

# Focus on Dope Testing

January 2026

Your questions answered

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## Hot Topic...

- By Ruth Flack (Judges and Rules Committee SHB(GB))

If show societies are going to protect and grow participation in the discipline of horse showing then we must place integrity at the top of the list when considering what we need to deliver. We are nothing without integrity and our actions should be transparent and accountable to our members.

We want our members to understand what we are doing to ensure a clean and fair sport. Here, we will attempt to answer some of the questions raised about dope testing in showing. I will caveat this by stating that this information applies to SHB(GB) and our own classes and that other societies procedures and practices may differ.

## The Cost of Dope Testing

Dope testing costs consist of several elements; testing kits; attending veterinary fees; laboratory testing fees; dope testing facilities; dope testing officer(s) and courier costs. The costs below are based on last years prices:

Controlled dope testing kit	£25 per kit purchased from the LGC laboratories in Newmarket.
Cost of attending vet	Most veterinary practices will require a reasonable estimate of the time that they are required to attend for. When organising tests for classes at shows we have to consider that if an emergency occurs then the attending vet may be delayed or not arrive at all. Vets costs are IRO £350 - £500 for attending for a period of approximately 3 hours.
Expenses for attending dope testing officer	<p>Dope Testing Officers are officials who are responsible for overseeing the dope testing process. They accompany the animal(s) and owner(s) to the dope testing area and explain the testing process fully. Together with the attending vet, they ensure that the process is witnessed by the Responsible Person and that all tests are drawn, labelled, and sealed in front of the RP and that they are made aware of what happens to the samples taken.</p> <p>SHB(GB) use an FEI approved Dope Testing Officer.</p> <p>It would be reasonable to expect to pay for motor mileage, food and refreshments and overnight accommodation (dependent on where the testing is taking place).</p>
Laboratory (FEI approved) fees	These are typically around £175 per sample. If a sample shows a positive reading, then further testing is required and the cost for this will be £600-£700.
Cost of Dope Testing Area	Some larger showgrounds have facilities set aside for these purposes which 'can' be free to use. Most
	equestrian centres will charge for use of stables for dope testing at the same rate as competitors hire cost.
Courier Costs	£25 - £50 depending on availability

The average overall cost of undertaking a testing session at a show is £1900 - this

figure is conservative and does not include further testing costs associated with a positive test.

### **Question 1 Why do we not test at every qualifier throughout the year?**

There are financial and logistical constraints that prevent this happening.

Logistically it is not always possible to arrange testing for some shows and the need to be unannounced is an important factor when planning. We keep our testing schedule confidential, and competitors simply do not know when and where will test. Qualifying shows are held all over the UK, mostly at weekends. There are weekends where multiple shows are being held, it would be incredibly difficult to cover all shows on these occasions.

There are approximately 20 RIHS qualifiers in the showing calendar alone, before we even consider HOYS qualifiers. If SHB(GB) were to test say the top two exhibits in each RIHS qualifying class (3 x weights, 1 x Small Hunter, 1 x Ladies Hunter, 2 x Working Hunter then these costs would equate to 7 classes with say two tests, so 14 tests per qualifier, that's 280 tests just on RIHS qualifiers.

With 14 tests, each show would cost £2.5K in laboratory fees (assuming all negative), plus vet fees and other expenses this would be in the region of £3.5K per show and some £70K per annum to cover one set of qualifiers.

The cost of this extensive dope testing would have to be funded. Societies' costs are covered to some extent by membership and entry fees, so it would fall to competitors to fund this, it is simply not feasible.

### **Question 2 Why don't you test all horses competing in a class? / Why not have an independent vet observing the ring?**

Scalability - It should be borne in mind that your testing must be swift and not cause unnecessary delay to a competitor. You need to be able to observe all animals and ensure that the owners / riders are aware of what is happening and exactly what is expected of them during the process. Selecting large numbers for testing would require you to scale up on all officials, you would need a large dope testing area and multiple vets to ensure that this process is well run and achievable within a limited time frame.

If an independent vet were to watch each class you would need multiple vets, some watching, some testing. This becomes even more complicated with multiple rings running.

### **Question 3 Selection - How is it decided?**

Selection can be based on random numbers, pre-selected placings, or, (in a few cases), it can be intelligence led targeted testing, or a horse can be selected on the day due to exhibiting signs that may indicate possible substance abuse\*.

For instance, this year SHB(GB) tested winners of some weight classes and then the following day we tested third placed horses, another day we tested random place exhibits from amateur classes.

Where a horse is selected through placing and it has been previously tested by us, then the dope testing official may select another horse for testing. If a rider or producer has multiple horses competing, then they could expect to be tested a

number of times during the season on different horses, that's simple mathematics.

When testing first / second placed horses then testing can be delayed until after a championship has been completed.

Intelligence led targeting requires that evidence is gathered, and a sensible approach is adopted. The implications of mishandling are significant.

\*On the subject of looking for horses that are doped.

