

DRESSAGE, EVENTING, HUNTERS, JUMPERS

VOL. 35

PRACTICAL HORSEMAN EXTRA

USE THE OFF SEASON TO PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENT

How To Keep Your Horse Hydrated During the Winter

Brought to you by





WEATHER.BEATEN.

[CLICK HERE](#)

NEW SEASON COMFITEC. THE PERFECT BLEND OF SCIENCE AND LOVE.

Our revolutionary new season ComFiTec turnout blanket collection is designed to conquer the elements... and your worries. As you'd expect from us, every aspect of our most advanced range ever - from materials to fastenings - has been developed with comfort and fit in mind. So whatever the weather throws at your horse, you can be sure their blanket will hug them as snugly and lovingly as you do.



DURABLE

MADE FROM DURABLE FABRICS WITH WEAVES DESIGNED FOR THE ULTIMATE TEAR RESISTANCE AND SUPREME TOUGHNESS.



INSULATING

NUMBER OF WARMTH OPTIONS TO SUIT YOUR HORSE AND CLIMATE AND PROVIDE THE VERY BEST LEVEL OF INSULATION.



WATERPROOF

100% WATERPROOF OUTER SHELL FABRIC WITH TAPED SEAMS CREATES A FLEXIBLE YET IMPENETRABLE BARRIER.



SELF-CLEANSING

TEFLON/REPEL COATED OUTER SHELL RESISTS DIRT PENETRATION AND ENCOURAGES MOISTURE TO BEAD AND RUN AWAY.



BREATHABLE

'INTELLIGENT' INNER MEMBRANE CHANNELS SWEAT AWAY FROM YOUR HORSE AND HELPS REGULATE TEMPERATURE.



CARING

OUR UNIQUE AFFINITY WITH HORSES RESULTS IN A FIT AND PERFORMANCE THAT'S SECOND-TO-NONE. WE CALL IT HUGOLOGY.



Hugology™



© HUNTER MESSINEO
Based at Fox Covert Farm, in Upperville, Virginia, Jim Wofford competed in three Olympics and two World Championships and won the U.S. National Championship five times. He is also a highly respected coach. For more on Jim, go to www.jimwofford.blogspot.com.

Now's Your Chance

Going into an off-season quiet time, you can plan for a fitter and happier horse next time out.

This might be my favorite time of year, when most of the big eventing competitions are over. I think of this period as "Now's my chance." While the horses in my program are having a much-needed rest, their riders and I are planning for future success.

By "success" I don't necessarily mean winning, although that helps. I really should say I am looking for "improvement." I go through this process regardless of the current level of the horse



© AMY K. DRAGOO/AIMMEDIA

Winter is the time to plan for improvement. Long walks during this time give your horse the strength and fitness to perform better in the coming year. While you are conditioning your horse, leave your headphones behind. If you disconnect yourself from the natural world, you are a menace to society and a danger to your horse. Headphones are mental "bling" —they tell me that your riding is about you, not about your partner. When told they are a defense against boredom, I ask, "How can you be bored when you are connected to the most wonderful creature in creation?"

As your horse makes a long series of solitary footprints, consider what author John Moore said, "Wherever man has left his footprint in the long ascent from barbarism to civilization, we will find the hoofprint of the horse beside it." Think about the horse's role in society and your particular horse's role in your life. Think about the ethics of owning an animal that depends upon you for both his livelihood and his life. Think about your horse, not yourself.

and rider. I want my riders to set goals for themselves, but they have to be realistic goals. If we are dealing with a 6-year-old Thoroughbred who ran until he was 4, it is rarely realistic to say, "Next spring I want to win a CCI*." The Thoroughbred might have successfully *completed* a competition at the Preliminary level at this point, but he is not yet competitive.

Chances are this Thoroughbred's dressage is still very much a work in progress, and although he's obviously talented, his youthful exuberance causes him to have an occasional show-jumping knockdown. His talent shines on cross country, but most riders and trainers will not have let him run at speed yet. That will come with maturity. Many times, horses of this type will have to work their way up the levels with few top-five placings to show for their efforts until they get into the rarified atmosphere of three- and four-star competition. Despite the change in format from Classic to short, at the middle and upper levels stamina and speed are still determinative factors, and this is when Thoroughbreds start to show their talent and the results of their riders' careful, years-long preparation.

Although I am proud that I can help horses and riders at every level, I tend to keep my eyes on the upper levels of eventing, and most of the upper-level event horses are 70 percent or more Thoroughbred. I counsel my riders that if a nice non-TB prospect comes along, they should keep the horse's breeding in mind. Non-TB horses usually find the dressage and show jumping easy, but take a bit longer to understand the cross country and rarely have the ability to gallop at speed.

