

HANDY HORSE HINTS BY "PABLO" From 2005 Cherry Chatters

JANUARY Dear horse owners, this summer is promising to be a particularly good one for flies. If your beloved equine doesn't already own a fly veil, then this may be the year to invest.

As an aged equine myself, I am really appreciating my new fly veil. Not only does it keep the flies out, my eyes don't get so weepy anymore.

Where are all those winter rugs? Sitting in a corner full of fur and frayed tears?

Now is the time to brush out all that old winter fur (an old plastic curry comb will do)

and take them along to your friendly rug mender before the winter rush. Don't forget to check clips and straps as well for replacement if necessary.

Now, remember, before you go trotting off to put those rugs away for winter, some of those canvas rugs which are more than 2 years old may just need reproofing. There are several brands of reproofing goo available, or canvas tent reproofers from a camping store will do. Make sure the rug is clean and choose a nice warm day to lay it out flat on the lawn or some flat surface then apply. Leave for recommended time before folding and storing.

There is nothing worse for us equines to be out on a cold, early winters day with a rug that is just soaking up all that rain. We will definitely appreciate your extra effort.



MARCH I hope everyone is feeling less bothered by the flies now that you all have fly veils. It really is a strange summer.

With all this "Queensland" weather upon us we need to be especially vigilant for worms. Unfortunately worms thrive in a warm, moist environment, which is what we have been having recently. If you are not already on a regular worming program, or have a new equine or are just plain lazy (dare I say that!), you (equine owner) may be interested in first getting a worm count done on your best friend (equine kind!).

For the small sum of between \$15 - \$20 per equine your friendly vet will get you a worm count so that you will know exactly how your equine is faring on the worm scale. To get a worm count, take a fresh sample of manure (one ball), put it in a small plastic container, label with name & date & get it to your friendly vet ASAP. In the meantime keep in fridge until it is needed. Don't tell sensitive members of your human family!

Having taken the worm count, your vet will probably recommend which paste to use & when. You may even need 2 follow up doses. Even if the count is zero, it really only means that there were no worms showing up in that particular slide, so it may still be a good idea to worm.

At least by having the worm count done you will know just how urgent the need is for worming. Follow your vet's advice & it is a good idea to write down the date & type of paste used & when you will need to re-paste.

Of course having an equine worm free gets back to a regular worming program, pasture management, manure removal etc but that is another story....

JUNE Greetings fellow equines and owners! My apologies for missing last month. I must have been dozing in the paddock again!

The topic for this month is one very dear to my heart.....feeding.

You may have noticed at this time of year that most paddocks are getting very bare & while our owners are anxiously scanning the skies for any signs of rain, us equines are busy out there trying to scrounge the very last blade of grass that we can.

As always the normal rules of feeding still apply, but owners need to be extra careful to make sure that their equine friend does not start to lose condition, or even have a bout of colic. I will run through some of the basic things that owners need to be aware of to maintain a healthy, happy equine.

1. To start with constant access to clean fresh water (would you drink out of your equine's trough?).
2. We need plenty of bulk ie. That means just plain good quality ordinary meadow hay. Good quality means that the hay is free from dust, mould, animal droppings etc & of a good colour & smell. If you consider that we spend at least 17 to 18 hours a day grazing and the rest dozing or just vegging out then that gives you an idea of just how much we need to keep nibbling.
3. Feed little & often. This relates to our normal grazing habits of just continual nibbling. If your equine is in a confined area, then adlib access to good quality plain hay as well as the morning & evening meal will help to keep him/her closer to normal habits & lessen the risk of colic.
4. Make any changes to our feed gradual, preferably over at least a week or two.
5. Try not to work us straight after a hard feed. Allow about an hour for the meal to digest before going for a ride.

