

Care of Horses

Ponies and Burros

CHOOSING A HORSE

Choosing your horse is the most important decision you will make. Most beginners envision as their ideal horse a beautiful, spirited young stallion and they frequently buy such — only to find they cannot manage or ride him safely. Far better to start out by selecting a quiet gelding, at least eight or ten years old, that is willing to work and has no bad habits. Contrary to popular belief, a horse is not old at ten years. She is, in fact, in her prime of life.

The first step in selecting a horse is to determine why you are buying her — what do you expect her to be — kid pony, your own mount, family horse, show horse? Determine and state the purpose, then look for a horse that fits. You will want a horse of good conformation and constitution, but most important of all, good disposition. Generally, reputable dealers will help you find the right horse and will let you try her out for suitability before sale. If not, find another dealer. It is good insurance before closing any deal to have the horse examined by your veterinarian to determine age, state of soundness and physical fitness.

A horse is a tremendous responsibility, and keeping one can be quite expensive, too. You must also consider what to do with the horse if a time comes when you can no longer keep it. Before choosing to buy a horse, it's a good idea to talk with people who own horses (*not* someone who wants to sell you one) to find out what problems you will face.

HOUSING

Horses are healthiest and most contented when running in large pastures where they can eat, drink and seek protection from the weather as they choose. However, ample feed, water and protection from sun, insects and cold winter storms must be available.

The ideal arrangement for a horse that must be confined is a stall or shed at least ten feet by ten feet, preferably larger, with a large door on the south side opening into a pen approximately thirty feet by ninety feet, but again, preferably much larger. This allows her to seek shelter or exercise at will. If there is grass in her pen so much the better.

Stabling facilities vary widely, depending upon climate and location. Nevertheless, the following should be provided: a dry, soft bed of straw, shavings, sand or other suitable material protected from storms, cold winds and drafts; protection from the hot sun and from biting insects; a safe, clean manger where she may be fed; access to clean water and ample room for exercise.



CARE OF HORSES



EXERCISE

Exercise is a must for a healthy horse. If her pasture or pen is large enough, she will regulate her own exercise. If not, she should be taken out of her stall or pen and ridden, led or otherwise exercised thirty minutes, preferably much longer, once or twice a day.

FEEDS

Horses basically require two types of feeds — roughage (hay) and grain. Both are required in proper amounts. Too much feed results in a fat, inactive and frequently sick or crippled horse. Too little feed results in a "skinny" starved-appearing horse with reduced stamina and resistance to disease. If such horses do not promptly regain weight with increased feed, they should be examined by a veterinarian and, if necessary, treated for parasites, defective teeth or other conditions. Physical appearance is the best indicator that a horse is or is not being properly fed.

Roughages: The best and most natural source of roughage is good pasture grass. The other is any of several types of dry hay. Although horses idle or on light exercise will subsist on good pasture or good quality hay, working (or growing) animals should receive grain in addition — the harder the work, the more grain required.

Good quality hay is always green in color. Alfalfa is bright green, other types lighter in color. Hay that is overripe, improperly cured or damaged by rain will lose most of the green and appear a mixture of grey, yellow and brown. It has very little food value. All hay should be bright in color and free from mold and dust. Spoiled, moldy, dusty hay is a frequent cause of colic.

Grains: The grains most available are whole or crushed oats, shelled or cracked corn, rolled barley and "sweet feeds." The latter is a mixture of several crushed grains combined with molasses. Any of the foregoing make excellent grain feeds. Availability and price usually determine which will be fed. Grain should be clean, free of dust, bugs, mold and musty odors.

Pellets: Pelletized feeds have become very popular, especially in city and small stables. Available in paper bags at any feed store, they are clean and easy to handle and store and are competitive in price with other feeds.

Some companies make pellets of hay only. Most popular brands are a combination of hay and

Medium Work: (3-5 hours per day under saddle)
.75-1.0 lb. grain and 1.0-1.25 lbs. hay per 100 lbs. of animal body weight.

Hard Work: (5-8 hours per day under saddle)
1.0-1.4 lbs. grain and 1.0 lb. hay per 100 lbs. body weight.



grain — a complete feed. Type of pellet and feeding instructions should be stated on the bag. Overfeeding, either by feeding too many pellets or feeding grain with the complete pellet ration, must be guarded against. Pellets may be supplemented with hay, if desired. All pellets should be fresh, free of moisture, mold, odors, and should not be stuck together or bear other signs of spoilage.

FEED REQUIREMENTS

Actual requirements vary considerably from horse to horse, also with age and work. The following is a long-established general guide:

Idle: Chiefly or entirely on pasture and roughage.

Light Work: (1-3 hours per day under saddle)
.4-.75 lb. grain and 1.25-1.50 lbs. hay per 100 lbs. of animal body weight.

FEEDING

A horse should be fed on a regular schedule. Common practice is to split the day's ration into two feeds, one for morning and one for evening. A three-way split with a noon feed is better. A horse on her natural feed — pasture grass — eats intermittently, but frequently, day and night. Her digestive system is best suited for eating in small amounts and often. A full-day's grain ration fed at one time to a hungry horse is quite apt to make her sick.

Knowledgeable horsemen have long fed by the following five rules: (1) water before feeding; (2) hay before grain; (3) feed in small amounts and often; (4) do not work hard following a full feed; (5) change slowly (3-4 days) from one type ration or feed to another.

