

# Abuse must not be tolerated

Carl Hester on judging and why FEI officials must be treated with respect

HAVING known Christian Landolt for many years, I was very sad to see his resignation from FEI officialdom and horrified by his reasons – concerns over abuse and bullying (news, 13 April). Christian was originally encouraged to become a judge by Stephen Clarke, and he took on the challenge in the eventing world – where he had ridden to top level – with the same passion and integrity as Stephen.

Christian's experiences with the way he has been treated are far from isolated, and that others are afraid to speak out speaks volumes.

With the spotlight on horse welfare, and rightly so, an expectation that officials are treated with respect and that their welfare is looked after is totally reasonable; anything else is unacceptable.

Tensions can run high at competitions, of course. In the dressage world there is a very clear policy that if a

## OPINION

rider has a gripe they have a discussion in the presence of the chief steward.

There have been moments I remember, such as a trainer receiving a "handbagging" from Mariette Withages, then chair of the FEI dressage committee, for rudeness

to a steward. An apology followed, *tout suite*.

The key words are transparency and consistency, and while the line may be fine between "heat of the moment" and

abusive, if that line is crossed there must be accountability. If multiple cases of verbal abuse are

not, as the FEI spokesperson said, "the information we are receiving", perhaps this is because people are afraid to speak out.

If the FEI does not represent its officials, who go through extensive and expensive training to get there, who does it represent?

Stephen mentions those

*"Perhaps people are afraid to speak out"*



One of Britain's greatest dressage riders and trainers, Carl Hester MBE is an Olympic gold medallist and multi-medallist at European and World Championships.

"Be kind to staff" posters you see in medical practices and elsewhere, clearly stating that abuse will not be tolerated.

And I'm reminded of the story of Henry Ford, the motor magnate, interviewing two equally impressive candidates for the same job over dinner. The one who was not successful asked the man why, when they hadn't talked about engineering, just about

general things. The response was that the successful candidate had been polite to the waiters. He'd seen human beings, not hierarchy. There are lessons there.

One route the FEI could take to address these issues and bolster confidence is to appoint an ombudsman to whom concerns could be reported, and who could take transparent action.

In the meantime, perhaps we can tempt Christian, whose interest and passion have also taken him to advanced level in our sport, into pure dressage.

## SHOWING SUPPORT

WE recently had the World Cup finals in the USA but several qualified combinations opted not to travel to Omaha, Nebraska. Flying the horses isn't the issue – instead the problem lies with the quarantine rules that mean horses must compete at full power after days of being only hand-walked. With this in mind, I understand completely why some riders didn't go.

Closer to home, we have international competition returning to Hickstead next month (9–14 May), and it's great to see banner sponsor I.C.E Horseboxes continuing to support, and several other sponsors who have given the organisers confidence.

There are still some opportunities for individuals or companies to add their support (and be very well looked after), but ultimately the success of this valuable event will be driven by riders' support. See you there. H&H

● *What do you think of Carl's idea to appoint an FEI ombudsman? Let us know at [hhletters@futurenet.com](mailto:hhletters@futurenet.com)*

There's a fine line between "heat of the moment" and abuse, but judges and officials must be treated with respect, says Carl Hester

