

OVER THE STABLE DOOR BY "HAMISH" From 2010 Cherry Chatters

Greeting fellow equines and owners!

MARCH I hope you have all had a relaxing and enjoyable Christmas break and New Year. The heat waves have made riding not the most pleasant activity. Just a thought, if you do not plan on riding, your trusty steed might appreciate a sponge down to keep cool. If you have a young horse, this could be a good time to get him/her used to being sponged or hosed down. Planning ahead for those winter months is smart too. Go through all your rugs, checking for anything that needs repairing or replacing. If you have more than one equine, you might have six rugs or more put away. It would be very useful to keep a diary of which rugs you do have, their brands, sizes and use (summer, winter, stable). I say brands, because not all brands fit the same, and not all sizes are the same either. Putting a list up in your stables would make the information easily accessible. And to go one step further, in this modern day and age, put it all up on computer for future reference!

While we are talking planning ahead for winter, the next three months will be the time to keep an eye on your horse's condition. The paddock feed will be down to the minimum, so supplementing will be on the agenda, especially if your horse is in regular work. Keep an eye on the amount of ground cover in the paddock and try not to let it get below 75%. Less than that and the risks of dirt and sand intake are higher. If you are not on a regular 6 week worming program, then it might pay to get a worm sample taken first. Take a small ball from a fresh dropping, put in a plastic bag, label with horse's name and date, seal and take to your vet. These results can also be kept on your computer!

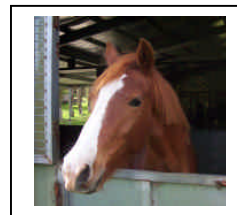
Well I think that's enough homework for now

APRIL This month I thought I would share a little story with you. It concerns one of my fellow paddock friends. Several months ago (around spring) he became badly lame. He could hardly walk and spent a lot of time lying down, much more than he normally would. He is twenty years old, so some time lying down is not unusual. His steps were very short and laboured, he did appear to stand with the front feet out in front, but not all the time and he was a bit 'cresty'. For our owner, the warning bells were ringing! This looked like founder – the right time of year, a middle aged pony, not being worked excessively, very sore, carrying a bit of weight and cresty. The vet agreed over the phone that founder was probably the case, but he said to bring him in anyway for a thorough check. Yes, some of the classic signs were there, however, there was no digital pulse and there was not excessive heat in the feet and there was not a noticeable reaction in the sole when palpated. His body temperature was within normal limits, so nothing unusual there. The vet then said that it was probably worse – arthritis. He was given acupuncture treatment and had to be rubbed daily with anti inflammatory cream, as well as MSM powder in his feed in the mornings. After a week he was no better and so terribly lame. Our owners really thought that it was going to be the end of the road. They contacted the vet again and he was taken back in to the surgery. This time, as we were running out of options, the vet decided on a blood sample. They also noticed that there was a small nasal discharge, not much, but a bit yellowish. The test would take a couple of days and in the meantime, the anti inflammatory treatment continued, plus some respiratory powder to help clear up the nasal discharge.

The test revealed a type of virus which had affected his muscles all over. The vet said it was very unusual. He had only seen about 3 cases like it in over thirty years. After an antibiotic injection and a week later, the little fellow was so much better. The nasal discharge cleared up and all the lameness gradually disappeared. Some weeks down the track now he is back to his old cranky self.

So that is my little story. Luckily it has a happy ending and our paddock life is back to normal. Don't forget to be getting stuck into rug updates, gear checking and keeping an eye on those weeds which will be sprouting up with the recent rains. Food value in the paddock will be down for the next few months, so your equines will possibly be needing some extra food, especially if they are in competition work or elderly. It pays to keep a daily eye on their condition. Also don't assume if they are rugged that they are OK. A rug can hide an awful lot. Do take time to remove the rug if the horse is not being ridden regularly to check on what's underneath!

MAY I have already discussed getting your rugs and winter gear up to date for the coming wetter months, keeping on top of the weed growth and generally maintaining your paddocks in good condition. If you are cutting hay off those paddocks, then ongoing soil tests and top dressing need to be in place, otherwise the hay that you cut will gradually deteriorate and have less and less food value.



