

HANDY HORSE HINTS BY "PABLO" From 2006 Cherry Chatters

FEBRUARY Hope you all had a safe Christmas & New Year with plenty of carrots (I mean goodies!).

Before we know it, the year will be well underway and not enough time to get everything done. I thought that it is probably a good time to talk about floats, their maintenance and safety.

Did you know that your tow vehicle should be at least equal to the weight of your float when it is fully loaded? Not all 4wd vehicles are heavy enough for this purpose. If you are not sure of the respective weights, there is a weighbridge opposite the Blackwood railway station.

For those of us living in the hills, brakes are a big issue. Although it is not yet mandatory in this state, electric brakes are to be highly recommended (override brakes are already mandatory on any towed vehicle over 500kg). As well as being much safer for you and your equine, it causes less wear and tear on your tow vehicle. Another great safety feature is an automatic braking system which comes into play if the float becomes separated from your tow vehicle. So instead of the float running amok across the countryside, it will come to rest reasonably safely and hopefully without damage to the occupant(s). Another good thing to check is the lighting system. Make sure that the wiring between the tow vehicle & your float is compatible – there can be disastrous consequences otherwise.

Make sure that the rego is current and kept up to date. It is also recommended that after use, floats are not hosed out as this can eventually cause rust in the supporting framework. Much better rather to give it a good sweep out & keep dry. Floats are just like any other vehicle in that it is better to keep them under cover, keeping rust and deterioration to a minimum.

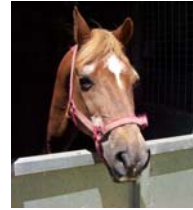
Always check out your float after use, especially if there has been an incident with your equine. Some of us are not always on our best behaviour in these claustrophobic things! Make sure that all catches, latches, bolts etc. can all be done up with ease. Also keep an eye on the tailgate, as this comes in for quite a bit of wear and tear. Centre partitions can often be a problem with some equines. It is useful to have one which is removable if need be. Of course things can sail along quite safely for years, until that time when we either buy a new equine, or a new float. Especially with a 'new' second hand float, it will pay to go over it with a fine toothcomb, paying extra attention to the safety features. You can always paint it a matching colour later! That's all for this month. Good luck with the coming year and have fun with your trusty equine.

MARCH You may recall last month I spoke about floats, their maintenance etc. Well due to a slight senior moment I forgot to include the checking & maintenance of the float tyres (silly me). There is nothing worse than being all prepared to leave home for an outing than to find that one of the float tyres has gone flat! Or worse, has developed a bald spot. Enough said, it just goes back to regular checking & follow up maintenance.

This month as a follow up I thought floating itself would be a good topic. As always, safety is a prime issue here, as we are putting a large animal into a confined space – not always willingly. Things to consider are, for yourself, safe footwear & if needed, gloves, hat & a whip. For the float, it should be cleaned out ready for loading & on as level ground as possible to minimise any bouncing or tipping of the tailgate. The tailgate itself should be free of any manure, especially in wet weather, as this can cause the surface to become very slippery. Whether you have a centre partition or not, the horse should be able to walk on & off calmly & straight. The ideal is if you can 'cast' your equine into the float, i.e. Throw the rope over his neck & have him walk in unaided & stand quietly until the tailgate has been secured. Similarly, on arrival at your destination, your equine should stand quietly even after the tailgate has been dropped & walk quietly off on command. Safety issues here are that the horse is not secured before raising the tailgate & also that he is untied before lowering the tailgate. If there are 2 of you working together, always make sure that each one knows what the other is doing! Fingers can get caught in the halter rope whilst undoing it if the tailgate is dropped too early. Very importantly, when securing or lowering the tailgate, make sure that you do not stand directly behind in case of a horse bolting off backwards – it can be fatal!

Horses that do not load on & off obediently, or do not stand still whilst floating nearly always have some gaps in their on the ground training. These horses invariably will have issues in the following areas – heavy in hand, bargey or not respectful of your personal space, do not stand still for saddling, mounting, pull back if tied up, or even lazy to lead. Under saddle, these horses will be either dead to the leg, lazy ('quiet'), nervous, shying or just plain inconsistent. Once these areas have been addressed correctly, the majority of horses will become reliable to load & float.

