

Riding, study and work: Can you have it all?

Any rider knows the commitment and sacrifice associated with horses: the many hours, the early starts, the bad weather, missing out on social events, and of course the inevitable hole in your hip pocket. Add study and/or work to your schedule, and you've undoubtedly got your work cut out for you.

Of course, we love it, and many of us wouldn't have it any other way, but how can we best manage these commitments, in order to achieve success and enjoy the ride?

My story

After finishing VCE and completing two years of Uni, I decided to press pause on study. Having not identified with my first choice of degree, I decided to take a year off to find what I "really wanted to do". What better way to spend that year than by riding full time. After landing a position with dressage guru, Charlotte Pedersen, one year soon turned into four and a half.

What an experience it was.

Learning to train numerous types and personalities of both horses and riders, travelling overseas to ride for a top dressage stable, and being paid to compete talented horses – these are only a few of the numerous educational and rewarding experiences I was so fortunate to gain.

Having never intended for dressage to be my long term career, I then decided to explore alternative paths. After much deliberation, I chose to study Engineering. Later, Charlotte would remind me that horses are not mathematical equations! I was accepted into the University of Melbourne and felt ready to return to the books.

Then came the challenge: how do I maintain my standard of riding and competition, do justice to my study *and* work enough to support myself? Also a lover of fitness, added to the mix was my desire to go to the gym, to do Pilates and to run regularly. Occasionally there was even a romance I had to make time for! There just weren't enough hours in the day, and I remember often feeling as though I could never simultaneously succeed in all facets of my life.



Graduation 2013

Although it felt like I never would, I got there. In 2013 I graduated with Honours. What's more, many of my most treasured riding successes came during my University years. I achieved these milestones whilst managing to support myself financially (albeit with a little help from my wonderful parents now and then). I won't say it was a walk in the park, but for what it's worth, here are some of elements that made it work for me...

Find the balance

This looks different for everyone. For me, it was studying three subjects per semester instead of the usual four. This meant a few more years at Uni, but a much improved quality of life throughout. Some riders prefer to study in the evenings, attend lectures online, or condense their contact hours to reduce the number of days spent on campus. Whatever it is, you need to find the balance works for *you*.

Be organised

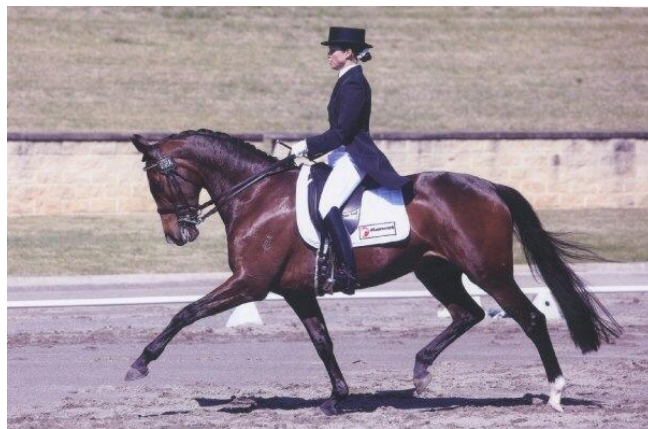
This is a must for any busy person. In addition to thorough planning, this meant two things for me: a mobile pantry, and a mobile wardrobe.

Firstly, I often needed to eat on the go; brekkie on the way to ride or coach, lunch en route to Uni, and sometimes dinner on the way home. Planning and preparing all my meals and snacks meant that I could eat well, whenever and wherever I was.

Secondly, the wardrobe. Clothes for riding, Uni, Pilates, running and going out; toiletries, towels and shoes – I would carry it all in the car. This certainly got on my nerves in the end, but meant that I was prepared in case I wanted / needed to cram one more activity in. I was also lucky enough to have the support of Charlotte and her husband Rob - I'm sure if they charged me a dollar for every shower I took at their place during those years, they could retire by now.

Quality not quantity

I'm sure this comes as no surprise; quality beats quantity hands down when it comes to both riding and study. An effective 20 minute ride is better than a 40 minute session in which your frustration / distraction / fatigue gets the better of you. And of course a short ride is better than no ride at all. The same goes for study.



National Dressage Championships 2009

Plan & compromise

Think ahead to major events and milestones: competitions, exams, important work commitments. Prioritise these events and then plan ahead to work around them. This might mean training a little less leading up to your exam period, or making training your number one priority (and letting study take a backseat) leading up to competitions.

Doing everything perfectly, all the time, is simply not possible. Being forever a perfectionist, I appreciate the temptation to think that it is. It isn't. Get comfortable with that, and then decide what is most important to you at each moment. This will free you up to whole-heartedly enjoy each and every experience.

The journey to earn that piece of paper can be long – work out how to find the balance so that you can thrive, rather than just survive.



After winning the Aachen Challenge, Dressage Festival 2009

