then we set off without stopping."

COPING WITH A BUSY COLLECTING RING



THE show jumping warm-up area is notoriously tight on space and gets busy (above), particularly at one-day events. "I used to ride a stallion who got very excited with all the horses around him and I've known others who have been naughty," says Giovanni, who copes with this behaviour by first warming up the horse on the flat in a quieter place.

"Even if it's just a small area at the bottom of the lorry park it's much better than nothing."

Giovanni then takes the horse into the collecting ring and goes straight over the fences in order to keep his concentration.

"I'm in there for as short a time as possible and I don't allow the horse's attention to deviate away from me and the job in hand by wandering around."

"It helps us both get our eye in and it encourages the horse to make a shape."

Next his helper builds an upright and Giovanni jumps it at two heights — slightly lower than the fences in the arena and then the same size. Then he tackles an oxer. Again it starts small before the back rail is raised and Giovanni tackles it again. He clears it another three times with the spread gradually being made wider and both rails raised before the front pole is put at the same height as the back one to make a square over to finish.

"I don't worry if the horse has one or two rails down out here. In fact, I'm more worried if they don't because often that makes them more careful in the arena."