If you do have feed in the float it should be well secured at head level well away from pawing feet. Booting & rugging can be used, but be careful not to over rug bearing in mind that a float can become quite warm inside. If travelling over long distances (i.e. 8 hours or so), it is good to make a stopover



for a rest after about 3 hours. Encourage the horse to have a good walk & stretch, drink & eat. Check for any swellings, dehydration etc. If the distance is longer, then electrolytes (be advised by your vet) are a good idea, with longer stops in between.

APRIL By now all your rugs should have been cleaned & repaired ready for the coming colder months. Also all worming up to date as well. It is about one year since I started doing this column so I thought that I might give you all a bit of my history.

My owner first met me about 12 years ago when I had been sold to an establishment as a bombproof learners pony. I had come from a very large country acreage where I had been treated as one of the family and all the visitors could ride me around the property. My new abode required that I be ridden twice a day for about an hour by learner riders. As I was what is generally termed a forward going horse, (and sensitive as well) this did not go down well with me. Consequently I took off with everyone, with them hanging on to my mouth to get me to stop, and gripping like iron to hang on! I quickly became unsuitable and was turned out. This went on for a couple of years and it was decided to 'pass me on'. The future was not looking very bright for me, as I was going to be very difficult to sell. Anyway, my owner could see that I wasn't actually really naughty, just terribly confused, so she took me on. The rest is history (so to speak). She spent about 3 months re-schooling me so that I could understand all aids correctly & I became a much better horse. I have spent these last few years teaching learners to ride until my recent retirement.

The message behind this little story is that all horses come with a history, so potential buyers need to be very cautious about what they are buying. It pays to do some thorough research and homework before parting with your money. To be continued.....

MAY As I said last month some thorough research & homework may save you your hard earned money & maybe some heartbreak as well.

To start with, some things which need to be considered are – family – will they be able to cope with your long absences down in the paddock with your new love affair? Can other members of the family rustle up the evening meal or any other meal for that matter while you spend quality time with your equine or borrowing the family car to take him to the vet, your other half (human variety) may have his/her nose put out of joint, feeling a little less loved. This isn't the case of course; it's just that you start to share your affection.

The next thing to consider is time. Will you have the time to spend with your equine friend? We are not like a trail bike or a car which can be shedded/stored as the impulse takes. Daily attention is best, even when we are kept in a paddock. Shoes come off, rugs slip off, come undone, hoof abscesses appear etc. Whatever can happen usually does. Will you be able to make that extra time before or after work to ride, check feed, rug or whatever, no matter what the weather? Commitment is the key word here.

Then money is the next thing. Firstly the purchase price. Is it affordable for you? That is just the beginning. Don't forget to include the cost of a vet check, especially if you are new to the game. The ongoing costs follow on from there. Do you have room at home or will you have to agist. Agisting costs vary enormously depending on the type of care/facilities provided, so you must be prepared to pay if you have no time during the week. The cheapest I have seen is \$5 per week for the most basic no care/poor feed situation to the more top line thoroughbred facilities which can be over \$100 per week. (shop around!). Weekly costs include feed (\$20 - \$50 per week depending), shoeing – every 4 – 6 – 8 weeks depending on the size, age & activity. Shoeing costs vary too, but generally the cheaper the farrier, the worse the job done. Unfortunately a poor job doesn't always show up for several months & in the meantime your poor equine may have suffered unnecessarily. Prices I have come across recently vary from \$20 (!) to \$120 (this was high quality corrective shoeing). Average prices appear to be around the \$70 mark. The next outlay is the gear & there are just oodles of the stuff for sale in the saddlers. A brief list of equipment needed for your equine friend is a saddle, bridle, saddle blanket, halter, grooming gear, rugs bandages (this is very brief). Then for yourself you will need appropriate riding gear, jods, boots and of course an Australian standards safety approved riding helmet. Here again the saddlers have been really smart in targeting the female market as it is mostly ladies doing the purchasing. The range of riding apparel is just huge & very fashionable, even colour coordinating gear for horse & rider! Another expense which you will need to incorporate into your budget (if you haven't blown it already) is vet costs. They are usually unexpected, so it is a bit hard to allow, but generally, it is more than you allow for! Most vets will give you a quote or at least an approximate idea of what you will be up for. It is possible that you may wish to compete with your equine, in which case there will be club fees, competition costs, and possibly lesson costs. And of course you need to get there, so you will need the appropriate towing vehicle (not cheap) and finally .. a float.

