

FROM ORDEAL *to ideal*

A warm-up session before a competition doesn't have to be a car crash — although it often sees stress levels soaring. **Catherine Welton** canvasses experts on how to emulate the pros and make this pre-contest element a smooth and serene experience



THE WARM-UP area at a competition can become so frenetic that even the pros can struggle to keep a lid on their horse — and therefore what hope does the novice or nervous rider have in such an environment? Horses often find themselves packed into a very small space, with limited room to move, and may become involved in a bit of a bun fight to jump the practice fences if this is a jumping contest.

When things go well in the warm-up, though, this is where horse and rider can get mentally and physically ready to really shine in the arena proper before a dressage judge or over a course of fences. However, working around other equestrians and their competitive equines often isn't a picnic. Sometimes, in fact, the warm-up feels like the most stressful part of the entire competition.

The good news is that there are plenty of things a rider can do to make the warm-up a more positive experience to ensure a successful session every time. Follow the rules of the ring is the advice of one event organiser. Practise accuracy and discipline at home, says a top event rider. And, comments a confidence coach, have realistic expectations before you even enter this frenetic cauldron.