Whether you go trail riding or compete, your equine needs to be soundly trained to be a safe and enjoyable ride. Simple things like stopping from a light aid (in all situations) and going forward from a light aid (in all situations) should be in place. Also standing still (parking), and turning should be soundly trained. As always the responsibility for this training lies at the feet of the owner/trainer. To begin with, the ideal place for the training should be safe (for both parties) and as free from outside distractions as possible. A reasonably confined area with sound fencing and a non slip surface (ie. sand) will make things much safer too. The trainer should also be dressed for the job – gloves, hat and non slip boots.

Assuming that your equine has been halter trained and will lead in hand lightly in self carriage and stop at the lightest command, you will be on your way. It is important to keep training sessions stress free and fairly short (little and often is good to start with). Two things to keep in mind here are 1) that the trainer must be consistent in the application of pressure (aids) and 2) that the pressure is removed the instant that the horse gives the correct response.

When leading forward in hand, check that the horse will walk forward from the forward pressure of the rope, not from you walking forward first. Try standing still and then applying the forward pressure. He should still move forward lightly and immediately. If this is not the case, then apply light forward pressure, followed immediately by an increase in pressure, followed by a cessation of pressure once he walks forward. You will be walking forward with him by this stage! Three to five good repetitions of this will usually give you a sound response. Conversely will he stop from light pressure (up and back into the gullet)? Test that he will also do this from the pressure first, not from you stopping. The repetitions and increase and decrease of pressure still apply. The next step is to test these responses in some place other than where he is usually trained. Most times, there is some loss of promptness of response or increase in rope (rein) pressure in a new situation. This is where the consistency of the trainer is so important. Remember this is the foundation for all future work so you will reap the rewards further down the track. More on the walk next month. And remember – be patient!

JUNE Well, not good news this month. You may recall that one of my paddock mates had been lame and we all thought of the obvious things like founder (laminitis), then arthritis and then it turned out to be a virus and after treatment with antibiotics he was back to his old self. Well he became lame again and following a visit to the vet was diagnosed with laminitis. Usually laminitis is associated with good feed, especially late winter to spring. However this year, with the combination of early rains and some warmer temperatures, the grasses were obviously too rich, too early.

It seems to have been caught early and now my mate is being yarded during the day and being let out at night. We understand that during the hours of 9am to 3pm, the sugars in the grasses are at their maximum, so it is safer to graze at night. The yarding will also restrict the actual amount of feed that he can consume. The other remedial treatment is that he has had his feet trimmed, especially the toes (an extra centimetre dubbed off the front) as well as being shod back to front. This means that his shoes have the opening towards the toe. All this will help to take pressure of the toe area, and facilitate the rollover as he moves. He is also on a course of anti inflammatories (bute) to relieve any swelling. He also needs to be worked lightly. At present this is on the lunge without the weight of the rider. This is largely a day by day thing and he himself will dictate how long he can be worked for. Also he is being left unrugged unless the weather is absolutely foul.

And you would never guess (!) my royal self has also been put on a restricted regime too. I guess it is in my best interests as I do tend to be rather 'well covered'.

So my friends, the bottom line here once again is to be very aware of your own equine as an individual, not every year is going to be the same and do contact your vet as soon as possible at the first signs of lameness. Common signs include crestiness (hard to the touch), lameness (back or front or all), standing with front feet extended to take weight of the toe, raised temperature and increased digital pulse. It can help to check these before ringing the vet.

Good luck everyone and I will try to be a good boy as well keep you up to date on my mate.

JULY You may remember last month that one of my paddock mates had developed founder. Due to the prompt action by our owners, he is now back to his old self. He has lost weight and is back in regular work.

Actions taken were as follows...Firstly his grazing was restricted during the day. We don't actually have a genuine 'Jenny Craig' area, so he had to be yarded for the best part of the day. The rest of us were in full view so he didn't fret. He was allowed out from 3pm onwards and overnight (with the rest of us)!

Any additional feed was restricted to meadow hay only.

Our farrier cut back his feet to maximise rollover and take pressure of the toe as well as putting shoes on back to front.

Anti inflammatories were administered to reduce any inflammation.

He was worked lightly every day, either a light lunge or a short ride, mostly at walk with a short time at trot, depending on how he was feeling.