Now I have got all this way and not even talked about how to go about purchasing your equine partner! Dear me! To be continued....

JUNE The continuing topic is buying a horse. We have decided that our family can cope with that extra equine member, we can allocate the time to spend with our equine friend and we can afford that extra money for the purchase price and ongoing maintenance.

What do we want to do with a horse? It may be trail riding/ pleasure, pony / riding club, dressage, one day eventing, hacking, western, polo, polocrosse, show jumping, endurance riding, the list goes on.

Whatever the discipline, ways in which we can look for our equine can range from Stock and Vehicles in The advertiser, word of mouth, on the internet, Horse Deals or even local ads in the fodder store.

Other factors come into play now like size, age, colour, sex and proximity. One of the most important factors is temperament, and this of course you will only really discover when you get to see the horse. Always take someone with you when you go to see the horse. Take your own riding gear or your friend's if they are the one to do the riding. Make sure that the owner rides the horse first. There is almost no limit to the number and type of questions you can ask the vendor. And don't always take their word for granted.

Make sure beforehand that there is a safe area in which to ride the horse. If possible, arrive early enough to see the horse being caught, saddled etc. Make sure that the horse can be floated calmly and safely and ask for a demo if possible – remember - if the vendor wants to sell, they will certainly do a demo for you!

Get as much past history of the horse as you can, including names of past owners etc. Will the horse be obedient ridden on its own and in company? Do you want a trial and will the vendor agree to one? Remember there are pitfalls either way. Don't fall in love if the horse is not for you and for the vendor, the horse may not come back to you the way it left. Don't be pressured into buying because the vendor has 2 more families coming the next day – most times this just isn't true. Don't be influenced by just colour, temperament is FAR more important! If possible, go back for a second and maybe third look. If the horse is very quiet, it may be drugged (another reason for that follow up visit). It can be useful to take a video camera with you so that you look at the horse again, at home, at leisure. Can the horse be pasted (wormed?). If the vendor has a regular worming and shoeing schedule in place, that is a positive.

Any unusual gear needs to be queried as well. While you are watching the horse being caught, saddled, ridden etc., check out its conformation. This is another topic on its own and it is also where your observing friend can be of great help. Once you have decided to take the plunge, don't forget to discuss a vet check. You may think you have found the most fabulous horse in the world, only to discover that it is not sound for the discipline you want to follow!

Well! I hope that has given you food for thought so to speak! Speaking of which, my dinner calls.....

JULY I hope you have been able to digest all that info re buying a horse. There is so much to remember, so it is best to take your time. However, let's assume that you have been both smart and lucky and are now the proud owner/carer of a very special equine.

Your equine mate is going to need all kinds of gear which will suit him (read her as well) and only him. Grooming gear is all pretty basic – the first absolute essential is a hoof pick, followed by a soft brush (for bony body parts), a stiffer brush for those thicker coats and removing mud etc., curry comb for removing hair from your other brushes, a sponge and a towel. There are many other items too numerous to mention just now.

The saddle will depend on the type of activity you plan on doing with your mount, but most importantly, it must fit him absolutely correctly. It does appear that the shape of the modern horse has changed somewhat, so dragging that old GP saddle out of the shed that once belonged to next door's son's daughter will probably not be a good choice!. If you are not sure whether the saddle is the correct one, then do get some professional or knowledgeable help. It can be a very expensive, time consuming and potentially damaging exercise (to your horse). Poorly fitting saddles can be the cause of a myriad of bad behaviour, including bucking, hollowing with the head up in the air, crookedness and even appearing lame. This can mean a vet visit, chiropractor, time off etc, while you are busy sorting out the exact cause and then how to go about fixing it. There should be enough adjustment on the girth that it isn't too hard to secure it. Your saddler can be of help here.