6. Treat us as individuals. Some of us are advanced in years & need that little bit extra as we don't digest the plain hay so well any more, also because we may have a few less teeth as well! There are a few products on the market specially formulated for the older equine & they really do help to maintain that condition. Younger equines of course are growing & have far more energy & need to be fed accordingly. Some of us have better metabolism than others too, so while one equine may live on the smell of an oily rag, another will need the feed pumped into him.
7. Weigh your feed. An equine on holiday or in light work needs only 2% of its body weight in feed per day (depending on the individual). So for example a 500kg equine will need 10kg (1/50th or 2%) of feed per day. This is a dry weight, so don't include any added water, oil or molasses.
8. Maintain the Ca/Ph ratio (calcium/phosphorous). Mostly this can be covered by just a batt of lucerne per day.
Some other things which may be helpful at this time of year is to keep the feed off the ground by feeding in a large tub, or feeding from a net suspended over a large tub. Make sure that when the haynet is empty that it does not hang on the ground or your equine may catch his feet in it.
9. Remember too to feed according to the amount of work we do. So if we are being ridden energetically most days of the week (eg for one day event training) then we will be needing more energy giving food like oats. There are also plenty of processed pellets on the market to choose from.

These hints are guidelines only to help you keep your equine friend in good health, but if you are in any doubt always refer to your vet.

Hope these hints have been helpful to you, so happy munching & safe riding ! (safety helmets please!)

JULY I hope that by now all your rugs have been mended, cleaned & waterproofed ready for winter. It has been such a long dry summer & autumn, so although there has been plenty of time to get rugs up to scratch, feed has really become an issue. Paddocks are very dry; ground cover has been reduced considerably, such that colic has been an issue in some areas. This is always something to be aware of when the ground cover gets very low & as us equines try to forage for smaller & smaller tussocks of grasses; we can't help but pick up bits of earth or sand. It is a good idea to make sure that we have plenty of roughage hay to feed on, preferably off the ground. If you can lay a nice heavy square of rubber matting or similar underneath the hay net to catch the spare bits, then we won't be eating off the ground.

My shoes are due to be done in a couple of weeks time so I wondered how everyone else was going. Due to my rather advanced age (ahem - 31) I am not needing a full set of shoes each time around. Also only my front feet get done as I don't do road work any more, although I am quite active for my age! Just in case your farrier doesn't come every 6 weeks, or comes as you require, a good guide to being able to tell whether your equine needs shoeing is to check several things.

One is if the toe of the shoe is being worn away or becoming thin. Or maybe the clenches (nails) are raised. Basically this means that the nails are sticking up quite noticeably from the wall of the hoof. Another way of telling if the shoes need replacing is if the hoof is growing outside the shoe. This is not good for your equine, as it can make him lame, causing pressure on the seat of the corn. If you look side on at your equine, his toes may look long & flat & low in the heel. Your beloved mount may also be stumbling more often than he should. If you walk him on concrete or bitumen you will be able to hear a rattley sound as each hoof hits the ground, indicating that the shoes have become loose. There is an old horseman's saying "no 'oof no 'orse" and how true that is. So look after our feet – clean out every time before riding & keep shoeing up to date. Keep a written record of when we are shod, who by, how much, what kind of shoe & whether it was a re-fit or a new shoe. Keep an eye on what your farrier does & don't be afraid to ask questions. He should be able to give you an answer! Compare your equines feet with other owner's equines. Are they the same or similar? Can you explain the differences? Can your farrier? Remember shoeing is not a cheap exercise & you owe it to us to ensure that a good job is done. Remember to shoe according to the work done & according to the equine. Some of us need shoeing every 4 weeks, others can go for 6, 8 or even 9 weeks. But most importantly, you can tell by looking at the feet themselves. Your equine cannot always stick to a formula, so it is up to you to assess your equine partner & book the farrier accordingly.

If your lucky equine is retired from active riding or just going barefoot, please don't forget to check these feet too.

They still need looking after with the occasional or regular trim to keep the hoof in good condition.

AUGUST Well I guess winter is really on us now. The paddocks are gradually greening up as the grasses emerge. Little food value, mind, so we will still need plenty of roughage hay to carry on with.

