

How to Ground Crew for Jousting

HL Colin MacNachtan

October 2016

Introduction

Jousting is an intense and exciting sport for all participants, no less for the Ground Crew than for the Jousters and horses. Everything must be focused on getting the Jousting and horse safely down the lane with lance in hand.

An important aspect of the sport of jousting is to make sure that all the participants; the Ground Crew, the horses, the audience, and the Jousting, handle their responsibilities in the safest manner possible. The Ground Crew is the eyes and ears of not only the Jousting but the Marshals as well. Be aware of your surroundings at all times and report any unsafe condition immediately. Do not hesitate to call a "Hold!" should an unsafe condition present itself.

Ground Crew's job is to see that the Jousting has a lance in hand when they are ready to begin their pass. The Jousting's primary goal is to safely control their horse and lance while making a clean pass and a good hit. They have limited visibility and hearing, and their focus should not be broken to deal with problems on the ground. Ideally a lance will magically appear in the jousting's hand when they signal for it, and magically disappear when they signal for it to be taken away at the end of their pass. It is Ground Crew's responsibility to make this happen.

Jobs

The primary purpose of the Ground Crew is to ensure that the Jousting has a lance in hand when they are ready to begin their pass. Everything the Ground Crew does derives from this simple job.

To achieve this end the work is generally divided into several subtasks. On each end of the tilt there should be one person handing up the lance at the entrance to the tilt, one person receiving the lance at the opposite end of the tilt, and two or more people preparing lances at the lance rack. There should also be one person at the middle of each side of the tilt to pick up broken tips and return coronels to the lance racks for reuse.

A pre-requisite for everyone on the Ground Crew is a certain amount of horse and situational awareness. There will be Jousting on horseback all around the end of the tilt, either getting ready for their pass, or waiting their turn. Horses can often be stressed and wound up, some because they enjoy

jousting, and others because it stresses them. As a result, the stress from the horse will often transfer to the Jousting as well. Always be prepared for a horse in the vicinity to do unpredictable things, and be ready to get out of the way.

Lance Hand Up

The Lance Hand Up person is the most critical job on the crew and should generally be done by an experienced person. As Hand Up person, your job is to hand the Jousting a lance when the Jousting signals for it by holding out their hand.

To properly hand up a lance, hold it vertically with one hand above and one hand below the handgrip. Place it firmly in the jousting's open hand. Keep in mind that the Jousting probably cannot see you, their hand, or even the lance, and must feel it hit their palm. Make sure they have a good grip on the lance before releasing control of it. Make every effort to hand up the lance vertically. The Jousting will need to be able to balance the lance in a neutral position while starting their pass. If the lance is even just a few degrees from vertical, the momentum of the horse taking off may cause them to lose control of the lance and force them to drop it.

Be aware that each Jousting may position their horse differently when preparing for a pass. They may also take the lance at different times. Some will stand at the beginning of the lane. Others will stand somewhat back and may have their horse turned sideways or even facing away from the lane. Some will want the lance as soon as they are in position. Others will not want it until the second they are ready to make their pass. Some may even start outside the lane and ride by grabbing the lance as they canter down the tilt. Be alert and watch the Jousting's hand for the readiness signal. The lance should be in their hand within a few seconds of them signaling for it. Learn each jousting's preference before the joust or on the first pass so you can be ready for them on subsequent passes.

Stay as close as possible to the Jousting's preferred hand up position but be aware that the Jousting is trying to settle their horse into readiness. If the horse is not cooperating it may move in unpredictable ways. Be careful not to get run over, but the signal to receive the lance may come at any time, and the time window to hand it up may be very short. Because of all the activity and commotion typically present at the end of the tilt, time moves very slowly for the Jousting. When dealing with a massive, nervous, herd animal, a couple of seconds feels like a lifetime for a Jousting. Be prepared to step in with the lance quickly but safely.

Stay close by and watch the Jousting after handing up the lance. If they are having trouble controlling their horse or the lance, they may want you to take the lance back. Be prepared for this at any time, up until the jousting actually runs down the tilt. Because of all the activity at the end of the tilt, taking the lance back is much safer than letting the lance fall to the ground.

As soon as the jousting has gone down the lane, get a fresh lance from the rack. You should always have a prepared lance in your hand.

While the Jouser is preparing for their pass at your end of the lane, you are their eyes and ears. The Jouser may not be able to see what is going on at the other end of the lane. Track the status of the Jouser at the other end, and give verbal updates to your Jouser in a loud clear voice. Typical statuses you might need include “They do not have their lance”, “They are receiving their lance”, “They are in their ready position”, “They are circling their horse”, etc. Use your knowledge of the other jouser’s preferred techniques to keep your jouser better informed of their opponent's status. If there is a significant delay on the other end, offer to take the lance back. If a hold is called, always echo it loudly to the Jouser.