The bridle should fit correctly too. Most bridles come in pony, cob and full sizes and there is usually enough adjustment on them to fit the in-between sizes. The bit should be stainless steel (doesn't rust) and as simple as possible. The previous owner may be of help here and you may not wish to change what your horse is already used to. The basic principle here is the KISS principle (Keep It Simple Stupid).

Saddle cloths come in all shapes and sizes and materials. Once again buy what is best suited to your purpose and your horse. Some horses cannot have a woolen cloth on them as they come out in a rash.

Other gadgets such as martingales should not be necessary if the horse has been correctly schooled. If you don't feel secure without one, get some help to re educate your horse to travel safely without one.

Shoeing needs to be considered and your farrier is the expert to talk to here. Generally a moderately worked horse will last for 6 weeks between shoeings, depending on the type of ground he has been worked on. However, as in all things, treat your horse as an individual; he might be quite different from the norm.

Most horses are rugged these days and the variety on the market is endless. Once again, the previous owner can be of help here, or your horsey friends. Some rugs just do up better than others. Some get jammed easily, others break.

These are just guidelines, so I hope that some of this is of help. Til next month.....

AUGUST This month (oh by the way, I am now one year older!) I would like to look at some ways of looking after your equine. Not in the food sense, as I have discussed that already, but from a chiropractic point of view.

How many riders wear their heels down on one side or the other? How many carry one shoulder higher than the other? Everyone is mostly left or right handed, or even right or left footed. Most people have some degree of scoliosis of the spine, which can affect how they sit in the saddle. If we combine all or one of those imbalances to the rider's position in the saddle, think what it does to your poor equine over a long period of time. Or a short period of time for that matter. No wonder we need to get the saddle fitting correctly! Imagine carrying around on your shoulders a person who continually sat to one side or wriggled around, tipped forward, leant back and generally threw you off balance all the time. How hard it would be to be forever rebalancing yourself, shortening your steps or speeding up to counterbalance. As an athlete, our equine suffers from tight muscles through holding himself incorrectly. This can manifest itself in all kinds of undesired behaviour. For example, tail swishing, reluctance to go forward, crookedness, irregular paces, ears back, girthingness, delayed transitions etc.

There are several ways of treating these problems and you probably have to shop around. The costs vary too, from \$40 to over double that amount, depending. And there are often follow up treatments. Firstly, it may just be a veterinary problem. If not, then there is a Bioscan treatment, which can be very beneficial, chiropractic treatment, physiotherapy or even muscle massage. These days there are several paths to follow, but whatever works best for your equine will be the way to go.

Horses which are in regular hard work like eventers and competitive dressage and show jumpers may need treatment more often. Or it just may be something that your equine has done in the paddock, especially at this time of year, when the surface is wet and slippery and the underneath still hard.

So next time your beloved mount starts to exhibit behaviour which is not normal for him, check your gear, yourself and then start at his feet and work up. The main clue is, is this normal for my mount?

I hope that is food for thought everyone.

SEPTEMBER Do you remember last month was a birthday month for equines? This of course makes us all one year older. Or chronologically advanced to be positive about it! I have been asked to talk about us oldies and what to do with us in our latter years.

As time goes on, joints become stiffer, muscles are harder to keep fit, the hills are steeper to climb and steeper to go down. Little ailments start to creep in. Maybe a cough, an unwillingness to go forward, a lot of lying down in the paddock, a mild bout of colic, loss of weight, a dull coat, easy to startle a change in manure consistency etc.

As a good horse manager would know, any changes to the norm need to be noted, not necessarily with concern, but noted nevertheless. The aged equine actually requires more care and attention than his younger paddock mates. He may need rugging more often, teeth checked more often, and more feeding. As the equine ages, his metabolism becomes less efficient and to maintain his good condition, his feed will need to be supplemented. There are some excellent pellet feeds on the market at the moment which can do the job. That is the first decision to make...can you afford the time and extra cost involved to keep up the extra maintenance?