Unfortunately the wetter months bring their own particular types of problems, especially here in the hills. Some of these problems include hoof abscesses, seedy toe, greasy heel & bruised soles to name a few.

All of these ailments are quite painful for us & any sign of lameness should be thoroughly investigated. It is a good idea to always pick out our feet before grooming, riding or putting on the float to go anywhere. This can save needless frustration for yourself & extra pain for us by being attended to as early as possible. As you pick out the feet, you can feel for any heat, as our hooves are normally quite cool to touch. Swelling, puffiness, restriction/reluctance in movement are also things which may indicate a problem. Anything, which is not 'normal' for your equine, should be investigated immediately. That is the first step.... You may then decide to call your vet, so get your details right: like which hoof is affected, how hot etc.

It may be that in the wetter months your trusty steed will need to be shod more often. A good farrier will be able to detect signs of abscesses etc as he prepares the hoof for reshoeing. Bruised soles can often occur as the hoof softens up with the rain & is then worked on a gravelly road or even can step on a solitary stone.

Greasy heel often affects those of us with white socks/hooves. If your equine has been clipped & no longer has feathers to protect his pasterns & heels, it is even more important to keep these areas dry. By leaving the feathers on, they provide a natural drainage point straight to the ground, keeping the pasterns & heels drier. Ideally, a stable or at least a well drained area is a big help in keeping these areas drier. If you do not have somewhere drier to put your equine, a good massage with a dry towel around the pasterns can be helpful. It pays to check on these things. Greasy heel is painful & can be slow to clear up, so contact your vet ASAP.

Seedy toe is also very painful & should be attended to immediately by your vet.

This all sounds like doom & gloom doesn't it & I guess it is if any of these things happens to your equine. If it does, try to learn from the experience & determine just why it happened & see if you can prevent it happening next time. And just to keep things really cheerful, in the following months, more weeds are going to appear, so some pasture management plan may be in order. Start checking for salvation jane, capeweed dandelion etc. Also late winter into spring is going to be a danger time for founder (laminitis), so fat pony/horse owners be vigilant. You may need to organise a 'Jenny Craig' paddock to keep your greedy equine off the feed. Anyway, that is food for thought so to speak!

SEPTEMBER Well it looks like we are really into winter now. The paddocks are starting to sprout nice green grasses and weeds too! The next coming months can spell danger time for those of us who are prone to grass founder or laminitis.

As we get further into winter & coming into spring, when the feed is richer, this can make a dangerous diet for us equines. Unfortunately for us, this rich feed affects our hooves in a very serious way. (And as you know...no 'oof, no 'orse!).

Founder or laminitis can affect many types of horses, but the ones which seem to be particularly prone are ponies, although thoroughbreds, arabs, appaloosas & quarter horses are all at risk.

Some of the signs to look for may be a pony that looks overweight, with a cresty neck, an apple shaped bottom, lumps of 'cellulite' around the haunches. Your pony may be reluctant to take weight on his toes & will stand in the paddock with his front legs pointing somewhat forward to keep the weight off his toes. His feet will be warm to touch & you may be able to feel a digital pulse at the fetlock. He may be reluctant to work or be absolutely lame. The very first thing to do is contact your vet.

In the meantime, you may have to yard your trusty friend to keep him off that lovely green grass.

Laminitis is a complex condition & there is ongoing research into its causes & treatment. Never underestimate its seriousness, as the damage it does can be permanently crippling. If you own a horse or pony that has foundered in the past, then there is more of a chance of the condition recurring. At least forewarned is forearmed & you can be especially vigilant during late winter to early spring looking for those telltale signs.

Once you are aware of this, the condition can be managed in a number of ways. A good farrier can help with corrective shoeing. Making sure that your pony is kept in a fit condition (even a lunge will help) & managing your pony's access to all that lovely (but deadly) pasture, keeping him on good quality, but plain hay are all things which can help. If you are in any doubt at all, then best to start to restrict access to green pasture. The condition can strike in a matter of a couple of hours, so it is best to play safe.

