

# The Benefits Of AquaPacer Conditioning For The Dressage Horse



[Fair Hill Equine Therapy Center](#)





In 2009, we teamed up with Bruce Jackson at the Fair Hill Equine Therapy Center (F.H.E.T.C.) in Fair Hill, Maryland, to explore the benefits of an underwater treadmill or Aqua Pacer, as part of our fitness regimen. Our training program has always put a strong emphasis on fitness. Our horses live primarily outdoors rather than being stalled, and we utilize cross-country hacking, free lunging, free jumping, cavalletti exercises and hill climbing to enhance soft and hard tissue strength and cardiovascular health. The Aqua Pacer however, offers several intriguing benefits. Horses working in the above ground, underwater treadmill, use the same muscles, ligaments and tendons as land based exercise but concussive stress is greatly lowered. This high resistance, low impact workout, reduces weight bearing by 40-60%. In clinical settings, Aqua Pacer therapy has been shown to increase strength, fitness and cardiovascular endurance as well as improve range of motion and flexibility. The height of the water and the speed of the treadmill are fully adjustable to achieve specific outcomes.



We took three horses to the F.H.E.T.C., each with different training objectives. The first horse had completely recovered from a shoulder injury but had residual muscle atrophy and uneven forearm mobility that we hoped to improve. The goal for a second horse, an upper level dressage horse, was to further strengthen and supple its topline. Both horses worked in the Aqua Pacer, and in a European freestyle walker daily for 20 minutes each, for 3 weeks. The third horse was BW-Raphael, a yearling colt, I was preparing for Dressage at Devon. Although born with beautiful gaits, he was in an awkward growth stage. The power generated by his hind end was not sufficiently supported through his topline, restricting his forehand expression. Raphael was put on the same program described above for 11 days. Thereafter his program transitioned to 3 days per week of Aqua Pacer sessions along with 2 days per week of in-hand training for an additional 3 weeks.



*European Freestyle Walker*

The final week prior to Devon, BW-Raphael trained with his handler, Michael Bragdell at Hilltop Farm.

Our goals for the horses were exceeded with each building considerable muscle through their entire bodies and all showing improved range of motion through the fore and hind limbs. Interestingly, we found the benefits of the Aqua Pacer continued for several months after their sessions ceased and the horses resumed their normal routines. All three continued to build muscle and improve their movement at a rate more accelerated than we would have expected from their typical work and turnout schedules alone.



Many in the Thoroughbred racing industry are well familiar with Bruce Jackson and the rehabilitative services at the Fair Hill Equine Therapy Center. In addition to the Aqua Pacer they also offer hyperbaric oxygen therapy, cold saltwater therapy, shockwave therapy, solarium therapy, magnetic therapies and a host of other adjunct modalities. Although Bruce has been caring and training race horses for more than four decades, many do not know that Bruce actually began his equestrian life riding dressage horses and competing in three-day events. These diverse life experiences uniquely equip Bruce and his team to meet the needs of both racing and sport horses. Extreme care was extended to each horse to insure they had a positive, confident experience and all returned home in just superb condition! My yearling colt went on to become Dressage at Devon Oldenburg Champion. Please visit [F.H.E.T.C.](http://F.H.E.T.C.) to learn more about their services and view online videos of each therapy.