Retiring the old fellow out in the paddock can often be 'out of sight out of mind', which is just what should NOT happen. How many owners have found their old friend out in the paddock one day? He may have been checked on only recently, but chances are that he probably would have died of colic. Owners owe it to their equines to see that they don't come to such a cruel and painful end. In the hills, many of our properties are in water catchments areas, so burying on your property may not be an option. Disposal is not cheap either. The Adelaide zoo provides an excellent service in disposing

of the old equine (I can't believe I said that!). It is a free service; the zoo man puts the horse down on the property, so his last moments are not stressful. He then winches the horse onto his vehicle. The hardest part about this is for the owner to make THAT decision.

My owners got my vet to give me a general overhaul as well as a blood test, as I hadn't been quite myself for some time. I know that my condition is being monitored daily and should there be any major changes in that, well my owners will be having to make a decision. I know it will be for the best, as I don't want to suffer colic, heart failure or anything else horrible. At 32 years of age I am at present making the most of my retirement. I love my hard feeds and my stable at night and of course my paddock companions. However, I should still be around to do next month's article!

OCTOBER It has come to my attention through the hills horsey grapevine that recently there have been a number of quite serious accidents which have occurred whilst rugs have been removed from horses in paddocks.

Please, please, owners & perhaps more especially helpful horsey mums & dads – safety is of paramount importance when handling horses, no matter how well you think you know your equine.

Here are some helpful tips: There are 2 schools of thought on rug placement & removal. Firstly, the old or the English way, or the new or Australian way. In years past, we were taught to place a rug on well forward of the withers, do up the front, then proceed to the back & do up the rear straps (making sure to cross them over). Once done up, the rug was then adjusted in a backwards direction to go with the lay of the fur. Presumably for the comfort of the horse. Conversely, for removal the rug was undone at the back first, securing clips (facing to the inside) back to the rug & then undoing the front buckle. The rug is then slid gently off the horse. This method is perfectly safe in confined quarters, a stable for instance, or if someone is holding the horse.

In Australian conditions, where it is more the norm for our equine pals to be kept in paddocks & it is much quicker to remove rugs in the paddock, the old method proves not to be so safe. In an open paddock situation, without the horse being tethered, it is safer to undo the front strap first, followed by the two back straps. Conversely, if putting on the rug in the paddock, do up the back straps first, then the front. The rug will slide back of its own accord to settle in its natural position.

The reason why this method is safer (although not foolproof) is that being the creatures of flight that we are, anything which spooks us will send us forward. If this happens as the rug is being put on, it naturally moves back. The horse feels something sliding down his legs, probably flapping a little & this may be all it takes for him to go galloping down the paddock. If the front straps have already been secured, the rug then falls around the horses front legs & can cause him to be quite seriously injured, namely breaking a front leg or even worse, his neck. These accidents have actually happened, to normally well trained & quiet horses. Of course, the rug is also wrecked. The safer way is to do up the back straps first & the front last. If the horse gallops off halfway through, in the majority of cases, the rug will just slide off & fall off his back legs. Once again though, safety is the bottom line here. If it is windy & the rug must come off, the horse should be secured, or one person to hold, while the other removes the rug. Also, too, if the horse is wearing more than one rug, each rug should be secured separate from the other. Should the horse spook whilst removing the first rug, at least the inner rug will stay secure, instead of the horse dragging two rugs behind him around the paddock.

One last comment re rugs. We will be coming into some warmer days now and the modern synthetic rugs although toasty warm when it is cold, do make your equine sweat during the day. Anything over 17 degrees with no wind or chill factor will generally cause him to sweat. Remember he comes complete with his own inbuilt fur coat, so try not to over rug.

That's all for this month everyone. If you have a particular subject or query to discuss, you can contact me as below. Happy munching & safe riding, rugging & unrugging!

NOVEMBER This month's topic is.....cleaning tack. On those nasty rainy days when you would rather sit by the nice warm fire than be outside with your equine pal, there is a really useful way to spend that time.

Put on a CD or the TV, grab an old towel or sheet, collect together all your gear cleaning equipment and away you go! If you think that's too boring, get a couple of like minded friends over and clean gear together. The time will fly as you will find out. Another good reason for doing this chore by the fire (not too close) is that it warms the leather and this makes it easier for the leather conditioner to be absorbed.