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A horse 'Looking like they are doped' doesn't necessarily mean they are doped. We have discussed this matter with our dope testing officer who advised that from experience that most horses that exhibit some of the signs of substance abuse, are very likely to test negative. Excessive sweating in a horse could mean that they are over excited, anxious, or reacting to warm conditions and exercise. A dropped penis does not necessarily indicate drug abuse, it could simply mean that the horse requires a pee or has some other physiological condition.

#### **Question 4 Why don't we use 'Elective Testing?'**

Elective Testing is a method provided by the British Horseracing Authority to racing trainers who wish to establish that that medication that may have been administered for essential veterinary treatment has cleared a horses system before a race, or for when they suspect that inadvertent medication has been given or possibly cross contaminated foodstuffs. These samples are tested for a maximum of four substances. This type of testing is not suitable for dope testing programmes in competition due to the sampling being focused on a small number of known substances.

#### **Question 5 Why not use mouth swabs?**

This method is not in use in horses. The British Horseracing Authority has commenced (2023) a new anti-doping saliva and sweat testing pilot scheme for Jockeys.

#### **Question 6 What are we testing for?**

SHB(GB) uses the UK FEI approved laboratory LGC in Newmarket for sample analysis. LGC are the worlds largest independent provider of drug surveillance and doping control activities. They are accredited to International Quality Standard ISO/IEC 17025 which enables laboratories to demonstrate that they operate competently and generate valid results.

The substances that the LGC are testing for are all those listed within the **FEI Prohibited Substances List** and are categorised as follows:

'**Banned Substances**' are substances that are deemed by the FEI to have no

'**Controlled Medication**' are substances that are deemed by the FEI to have therapeutic value and/or be commonly used in equine medicine. Controlled Medication have the potential to affect performance and/or be a welfare risk to the horse.

The prohibited substance list can be found here

<https://inside.fei.org/content/anti-doping-rules>

We would urge all competitors to check this list at least once per year as it evolves - for instance, this year's changes see the addition of some medicines used to treat horses with Equine Metabolic Syndrome.

For any avoidance of doubt... the subject of bromide use in horses is raised regularly, this substance (potassium bromide), is included within the FEI banned substances list.

### **Question 7    How many of the samples are tested? / Tests going 'accidentally missing'/ 'Mates' - it does not get processed properly...**

SHB(GB) require all samples taken to be tested. The number of samples taken (certified by the vet) must match the invoices received in the office for laboratory processing (see below). This provides a full audit trail of activity. For a test to 'go missing' then every person would have to be complicit in a cover up, from the attending vet, dope testing officer, General Secretary and full Council.

### **Our Dope Testing - Confidentiality and Accountability**

There are just two people within SHB(GB) who are aware of when and where dope testing will take place during the showing season.

Records of tests taken are filed at the office until the test results are received, these are then matched to the testing records by the General Secretary. The General Secretary informs the Person in Charge of Dope testing of the results and the owners are informed immediately of the results.

The Council of SHB(GB) are informed at the end of the season of the dope testing undertaken, the number of tests and the results. This process is fully accountable, financial records must match the testing paperwork and results.

### **Question 8    Publishing Results - why publish the negative results as well?**

We publish both negative and positive results - if you have only negative tests during a season, printing the negative results provides our members with the confidence that we are undertaking testing and may act as a deterrent for those considering using an illegal substance. Positive results are published after a disciplinary decision has been made.

### **Penalties - too low?**

When a positive test is verified, a disciplinary committee is chosen to deal with the case. Members of the committee do not have to all be Council Members and may include a person from another Society or could include someone with veterinary or legal experience.

Evidence will be submitted and considered by the committee. The committee

would want to establish the exact circumstances that led to the blood sample containing a prohibited or banned substance, what the substance was, evidence of where it came from, how it was administered etc.

The committee would need to decide between the balance of probability being either a deliberate or accidental action. Whilst ignorance is not an acceptable defence, there may be cases where a committee would impose a lesser penalty in a case where the balance of probability was that it was a genuine controlled medication mistake, as opposed to a deliberate use of a banned substance.

The current system imposes fines up to £6K plus any incurred costs such as laboratory testing fees and a ban that could be either temporary or permanent. The Rider, Owner and Producer (if applicable), of a horse can be subject to any disciplinary process in relation to a positive dope test.

### **BEFAR System**

BEFAR is the term used for the British Equestrian Federations Equine Anti-Doping and Controlled Medication Rules. BEFAR and its associated testing programme are managed and administered centrally by them on behalf of their Member Bodies. All positive cases are dealt with through the results management provisions in BEFAR, with cases being heard and determined by their Hearing Body.

The Showing Council investigated the possible umbrella membership under this scheme in 2020. Several member societies withdrew from the process due to the estimated cost of testing under BEFAR.

### **This is horse abuse / This is cheating ?**

We agree...

SHB(GB) is committed to working to ensure a clean and fair sport for all. We will continue to undertake regular dope testing at events and strive to ensure that our competitors, judges and horses are all treated with decency and respect.

### **Together we can ensure a clean sport - How you can help**

If you have witnessed any animal on a showground receiving a banned or prohibited substance, then you can inform a Dope Testing Officer or speak in confidence to our General Secretary (Ms Catherine Burdock). SHB(GB) assure you that you will be treated with respect and confidentiality.