He was also left without a rug for as long as possible, weather permitting. Basically, if it wasn't raining, he had no rug. Even today, where the temperature was around 11 degrees, he was rugless!

All these measures have contributed to his recovery and he has been back in work for the last two weeks.

Like I said last month though, it certainly pays to be extra vigilant around this time of year, even when your equine has never shown signs of founder before.

Unfortunately for yours truly, these past events caused my owners to take a closer look at myself and also restrict MY grazing too! I am 'well covered' at the best of times, so now not only is my grazing restricted, but my rug only goes on at night or when it is raining. My girth has come up a couple of holes, so I am back to my best fitness shape! I do realise that this is in my best interests, so mustn't complain.

Hopefully next month we can get back to schooling in the walk.

AUGUST Still another episode to the founder saga. While myself and the 20 y.o. galloway had been restricted in our grazing, with positive results, my other two paddock mates, a thoroughbred and a warmblood had not. Our owners decided that the two larger horses could do with the extra feed. Within a matter of days, the warmblood too was showing early signs of founder. Just mildly mind you, but our owners were pretty alert to changes by this stage. So the two 'biggies' were also locked out of the main grazing area. Of course the culprit in that area is clover. Far too much in that paddock and far too rich for the horses. I should also point out here that all of us are in regular work, so one would expect that we would be working it off. Just goes to show how potent that rich feed is! Next thing our owners decided to spray the clover to reduce the quantity, as this paddock is cut for hay. Too much clover makes the hay difficult to cut, so they decided that it was better all round to have less of the sweet stuff.

Now where were we? I had started to discuss training in the halt (park) and the walk. As in everything to do with training, the trainer must be skilled, consistent, observant and gentle. Do not confuse gentle with wishy washy, rather ask quietly first, followed by a stronger pressure if the desired result is not forthcoming. Good reflexes are great asset here, as when the increase in pressure is required, it has to be within 1 – 2 seconds. The longer the gap, the less effective the pressure will be. Look at the pressure you apply on a scale of 1 – 10. Gentle or polite pressure will be in the range of 1 to 3 out of 10. For example when leading in hand and you ask the horse to stop, you might apply a backward/upward pressure of 2/10. If your horse becomes heavy in that instant and/or takes more than 2 or 3 steps to stop, then that is the time to quickly apply the pressure again to achieve the desired result. Depending on the horse, the pressure may have to be escalated up to a 6, 7 or 8 out of 10. Once he has stopped, lead him forward again and repeat the exercise until he is stopping lightly and in 2 or 3 steps. This may take 3 to 5 repetitions. It is not productive to repeat any more than this in one session, as the amount of improvement will be minimal. Better to end on a good note and repeat the same exercise the following day. This should not take more than 10 to 15 minutes each time. If the horse is just being broken in, then that is plenty for his young brain. The same will apply even you are retraining an older horse who has developed poor habits. Remember that best results will be achieved in a quiet, safe situation away from outside distractions. Also make sure that you have the appropriate clothing ie. gloves, hat and boots. That's all for this month,

SEPTEMBER Due to a special request, this month I will talk about (a brief summary thereof!) what is commonly known as Equine Cushing's Syndrome. The veterinary term for this condition is pituitary pars intermedia dysfunction (PPID). It is a common endocrine disorder found in horses, especially those over 20 years of age. It can also be found in younger horses, although this is not usually the case.

One of the easiest ways of recognising the condition is by extra hairiness in the coat, giving quite a shaggy appearance. Some of the many other ways are that the hair does not always moult with the change of seasons or at least may be late to do so. Sometimes the skin is moist and greasy; your equine may also seem to be lazy with a 'hay belly'. He/she may also have a raised respiratory rate, and muscle wasting. In mares, there may also be a poor reproduction history. There may also be insulin resistance. This complex condition can also be strongly linked to

chronic laminitis. Obviously it is important to consult with your vet should your equine exhibit any of these outward symptoms.

Managing your equine's diet and having an exercise program are extremely important with this condition. The diet should be free of any concentrates and/or grain and include plenty of hay. When the diet is restricted to plain hay, then it may have to be supplemented with adequate vitamins and minerals. Weighing your feed is important here and the most commonly recommended ratio is 1.5%– 2.0% of the body weight. Your vet should be able to advise on the weight of your horse if you are not sure. The exercise program should also be tailored to suit your horse. Daily exercise is best, with a combination of lungeing, riding or walking in hand being ideal. The amount and time spent will vary according to your own horse's fitness.