Firstly, take everything apart and lay on your sheet. Next you need a bowl of warm water and a sponge. Go over all leather parts with saddle soap and your damp sponge, checking for extra wear marks or cracks as you go. Pay special attention to stitching, especially stirrup leathers and the webbing under the flap that the girth points attach to. With the bridle, check the rein attachment and

all buckles. Also check your bit for signs of wear. Bits may last forever, but the edges do wear and can cut into the side of your horse's face. As the bit wears, it becomes a little looser and it is where it is loose that it can pinch. Rub well into the leather, this takes a bit of elbow grease, check for 'jockeys', those little black lumps that tend to sit on saddle flaps. They are just a mixture of dirt, sweat and grease. If they are really bad, after you have softened them up with the warm sponge and saddle soap, one of those old bone handled knives with a smooth edge is useful for removing them. But be careful not to cut into the leather.

Now, if you have been somewhat lazy and your gear is very dry, you may need to apply some leather oil. Be careful not to overdo the application of the oil. A good way is to apply with a small brush, then rub in with your hands. This helps to soften the leather two ways. Wipe off any excess with a soft cloth. There are plenty of leather conditioners on the market and if your gear is well maintained, then this is all you should need to use. Once again, it is best to rub in with your fingers, as it really helps to soften the leather. After you have gone over all your gear, wipe everything with a damp cloth to remove any excess grease.

Stirrup rubbers, bits and irons can all be washed in warm, soapy water, then dried with a soft cloth. You may find some discolouration on your bit, patches of yellowy-brown. They are very hard, but can be scraped off carefully with your flat bladed knife. Patches of rust may show on the stirrup irons as well, and a soapy steelo pad will generally remove these. If your girth is of a cotton type, it should be washed regularly anyway. A leather one should be treated as per the rest of your gear. Synthetic girths may only need a wipe.

Once you have gone over everything and are satisfied with the cleanliness, you need to set aside any parts for repairs. The next thing to do is put it all back together! Please do make sure when assembling your bridle that the bit goes back on the correct way, otherwise your poor equine mate may not only be a tad uncomfortable, he may show his discomfort to you in an unpleasant way too! Once your tack is all assembled, keep it inside overnight, so that the leather will stay warm and better absorb the oils and conditioner. Then, clean up your mess and remember, clean gear is safe gear!

DECEMBER This month I thought I would discuss the gentle art of lungeing....

Lungeing is a valuable part of any horse's repertoire and whether a horse is lunged on a regular basis or not, it is a very useful tool. It can be used for basic training in suppleness, rhythm, obedience, bonding (verbal commands), contact, balance, fitness and assessment to mention a few things. Done well by an experienced handler, it looks remarkably easy, but there are many pitfalls. Beware the trap of having to lunge your horse to 'get the beans out of him'. When the basics are not established with your horse and by that I mean stop, go, turn and stand, lungeing can actually reinforce the flight response (speeding up instead of slowing down, or just not slowing) and the handler then lunges the horse more and more until he is too tired to respond, so he slows down anyway. Consider this – what has he learnt from that scenario? Other than to use the lunge as an excuse to play merry hell. Far better (and safer) to have those basics established in hand first before putting him on the lunge. Be careful when introducing lungeing to keep sessions short and non stressful. Ten minutes each rein is plenty, especially with a young horse who is still growing. Permanent damage can be done with excessive lungeing too early.

It is very handy to be able to assess your horse on the lunge. Especially if you are looking for any uneven paces or rhythm, responses to transitions and response to the whip or your voice. If for some reason your horse cannot be ridden (he may have been out for a spell and be in 'soft' condition), he can be quietly lunged to get him back to everyday fitness. This can be particularly applicable to ponies, who seem to put on kilos at the drop of a hat! When they are in really soft condition, there is a risk of girth galls if they are not brought up to riding fitness first. Or perhaps you may have brought him in out of the paddock and put him on the lunge only to find that he is either uneven or erratic. He may have pulled a muscle whilst being turned out and may need chiropractic treatment or the vet. Quite often, when they are erratic, it can be a simple reaction to pain, in which case further investigation is required.

Next month we shall discuss the gear required and technique. Cheerio for now

Safe riding and happy munching!