A Chance to Improve Soundness and Fitness

I mentioned earlier that my horses take a break from competing at this time of year. I am a bit old school about this. I still think in terms of a two- or three-month competition season followed by a rest period and then by another period of preparation for competition. As you start your break with your horse, get your vet to examine

him. Now's your chance to have your vet diagnose and treat any lingering physical problems he might have.

When you start conditioning for your horse's new season, I want you to use the most powerful tool you have: the walk. That's right, I want you to *walk* your horse into shape. My reasoning is simple. Both the walk and the gallop are four-beat paces. When you walk your horse, you are galloping in slow motion with little concussion and a low risk of injury.

At this juncture you may be thinking, "Walk? But Jim, what about trot sets?" The vast majority of horses who I train these days are preparing to compete in a short-format event rather than a Classic (which included roads and tracks and steeplechase). But even when I was training mostly Classic horses, I did not use trot sets as part of my conditioning system. I thought they were outmoded years ago and are even more so in modern eventing. Trot sets do not condition the galloping muscles as well as long walks and cause much more concussion on the horse's feet and joints, especially on firm ground.

Not Just Any Walk Will Do

But wait—when I say I want you to walk your horse into shape, I need to add a few comments. To me, "walk" does not mean aimlessly ambling around on a loose rein with earphones blasting the latest top-10 hits. It is an interesting phenomenon, when you think about it: People who must make their living by sitting in a cubicle looking at a computer monitor are dreaming of being outside riding. Yet as soon as they get into the saddle, they do the one thing that will separate them from their horse by plugging in their earphones. I disapprove of this because it disconnects you from the natural world just when you want and need it the most. In addition, it is not safe to walk your horse out without being exposed to the same stimuli he is. If you are riding your horse in public with earphones, then you are a menace to society. If you can *hear* that noisy truck in the distance, on the other

hand, you can make sure your horse sees it in plenty of time and that it does not trigger his flight reaction.

Olympic dressage rider and judge Linda Zang says that during a dressage test she wants to see a "going-home walk." Chances are you will have to use your legs to produce this in your horse, but the effort is worthwhile. Every time your horse's shoulder moves forward, close your opposite leg in rhythm with the walk that you want rather than the walk he might offer. For example, as his right shoulder moves forward, close your left leg at the girth and then your right leg at the girth as his left shoulder moves forward. When you get off after an hour's vigorous walk, your legs should be more tired than your horse's legs. Try to walk on rolling terrain, as it helps strengthen and supple your horse. Whether you are going up or down a slope, make him go straight and maintain a regular rhythm.



"If you are riding your horse in public with earphones, then you are a menace to society."

For the Record

While the walk is an important tool in your conditioning program, it is not the only tool. Your job is to arrive at your destination event with your horse brought to as high a degree of training as possible. This means that in addition to conditioning, you must schedule adequate dressage, show-jumping and cross-country training. To that end, I want you to keep both a schedule of plans and a work diary. The schedule makes sure that you plan for improvement in every phase from now until the event, while the diary is a record of the work you actually did on a day-to-day basis. For example, your schedule might call for "one-hour walk plus dressage work" (see below for which activity comes first) but your diary says, "shoe off, farrier tomorrow." Use the schedule to train your horse, but don't be afraid to change it as circumstances require.

What should a schedule look like?

There are as many answers to that question as there are event trainers. My typical schedule does not use a weekly calendar, but rather is what I call a "four-day rotation." My sample schedule looks like this:

Day 1: Walk and dressage.

Day 2: Walk and show jump.

Day 3: Walk and dressage.

Day 4: Canter (or depending on the level of competition, gallop, once I am getting close to my destination event).

Day 5: Repeat Day 1, and so on.

You can see that there is variety in my schedule, as horses like different activities. I count any cross-country schooling I do as a canter/gallop day. (I also suggest you keep your training diary, as it will be a valuable resource for you in the future. The diary will serve as a guide to the sort of work you have done with your horse in the past and can help you adjust your horse's workload this season accordingly.)

The next question is, "How much exercise should I give my horse?" The truthful answer is that I have no idea. First you have to tell me what type of horse he is, what level he is currently competing at, what you did with him last season, whether you were happy with the results of your former schedule and so on. Experiment with the sequence of either walk first followed by dressage or dressage first followed by walk. Some horses will go much better if they have walked out first while other horses are quite businesslike and want to get the dressage out of the way and then go for a walk. There is no right or wrong about this, it is just a matter of knowing your horse.

As my training schedule gets close to the destination event, my Novice and Training horses walk for at least half an hour in addition to their technical work, Preliminary horses walk for an hour, Intermediate horses for an hour and a half and Advanced horses for two hours.