If your equine is still really hairy coming into the warmer weather, then clipping him will help him to thermo-regulate, so he will be much more comfortable. If he is clipped, then extra care will need to be taken re rugging. With any sudden changes in weather, he will be needing extra protection. Any other pharmaceutical treatment will be taken care of by your vet. As with any ageing pet, extra care needs to be taken, especially noting any changes from what you know is 'normal' for your horse. For all the hours of pleasure they give us, that is the least we can do.

This is still danger time for founder/laminitis, so be on the alert. Fortunately, all seems to be well at my place, although my paddock mate has decided at 20 years of age that he can crawl under fences. The bottom wire is only 40cm off the ground and he can still get under! First of all he puts his head and neck under the wire then seems to flip himself underneath – quicker than the eye can tell! He is just too smart for words (smarter than me I mean!). Now the fence is completely electrified and he has backed off. Oh he has also started to crawl under the fence INTO my yard! Wonders never cease.

OCTOBER Not much riding to be done in the last few weeks.... Even if your equine is still not being ridden on a regular basis, it is still a good idea to check him or her over for any cuts, heat, swellings etc. Fallen sticks in the paddock can cause a nasty cut on the leg and winter ailments such as greasy heel and hoof abscesses abound. Any spare rugs come in handy too, in case the regular rug needs to go in for repairs.

Some months back I talked about training. A great deal of introductory training can be done in hand, and it is a good way of assessing how good your equine is at stopping, going forward, stepping across and standing still. In fact, your work in hand continues throughout your equine's life. Something as simple as catching and leading in the paddock can tell you where your fellow is at. This includes tying up for grooming, saddling and so on. These simple but basic things will also reflect how good these responses are under saddle.

It is important to understand how a horse learns in the first place. He is a creature of flight and fight. Mostly it is flight and this is extremely strong, since it is linked to his survival. Any stepping forward in hand is a small emergence of this flight response. The more we can 'dampen' this response, the calmer our horse will be. So if in hand our equine steps forward without a given command, we step him back. If he steps sideways, we also step him back. If he steps back, then we bring him forward – back to where he started from. You will know when this lesson has 'sunk in' when his response to these commands is both light and instantaneous. Similarly, this will follow on under saddle. Once again, a few repetitions (3 – 5) should bring about some improvement. As I have said before, it is so important for the handler to be consistent. Removal of pressure is vital once the desired response is achieved. It has been proven that 3 – 5 repetitions will bring about the maximum improvement compared to say 10 repetitions. After that 3 – 5, the % of improvement will be minimal, and in fact the response may become 'blurred'. So the old saying of finishing on a good note has some merit! The handler needs to be very aware of body language in this early training in order to be prompt at cancelling out any unwanted behaviour. A useful aid in this training is the dressage whip. For example, if he is slow to step back you can tap him just below the knee to reinforce your backwards aid from the rope. The whip can also be used just behind the shoulder to tap him forward. Just below the hock to ask for the sideways step. These are also the basics which will help when it comes to loading a horse onto the float.

NOVEMBER Ah, sunshine at last! Once again the usual problem with my owners trying to keep the weight off my good self. I just naturally make the most of every little morsel that passes my lips. With the good growth that we get in the hills regions, it can be an ongoing nightmare for some horse owners. These last few months have not been the best for regular riding; so many equines will be feeling their oats, so to speak. The combination of less work and more good quality feed can make for a bit of a fizzy cocktail. We have a bit more spring in our step, and a bit of wind up our tail. Our poor owners are trying to get out and about, but we are feeling too good to really pay attention to their commands! Sounding familiar?

