

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

Standardised behavioural tests to assess a horse's suitability at a particular role have been used in past research, but with notable exceptions few attempts have been made to establish their feasibility, reliability or validity. Where these issues have been addressed, findings have been inconsistent. This present study firstly modified tests used in previous studies to develop a set of feasible tests. These tests were then assessed for their reliability, which was found to be low to moderate for the majority of the tests, with only the reactivity tests showing good or better agreement. These moderate tests were then found on the whole to be invalid in predicting a horse's suitability for police work, with only the reactivity tests showing any relationship with the suitability scores.

The findings suggest standardised behaviour tests are poor predictors of a horse's role as a police horse and are unlikely to be good predictors for roles in general due to them most likely measuring past experiences rather than general underlying behavioural tendencies (personality). The possible exception are tests of response to moving objects or noises (reactivity tests), which are less likely to be influenced by prior experience or training. These tests may be useful in adult horses for predicting an animal's general reactivity which in turn may influence its suitability for a particular role e.g. low reactivity for therapeutic riding horses and higher for competition horses.

These findings add to the scarce literature in this field, by indicating these tests are of little use in predicting an adult horse's suitability at a particular job. It has expanded on previous research, as most studies have failed to address the issues of reliability and validity, which are both very important in any research. This study has shown that future research would be potentially useful, to explore the use of reactivity tests in foals at predicting their suitability at a particular job as young adults and then possibly again as older adults, although this would take quite a number of years.

Overall it can be concluded that this study cannot support the claims made in literature for standardised behavioural tests to be valid predictors of an adult horse's suitability of use.