Receiver

The Receiving Lance Handler stands at the opposite end of the tilt. As Receiver, your job is to take the lance from the oncoming Jouser when they finish their pass, then return it to the rack for refitting. A well trained horse will come to a stop at the end of the lane, at which point the Jouser will most likely signal to the Receiver by holding the lance out to the side. Please do not grab the lance from the Jouser’s hand unless they have offered it to you. They may be trying to settle their horse or deal with some other issue before safely handing the lance off. As at the entrance to the tilt, take the lance using one hand above and one hand below the handgrip. Some Joustors will stop short of the end of the tilt so be ready to receive the lance there if they signal to you. Other joustors will be unable to make their horse stop at the handoff point and will signal to you to receive as they ride by. If possible, grab the lance from them as they ride by. If you feel it is not possible to do this safely, get out of the way. Be aware that a Jouser may throw the lance away from them if they need both hands to control the horse. Let this happen but be aware of your position, and the rest of the crew’s positions, so that no one is hit by a flying lance.

As soon as you have the lance in hand, take it to the Rack Crew.

Rack Crew

The Rack Crew's job is to ensure that there is always a supply of ready lances for the Lance Hand Up person. There are typically two to four people in the Rack Crew. In most cases, one person should be designated Crew Chief. The Crew Chief is responsible for ensuring that lances are being readied in a timely fashion and that the Lance Hand Up person always has a prepared lance.

There are two basic lance styles. The technique for preparing lances for use varies by style.

Foam Lances

For foam lances, the three parts are a wooden base, a cardboard tube, and a foam tip. When assembling the lance, be sure the cardboard tube is firmly seated on the wood base, and that the foam tip fits snugly into the cardboard tube. If the fit is too loose, wrap the bottom two inches of the tip in painters tape or duck/duct tape for a better fit.

Check the cardboard tube for integrity. Any kink or bend in the tube is unacceptable and it should be discarded.

When the broken lance comes back to the rack, remove any broken foam from the tube and insert a fresh tip. If the foam is broken off flush with the end of the cardboard (a common occurrence) remove the cardboard from the base and poke the foam out with a stick from inside. Pig sticking lances or ring lances work well for this.

Wood lances

The parts of a wood lance are the base, the ferrule, the tip, and the coronel. The base is solid wood or aluminum. The ferrule is an eight inch aluminum pipe that fits on the end of the base (the ferrule is typically integrated into the base on aluminum lances). The tip is a three foot wood rod (usually balsa or other light wood) that may be split (typically in quarters) part way down. The coronel is a molded rubber piece that fits on the front end of the tip.

The solid end of the tip should fit snugly into the ferrule. If it is too loose, a wrap of painters tape should give a snug fit. The coronel should fit snugly onto the split end of the tip as it is tapered internally. It is not necessary to force it on too tightly.

When the broken lance returns, remove the broken tip from the ferrule. If the tip is broken off flush, a corkscrew is a good tool to remove it.

When dealing with broken tip material in the coronel, the best tool is a flat bladed screwdriver. Slide it down between one quarter and the coronel, then pry upward to work the quarter out. Once one or two of the quarters are free the rest should come out easily.

Be aware that balsa tips, in particular, are very sensitive to weather. Tips that fit very snugly in humid weather may need significant amounts of taping when things dry out. Some balsa will break in chunks that are easy to remove, while others will always break off flush at the coronel and ferrule.

List Cleanup

The Cleanup Crew consists of one person at the middle of each side of the tilt ready to pick up broken tips and coronels. This person needs to be extremely aware of the flow of the joust so they are out of the lane before the next pass begins. Remember, the Jousters usually cannot see or hear you so it is your responsibility to be out of the way when they start their pass.

When wood lances are in use coronels should be taken back to the racks on each end. Some care should be taken that all the coronels are recovered from each pass and that each end gets a reasonably even number of the recovered coronels.

Personal Lances

For many SCA jousts, Jousters will be providing their own lances and tips. They will generally be painted in the Joustler's colors.

Personal lances are a special challenge for ground crew. There are several options, based on how many lances each Joustler has and the format of the joust.

Ideally, each Joustler will have at least three lances and enough tips for a stack at each end. How the lances are allocated depends on the joust format. Jousts are run in one of two ways, "Return to Home", or "Turn and Burn". Return to Home means after a Joustler has completed their pass they will ride back to the end where they started before beginning their next pass. Turn and Burn means after their pass they will turn right around and make the next pass from the end where they finished the previous pass.

For Return to Home, all of a Joustler's lances should be on the end they start from as they will be doing all of their passes from that end. For Turn and Burn their starting end should get two lances and the other end one lance.

If the Joustler has less than three lances, the Rack Crew needs to be ready to do a quick turnaround to minimize delays.

Whichever type of joust, the Rack Crew needs to allocate resources to move lances between ends of the tilt as the pairings of the joust may change the starting ends of each Joustler.

Head In

There will be times that a Joustler may have trouble getting their horse to enter the lane, or trouble keeping the horse calm once they are in position. It is advisable to have one or more persons designated as a Head In person, or horse handler. When a Joustler requests a head in, that person needs to lead the horse to the ready position and hold them there until the Joustler is ready to make their pass.

The Head In person must be experienced in handling unruly horses.

In a field of experienced Joustlers and horses, the Head In person could be one of the ground crew who can do this in addition to their regular job. When the field contains several horses who are not as well trained it is advisable to assign Head In as a full time job of its own. When specific horses are having problems, often it is better for the Joustler's personal squire to handle Head In duties. They often are more familiar with that horse.