This is where a good solid foundation in basic training can pay dividends. Having decided to go out for a ride on a lovely sunny day, we find that yours truly (or someone else) is just not interested in standing still to be groomed and saddled up. Be patient! Here is the opportunity to revisit putting your equine back in his place. Using a dressage whip if necessary, step him back if he moves forwards or sideways and also tap him forwards should he step back. Basically put him back where he started. It may take several repetitions before he is doing this lightly and calmly. Ideally, this could be done for a couple of days before you have decided to go out for that ride. It will be better consolidated if you do. Also it helps to pick a day which is nice and calm to lessen distractions. If your horse is young and green, a calm older horse will make the ideal riding companion. Being a herd animal, they are usually calmer with another horse. If a companion is not available, then short walks out can suffice. Be aware of changes in speed going away from and coming home. If he slows down, then urge him forward. When he speeds up, then slow him down. If he is not solid in these responses, then many repetitions may be necessary, even turning him away from home for some steps and then back again. The main thing is to keep it as calm as possible, so that it is a positive experience for both parties. Some horses prefer to lead, while others plod along behind. Usually the ones who prefer to lead will 'pull' when asked to follow, while the plodder will suddenly become quite spooky when asked to go in front.

When riding out with a companion, ask one horse to stand while the other walks past for a few steps, then stand. Practise this, alternating until both horses can do this in a rhythm – i.e. that standing still is maintained and also that the horse still moving does so in a regular forward manner. As they become used to the idea, the distances between can be increased and it can also be done in trot and canter. If you are riding on a public road however, canter is not recommended and even trot will need care. Any riding on public roads can be a risky undertaking and riders need to be vigilant about other road users, even properties which they ride past (beware the bouncing, barking dogs, lawn mowers and the like) as well as themselves. Keep to the left and stay in single file when there is traffic about. If you need to cross over, then wait 'til the road is clear and cross together. Never separate, as the horse left behind may panic. It pays to be courteous too, when a motorist slows down to pass you. A wave and a thank you goes a long way. Carry a mobile phone in case of an emergency and always wear a safety helmet and boots with a heel. That's all for now, enjoy your summer riding and stay safe!

DECEMBER I trust that your last month's riding has been incident free, both at home and on the road.

Your royal fatness is already having a restricted diet due to the excellent feed around at the moment. My owner can't wait for the grass to dry off a bit, as there is a limit to how much work I can do to keep that weight down! I just can't help being a good doer. Unfortunately one of my paddock mates is completely the other way round and is getting as much as he can eat to put some weight on. I am green with envy!

I thought that I might cover some safety tips prior to the Christmas break. Simple things like not ducking under the tie up rope in front of the horse when he is tied up. Should he take fright at a sudden noise or just something which he has seen and you haven't, his very first reaction is to leap forward and at that instant he is not going to care whether you are in front of him or not. It is just laziness which brings about these accidents and it easily avoidable. When you are leading (usually from the left), hold the lead rope in the right hand about 10 – 15cm from the halter and take up the rest of the slack with the left hand, making sure that the hand is around the rope, not the rope around the hand. Keep to the side of the horse, usually somewhere between his head and his shoulder (never in front). If he wants to walk faster than you, slow him down and if he is slower and you have to pull, then speed him up. A training whip is very useful here. If he is light in your hand then consider that he is in 'self carriage'. This is good. When he is heavy and you have to drag, a timely tap with the whip with your left hand (the whip lands just behind the girth) will smarten him up. Once you can get around three good repetitions of not having to pull, you can leave that lesson for a while. Do something else (like go for a ride) and then repeat the leading lesson in hand. Two or three sessions of this for a week should show quite some improvement. Remember though that these things are never 'set in concrete' and there may be times when the homework needs to be covered again. The same applies if you have to slow the horse. When he pulls you, then ask him to slow or stop. Once he has stopped, then ask him to walk forward again. Be careful not to walk first. Tug the lead rope forward and if he speeds up, then stop again. If he is extremely 'pully', then an anti-rearing or lead bit will be more effective. If he is still strong in your hand, then some steps back after the halt will help to deepen the stop response. When indicating

the backward step, or even the stop, angling the tug on the rope up into the gullet instead of straight back will increase your leverage and thus be more effective too. The same principle of three good repeats and then leaving it applies here too.

There is a safety issue here, as usually what your equine does in hand is repeated under saddle. Also, if you have to run your horse up for the vet, it is much better to have one which is obedient to the aids!

Well, that will do for now. I hope you get plenty of carrots for Christmas morning and have a safe and enjoyable Christmas break.

Hamish.