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PREPARING THE PERFORMANCE HORSE - PART TWO...

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PREPARE HOOVES AND COAT

Regular hoof care and trimming is essential to prevent injury and to reduce uneven and unwanted pressure on joints, which can lead to early breakdown. Proper hoof balance helps to facilitate optimum gait and a smooth stride. Consistent hoof trimming is particularly important in growing horses as it helps to 'set the bones' in place and correct any limb deviations. It is vital to trim to realign the limbs during the first 3-12 months while the horse is growing. Corrective trimming in young growing horses to help ensure straight limbs should be carried out every 4 weeks, rather than the standard 6-8 weeks in mature horses.

Adequate nutrition is essential for proper hoof growth and strength. The diet for a fully-grown horse should contain a good source of protein such as 200-300gms full fat soya bean meal, or 400gms cracked lupins or 500gms copra meal. A daily supplement high quality vitamin and mineral supplement, which includes calcium, zinc, Vitamin A and biotin (Vitamin H), helps to make up shortfalls of trace-minerals and vitamins in the diet. If a horse has poor quality "shelly" hooves, an additional 15mg of biotin daily may be worthwhile.

Be aware of the weather conditions and terrain on which you are exercising your horses. Stony, dry working areas can lead to bruised soles and broken away and chipped hoof edges, as well concussion on joints and limbs.

PRODUCING A SHINY COAT

Skin and coat condition is largely a reflection of a well-balanced ration, a good worming program and regular grooming, cleaning and rugging. The ration must include a good source of vitamins and minerals, in particular copper, zinc, iron and Vitamin A, as well as polyunsaturated oils. An additional iron supplement can be useful to help produce a deep, lustrous coloured coat.

Polyunsaturated vegetable oils, fed in conjunction with a supplement containing zinc, copper, iron and Vitamin A, will help to maintain optimum coat and skin condition. Regular grooming will keep the coat short and clean as well as stimulate and disperse skin oils from the oil glands, producing a soft coat and healthy shine. Rugging with a well fitting rug (to avoid rub marks and hair loss) will also help ensure a flat, short and clean coat.

HINT: CHOOSE A SUITABLE HOOF PREPARATION

Many show competitors use 'greasy' fat or 'mineral' oil based hoof preparations that collect dust as well as melting or wearing off during exercise. Products containing Eucalyptus oil can adversely affect the hoof wall lamination.

Kohnke's Own Hoof-Seal® is a hoof dressing made from a natural protective blend of biodegradable wood tars and oils. It provides a thin coating of breathable polyurethane that can help to reduce moisture and variations in the hoof. In the winter months, it helps maintain normal hoof moisture levels to minimise excessive softening due to wet conditions, and in the summer months, Hoof-Seal limits moisture loss from the soles to help maintain the hooves in a flexible and resilient condition, without being too dry, hard and brittle. Hoof-Seal® needs to be only applied as a thin coat once a week, making it highly economical and easy to manage. It dries on the hooves within 10 minutes, doesn't melt off or collect bedding and dust when working on an arena.

A CLEAN HAIR COAT READY FOR SHOWING

It is important to keep the coat clean and free from stains and scurf. Avoid shampooing excessively and try to limit use of shampoos that are soap/detergent based, as these will often strip the natural oils from the coat and dry out the skin.

HINT: IMPROVING NATURAL GLOSS

A great way to improve coat gloss is to exercise the horse or pony by walking it in the sun until it starts to sweat and dampens its coat. Then bring the horse into the wash bay or stable aisle and rub it over with a soft grooming brush while it is still hot and damp from sweating. The massaging effect of the grooming on the hot skin will stimulate dispersal of skin oils from its oil glands, which will shine and help soften the coat. Repeat at 3-4 day intervals for the best effect.

IMPROVING CONDITION AND TOPLINE

Improving condition on a horse and building top-line are two quite different objectives in a show preparation, which are sometimes confused and regarded as the same. Often show horses and ponies are overfed and carry too much condition to provide the illusion that the horse is 'well built' and has a well developed 'topline'. Putting condition on a horse or pony is usually a result of the diet being high in carbohydrate and fat, while feeding limited amounts of good quality protein and muscle-loading exercise develops the topline. When conditioning horses and ponies by feeding high carbohydrate and fat diets, it is important not to overfeed and cause an over-weight fat appearance, as this can increase the risk of joint disease



from overloading during exercise, especially as the horse ages.

It is important to be able to distinguish between fat deposits and muscle in the horse, and despite popular belief, fat cannot be converted to muscle. Unwanted fat stores must be reduced, while muscles must be built through exercise and protein in the diet. High energy diets will cause fat deposits to first accumulate behind the shoulders, then above the tail butt, followed by behind the withers, elbow and over the ribs and finally on the crest of the neck.

Equine Metabolic Syndrome (EMS) and Equine Cushings Disease (ECD) are often a result of overfeeding and obesity during years of show conditioning, without a winter 'strip out' to readjust glucose and insulin metabolism. It is relatively common in show horses and 'crested' ponies as they reach 12-13 years of age.

IMPORTANT: TAKE CARE FEEDING HEAVILY CONDITIONED HORSES AND PONIES

Be careful when feeding good quality grass hay, particularly rye grass and lucerne hay, to heavy, 'crested' horses and ponies with a history of recurring founder. The sugar or Non-Structural Carbohydrate (NSC) content in these hays can be very high and besides making your horse over-energetic, it can result in obesity. Soak the hay in twice its volume of lukewarm water for 40-60 minutes prior to feeding. This will help remove a significant amount of the sugars, while still providing a good fibre source which is important for proper digestive health.

For lighter weight horses and those in poorer condition, particularly older horses who have a reduced digestive efficiency, a planned step-wise increased feed intake, including an increase in both energy and protein, is recommended to reduce digestive and metabolic upset. Feeds should be divided up between 3-4 small feeds per day to avoid gut overload. You could consider including feeds such as steam rolled or boiled barley, or rice bran, to help condition the horse along with a protein source, such as extruded full fat soya bean meal, as well as regular exercise to help improve health and condition. At least 50% of the diet should consist of good quality roughage, which must also be provided in sufficient amounts to ensure good digestive function

ABOUT JOHN KOHNKE:

Dr. John Kohnke is arguably Australia's leading nutritional and practical feeding advisor and his services are sought throughout Australia and worldwide for advice on the feeding and management of horses. He has over 35 years experience as a veterinarian specialising in equine nutrition and management. Dr. Kohnke gained his early professional experience with horses as a veterinarian on a leading Thoroughbred horse breeding and racing stud. In March 2002 he started his own company John Kohnke Products and formulated an innovative range of feed supplements and horse care products, distinguished by the Kohnke's Own brand name. The large range of Kohnke's Own supplements are formulated to meet the specific needs of all types of horses, based on the latest research in nutritional standards (NRC 2007) and manufactured to the highest quality standards. Check out the Kohnke's Own website www.kohnkesown.com