

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

### STRESS AND THE IMPACT IT HAS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF RECREATIONAL DRESSAGE HORSES AND PONIES

**Senior investigator:** Dr. T.L. Frankel, Lecturer, Dept. of Agricultural Sciences,  
La Trobe University

**Other investigators:** Ms Bridget Murphy, Honours student, Animal and Veterinary BioSciences,  
Dept. of Agricultural Sciences,  
La Trobe University

#### Reason for carrying out the project

- Stress can affect the behaviour and performance of horses and ponies.
- Documenting the level of stress experienced by horses and ponies could help to form the basis for further experiments on methods to improve handling techniques in performing horses and thus improve performance.
- Improved understanding of links between stress and behaviour could help to reduce injuries in adults or children handling horses or ponies.

#### Information we require and how it will help us

- We need to measure the levels of the stress hormone (called cortisol) in the saliva from amateur pony and adult rider dressage horses before and after they have been in a dressage competition.
- Cortisol levels will be matched against the performance scores.
- Cortisol levels will also be matched against the behaviour of the horse or pony before and during the competition.
- We will also need to measure the cortisol levels in companion horses or ponies that have been brought to the event but are not competing. This will show how much the whole experience of transportation and being at a show or rally, independent of competing, affects stress levels.
- Your pony or horse will help us to achieve our aim to contribute to improve knowledge of the effects of stress during competitions and hopefully improve safety for horses and people.

#### What tests will be performed on your horse or pony

- We will require two swabs of saliva samples from each horse or pony.
- The first swab should be collected about half to one hour before a competition starts or when the bit is first placed in the mouth
- The second swab should be collected as soon as possible after completion of a dressage test.
- The first swab from non competing horses or ponies will be taken at about the same time as the first sample from competing companion horse and the second swab at a convenient time before returning home.
- We will store the swabs on ice at the grounds and when we have collected all the samples for the day they will be taken back to the laboratory at La Trobe University and stored in a freezer until we have sufficient samples to analyse them.
- Ideally we would like to collect swabs from each horse or pony on two separate days so as to try to eliminate variable factors such as different weather conditions that can occur on competition days.

This means we will need a maximum of four saliva swabs from each horse or pony.

- If any horse or pony becomes agitated by the procedure it will not be continued, not only because the stress hormone levels will have increased too much for it to be useful in the experiment, but also for the safety of the horse and owner.

### **How will the saliva samples using swabs be collected.**

- We would like the swabs to be collected by an experienced adult (the owner or parent/adult supporter of the child owner) or, if sufficiently experienced, by the owner under the supervision of the parent or adult supporter.
- Prior to the collection day, we will provide you with instructions or give you a demonstration of the method.
- A cotton swab should be placed and held in the horse's or pony's mouth between the cheeks or lips and teeth or moved around that area of the mouth until enough saliva is obtained (approx 1 minute). The swab will be held in a gloved hand to avoid contamination.

### **Other information to be collected.**

- Behaviour of horses and ponies will be recorded before and during the performance, this will be done by Bridget Murphy using a standardised form to record observations such as sweating, agitation, resistance to commands by owner, throwing head up and down, increased respiration or snorting, neighing, backing or sideways movements.
- The judge's score which will be used as a measure of performance and will be collected from the event organiser on the day.
- Once the second sample of the day has been taken the horses or ponies and owners are then no longer needed in the experiment.

### **Where will the tests be carried out?**

The tests will be conducted at pony club rallies or dressage competitions.

- For tests being carried out at pony club rallies or at any competitions we will have obtained the consent of the PCAV to approach members and to oversee the conduct of the project. The project has also been approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of La Trobe University.
- **Accidents can occur very easily and it is essential that the horse or pony be under control at all times so as to reduce the possibility of an accident occurring to the pony, handler or any people and ponies nearby.**

**Time involved:** Altogether the swabbing procedure should not take more than a few minutes. Again, if any horse or pony becomes agitated by the procedure it will not be continued, firstly because we do not want to risk any harm to horses or owners, and also because the stress hormone levels will have increased too much for it to be useful in the experiment.

### **What happens to the information you give us**

- We will use a code so as to be able to identify you with your horse or pony.
- All data obtained from your horse or pony will be kept in a secure place.
- We will not give your name or details to anyone unconnected with this project or to any sponsors should we acquire any in the future.
- We will not use the information we have, except for the purposes of assessing the effect of stress on performance.
- The information you give us will not appear in any articles published in scientific journals or in reports or in talks or lectures in a manner that would make identification possible.

After we have downloaded and analysed the information on your own horse or pony, you will be able to obtain a copy of the results of the tests from the Senior Investigator (whose contact details are listed below).

### **Withdrawal from participation**

You have the right to withdraw from participation in this project at anytime, and the right to require that all traces of your participation are removed from the project records provided that this right is exercised within *four weeks* of the completion of your participation in the project.

**Queries or Complaints?**

About the project can be directed to;

The Senior Investigator, Dr. Theresa Frankel, of the School of Life Sciences on telephone no. (03) 9479 2180 or by email [T.Frankel@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:T.Frankel@latrobe.edu.au) .

Or

Miss Bridget Murphy, Animal Science Honours Student – La Trobe University, Bundoora. 0409843646

Or email [bmmurphy@students.latrobe.edu.au](mailto:bmmurphy@students.latrobe.edu.au)

If you have any complaints or queries that the researcher has not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Animal Ethics Committee, La Trobe University, Victoria -

Animal Welfare Officer - Dr Sue Ottomanski, can be contacted on Phone 03-9479 1361

Or via email [animaethics@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:animaethics@latrobe.edu.au)

**STATEMENT OF AGREEMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

**PROJECT ON STRESS AND THE IMPACT IT HAS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF RECREATIONAL DRESSAGE HORSES AND PONIES**

**Senior investigator:** Dr. T.L. Frankel, BVSc PhD, Lecturer, Dept. of Agricultural Sciences, La Trobe University

**Other investigators:** Ms Bridget Murphy, Honours student, Animal and Veterinary BioSciences, Dept. of Agricultural Sciences, La Trobe University

I/we..... the owner and/or adult supporter/parent/guardian of the owner have read and understood the information in the document “Information about a project on the stress and the impact it has on the performance of recreational dressage horses and ponies.” and any questions I/we have asked have been answered to my/our satisfaction.

I/we agree to the horse/pony called ..... , having salivary swabs taken and to allowing behavioural observations to be made and dressage scores to be made available.

I/we will be responsible for handling the horse/pony.

I/we agree to participate in the project, realising that I/we may withdraw at any time.

I/we agree that the research data provided by me/us or obtained with my/our permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that neither my/our name(s) nor any other identifying information is used.

**Name of Participant (block letters)** .....

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Name of Participant (block letters)** .....

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Name of Researcher (block letters)** .....

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Name of Student Supervisor** Dr. T.L. FRANKEL

**Contact addresses:**

Questions regarding **this project** can be directed to the Senior Investigator, Dr. Theresa Frankel, Department of Agricultural Sciences, School of Life Sciences, La Trobe University Bundoora 3086. Phone no. (03) 9479 2180 Fax (03) 9479 2180 or by email at [T.Frankel@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:T.Frankel@latrobe.edu.au)  
Chair or Executive Officer, Animal Ethics Committee, La Trobe University, Bundoora 3086. [animaethics@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:animaethics@latrobe.edu.au) or Animal Welfare Officer - Dr Sue Ottomanski via Phone: (03) 9479 1361