In any case make sure that you work in close association with your vet. In the hills we equines are especially vulnerable, so look after us! So good luck everyone, I hope that you have a 'founder free' spring!

On a lighter note I have to inform you that my mum has decided to let me retire (how kind!). So no more work, just days of munching, mooching & generally pleasing myself as to what I do. Although some of my teeth have fallen out, my condition is quite good. Although I have never foundered in the past, I know my mum will be keeping an eye on me during the next few months. I am happy to answer any queries via the 'chatter' (keeps me out of mischief).

OCTOBER I hope the 'founder watch' is going well. Remember to keep an eye on those cresty hard necks, cellulite bottoms, hot feet, lameness as well as standing with the weight off the toes, especially in the front.

The last few days of spring warmth has speeded up the grass growth, so let's hope that paddocks will crop well this summer. The word is that spring will be drier than usual, but if we still get the follow up rains, all will be OK.

My topic this month is a bit belated, but you know I had so much to say in the last few months that I just ran out of room!

When you are out riding along public roads remember that today's motorists are not as horse-wise as they used to be 20 or even 10 years ago. We can help them & ourselves by wearing brightly coloured clothing. During the winter months reflective vests & even reflective leg boots for horses are available.

In the summer it is not so much of an issue, but still a good idea to be as visible as possible. My mum has been (so far) very lucky on the road, but she always makes sure that when a motorist slows down that she gives them a very clear thank you & a wave of acknowledgement. It seems to work! Maybe it was the first time that that particular motorist has slowed down, but hopefully a wave & thank you adds incentive to repeat the behaviour.

Riding in the same direction as the traffic seems to be the safest thing, keeping as close to the left as possible. If riding in a group, it is usually safer for the whole group to cross the road together, rather than leaving one or two behind, as some horses do not take kindly to being separated from their pals. If there is a nervy or fractious equine in the group, keeping that one in the middle can be helpful, but whatever the differences in those on the ride the speed should be geared to the lowest, slowest & scarest combination. Also don't forget that at least one rider should carry a mobile phone & that someone at home should know where you are riding. Enjoy!

Also don't forget that HORSE SA has available Horse Incident forms which can be filled by riders to record any road/traffic incidents involving you and your horse. Incidents may include dogs, motorists or any other road users. If you can, remember registration numbers & any other relevant details.

P.S. If anybody has any queries, I can have a go at answering them Pablo is very interested in helping his equine mates'

DECEMBER My apologies for missing last month's article. My Mum & Dad were busy with camps & the Masters Games. Now that things have settled down, I am able to put pen to paper again (so to speak).

With the rather late seasonal rains, it is still a good idea to be keeping that founder watch, especially with those smaller ponies. In fact, the ground has been so wet for so long, that it might pay to be extra alert regarding those soft hooves, stone bruises, abscesses, greasy heel, seedy toe etc. With our feet being soft, if you are riding on the road, stone bruises can be a real problem, so it is a good idea to harden the feet up gradually & also being careful to keep off the really lumpy gravel. Of course some of us are more susceptible than others, so it is up to you, the owner to know your equine & be aware of what type of feet he/she has & ride accordingly. As usual your farrier can be a great help here.

I personally am hanging out for some nice warm, dry & sunny weather!.

I was lucky enough before these nasty rains for my mum to give me a nice wash to loosen off all that winter hair. She groomed me & groomed me – you should have seen all my fur! I'm sure there was enough for a hundred bird nests! Even though I am retired I am still getting lots of attention. I get all the goodies as well as playing with the big boys. Well, they play, I watch!

I know that the next chores for mum will be to clean all our rugs of that winter fur & get any repairs done before the next wet season. Or even buy new rugs if necessary. Once all that is out of the way, she stores our rugs in vermin proof containers so that they will be ready when required.

Well I guess that's all for now, I'm sure you are all looking forward to the real summer too.