



4th ECVSMR Scientific Meeting

20-22 July 2023 MAISONS-ALFORT, FRANCE

PROCEEDINGS



EUROPEAN COLLEGE
OF VETERINARY SPORTS MEDICINE
AND REHABILITATION



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IMPRESSUM

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Publisher

ECVSMR

ISSN: 2510-8093

Gastroscopy findings and faecal blood test in active dressage horses with clinical signs suggestive of equine gastric ulcers

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Objectives: Equine gastric ulcer syndrome (EGUS) is insufficiently documented in dressage horses. This study aimed at assessing the potential of clinical signs and faecal blood test (FBT) to diagnose EGUS in active dressage horses.

Methods: Retrospective study conducted on 24 client-owned dressage horses with clinical signs suggesting EGUS. Gastroscopy, FBT (Succeed, Freedom Health, USA) and questionnaire completed by horses' owners were recorded during clinical investigation. When present, equine squamous (ESGD) and glandular (EGGD) gastric diseases were characterized according to guidelines. One-way ANOVA or Chi-carré test with $p < 0.05$ was used to compare horses without gastric disease, with ESGD and/or EGGD.

Results: Eight (33.3%) horses had no gastric disease, 11 (45.8%) had ESGD with a grade $\geq 2/4$, and 12 (50.0%) had EGGD. Pain at girthing was the most common complaint in horses with ESGD (81.8%) and EGGD (91.7%) but also in all horses (100.0%) without gastric disease. Poor performance was reported more commonly in horses without gastric disease (50.0%) than horses with ESGD (27.3%) or EGGD (8.3%). No significant difference with stabling time was observed among horses with or without EGUS (mean \pm SD: 17.5 \pm 3.7 hours per day). Presence of faecal haemoglobin and albumin did not allow to distinct horses with ESGD (36.4% and 63.6%, respectively) or EGGD (33.3% and 66.7%, respectively) than horses without gastric disease (25.0% and 50.0%, respectively).

Conclusion: Clinical signs or results of FBT did not allow screening of dressage horses with or without EGUS for which gastroscopy remains mandatory for diagnosis.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical committee: No need as this is a retrospective study. Owners provided informed consent for their horses' inclusion in the study that was part of routine veterinary practice to establish a diagnosis of gastric ulcers. All procedures are in accordance with the national and international guidelines for animal welfare.

Sources of funding: This research received no external funding.