I know my conditioning schedule takes more time than others, but I am convinced it produces sounder, fitter horses by making the most of the chance to improve them. 🐾

ComFiTec™ Plus



[CLICK HERE](#)



LINER
COMPATIBILITY



DURABLE



RIPSTOP



NIGHT VISION



COMFORT

COMFORTABLE, DURABLE AND REMARKABLE VALUE.



How do I keep my horse hydrated during THE WINTER?

Q Are dehydration and overheating ever a problem for horses in the wintertime? If so, do you have any tips for avoiding these problems while continuing a regular exercise routine?

HARRY W. WERNER, VMD

A Yes, overheating and dehydration can be a problem for horses in the winter. Both can result from a combination of factors, some of which may not be obvious during cold-weather conditions. It is important to know what these factors are and how to control their effects on your horse.



© STACEY NEDROW-WIGMORE

To prevent winter dehydration, keep fresh, temperate water and a mineral salt block available to your horse at all times.

Preventing overheating

Unlike smaller animals, such as people and dogs, horses have a very large body mass relative to their surface area. This makes them big “heat sinks”—their bodies take a long time to warm up and cool down. Even on chilly days, if you exercise your horse enough to increase his internal temperature, he will still need a proper cool-down.

How much heat a horse can tolerate varies a great deal among individuals. In the winter, heat tolerance also depends on whether he is body-clipped, trace-clipped or unclipped. A heavy winter coat is very insulating, so an unclipped horse will get warmer during exercise than a clipped horse. A winter coat also slows evaporation of sweat, which is the primary means by which horses cool their bodies, so it takes unclipped horses longer to return their temperature to normal after a workout.

Exercising your horse during winter is fine on all but the most bitter-cold days (when temperatures are below about 25 F). To be sure he is completely cool at the end of your ride, always err on the side of caution by walking him more rather than less. Keep in mind that the purpose of cooling out—transitioning from peak exercise to rest—is not only to return his body temperature to normal, but also to restore normal muscle function. His circulatory system needs time to

remove waste products from his muscles and return pH levels to normal. How long this process takes depends on how fatigued the muscles are. The degree of muscle fatigue depends on the duration and intensity of the workout as well as how fit your horse is.

If you blanket your horse, be careful not to do so too soon after exercise. Even if his skin temperature seems cool to the touch, his core body temperature may still be elevated. Blankets can trap excess heat against the skin and prevent sweat from evaporating, so blanketing too quickly can sometimes cause horses who seem to have recovered from a ride to break out into a sweat again.

If your horse is unclipped but is still slightly damp after a ride, it is usually safe to turn him out or put him in a stall unblanketed as long as he has a good winter coat and is a healthy weight. His coat’s natural wicking and insulation properties will keep him comfortable. However, a soaking-wet coat (as from a drenching rain) will not provide adequate insulation because the hairs are flattened against the skin. If your horse gets this wet on a cold day, towel him off and put him in a temperate area until he dries.

Preventing dehydration

Susceptibility to dehydration varies from horse to horse. Depending on his diet and exercise, your horse’s water consumption

actually may need to go up in the winter-time. In colder months, many horses eat more hay, which requires digestion by the hindgut in a very water-intensive process. If your horse does not have enough water to digest the roughage, he may develop impaction colic.

Also, the more internal heat your horse produces through exercise, the more water he needs to cool his body. At the same time, exercise increases intestinal motility, which reduces the risk of colic. So instead of limiting his exercise, try to encourage adequate water consumption. Keep fresh, temperate water available at all times (many horses dislike drinking extremely cold water) as well as a mineral salt block to stimulate thirst. Consider giving him daily oral electrolytes to help increase water consumption. The kidneys naturally excrete any excess electrolytes, so there is no harm in offering them year-round.

Regularly monitoring how much water your horse consumes can help you catch sudden changes. Unfortunately, monitoring isn’t possible if he is turned out with other horses or if he has an automatic waterer in his stall without a flow meter. The easiest way to keep track of his hydration is by testing his skin elasticity. Pinch the skin on his neck between your thumb and forefinger and pull it slightly off his body. When you release the skin, it should spring right back into place. If it does not, he is dehydrated (in which case, consult your veterinarian immediately).

By keeping your horse hydrated and cooling him out properly after every workout, you will help him weather the winter safely and happily. 🐾

Dr. Harry Werner began his equine practice in southern New England in 1979. Since then, he has held numerous positions at the American Association of Equine Practitioners, including its presidency in 2009. He also serves on the board of the World Equine Veterinary Association and is a member of the American Veterinary Medical Association Welfare Committee.

WHATEVER THE WEATHER THERE'S A WEATHERBEETA.

When you give your dog WeatherBeeta ComFiTec, you give them more than just a coat. Born out of innovation and technology; waterproof, insulated, breathable and strong, giving your best friend all the protection they need.

[CLICK HERE >](#)

weatherbeeta.com



Hugology™