Horses should be fed individually and according to their size and amount of work they are doing. Some require more feed than others to

maintain the same condition. Others require more time to eat. When horses are fed in a common manger in a corral, the fighters and kickers get the best of the feed and the less aggressive ones get the left-overs (and kicks). Individual feeding not only conserves feed, but prevents injuries.

Grain should be fed in clean boxes that will not allow leakage or spillage on the ground. Hay should be fed in a larger box or manger that will prevent the finer hay leaves and chaff from falling to the ground. A block of salt should always be available and horses that are working hard and sweating freely should receive a tablespoon of salt in their grain each day.

WATERING

In a corral or pasture, clean water should be available to a horse at all times — if so, she will safely adjust her intake. She should always be offered water prior to feeding and again thirty minutes after she has finished eating. She should not be watered for at least an hour after exercise and should never be watered while hot — one exception, when horses are working such as in trail riding, it is well to water at every opportunity. Let her have all she wants providing she is to continue work immediately. *Never water a horse during work and then allow her to stand still. Move on immediately* to avoid cramps and colic.

In sub-freezing weather, be sure that frozen water buckets and tanks do not deprive the horse of water. Placing a warmer in the water supply so that it is not ice cold will greatly increase intake.

GROOMING

A horse should be thoroughly groomed before she is ridden each day and again after she has finished her day's work. A shining, glistening hair coat can only be developed by diligent massage through grooming and hand rubbing. Hard metal or irritating combs and brushes should be avoided. An ordinary curry comb made of rubber vigorously rubbed in a circular

motion is most effective in massaging the skin and loosening dead hair and dirt. This should be followed by a grooming brush vigorously rubbed with the hair. A cloth works well in grooming the head. Horses that resist grooming should be rubbed and brushed less vigorously. Starting with the head and left side of the neck, one should methodically groom all the way around until the entire body and legs are groomed. Each foot should be picked up, the bottom cleaned and examined each day.

FOOT CARE

Feet should be cleaned and examined regularly at grooming time to detect nail punctures (quite common), wounds and infections in the bottom of the foot. If a horse is shod, the shoes should be removed, the feet trimmed and the shoes reset or replaced at six weeks' or less intervals. Shoes may be reset two or three times before they wear out. Many horses can do their required work without shoes. However, their feet usually require trimming and shaping at four- to six-week intervals. Shoeing and trimming is best left to the experienced hand of a farrier.

THE HEALTHY HORSE

The healthy horse shows several typical characteristics. She is alert, attentive and her eyes are bright. Her skin is elastic and her hair coat shows luster. If given the opportunity, she will usually run and play for exercise. She is in good flesh and pleasing in appearance. Her appetite is good and she rather promptly consumes a normal ration at feeding time.

THE SICK HORSE

A horse has many ways of telling when she is sick or injured. If her back is sore, she will flinch or squat down if pressure is put on it either by rubbing a hand over it or by mounting. If a foot or leg is sore, she will limp as she walks and as she rests, she will stand on three legs with the affected foot extended forward resting limply on the ground. If she is sick, she usually will not eat. Loss of appetite is one of the first symptoms noticed. She will appear

listless and as if something were wrong with her — quite the opposite of the healthy horse. If she is in pain, she will be restless and will paw or scratch the ground with her front feet. She will frequently lie down, attempt to roll over, then jump up only to paw and tumble again. Any or all of these are signs of pain somewhere in her body, usually in connection with her digestive system. When she shows these signs, she is said to have "colic" which means she has a painful problem in any one of the many possible places and due to any one of many causes. So, there is no clear-cut specific treatment. The location and cause of the problem must first be determined. If any of the signs of colic appear, it is an emergency situation, and you must call the veterinarian at once. While waiting for the doctor to arrive, keep the horse as quiet as possible.

DISEASES

The horse, like man, may be affected by many diseases and also as in man, the most common are respiratory diseases, common colds and influenza — seldom serious if the horse is given rest and shelter while sick. Several diseases may be effectively prevented by vaccination — tetanus, influenza, encephalitis (sleeping sickness) and others. Since disease situations vary greatly in different parts of the country and from year to year, it is best to rely on a local veterinarian for guidance in control and prevention.

PARASITES

External parasites, flies, mosquitos and lice are obvious and can be controlled by sanitation. The real problem is the less evident internal parasites, especially the roundworm or ascaris and strongyles or blood worm. In some parts of the country, horses, especially younger ones, should be treated every 60 days if damage from these parasites is to be avoided. The problem is less severe in other areas. Again, the local veterinarian is the best informed source for guidance.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Insure that your horse is properly fed, watered, housed and exercised. Be sure there are no dangerous objects in her stall or pen such as protruding nails, broken boards, pitchforks, shovels, buckets, sharp objects and just plain junk that she may step on or run into and suffer injury. Barbed wire as a fence is most dangerous and should be avoided. Any fence should be strong enough, visible enough and high enough — preferably about five feet — so that a horse will not be tempted to jump over it. If boards or rails are used, spacing between should be sufficiently narrow so that a horse cannot stick her head between rails or boards. If strands of wire are used, the lowest strand should be at least two feet above ground where a horse is less apt to playfully stick a front foot over it. Finally, be sure all grain is stored in a safe place where it will be impossible for a horse to accidentally reach it and overeat.

American Humane is a national federation of concerned individuals and animal care and control agencies dedicated to the prevention of cruelty, neglect, abuse and exploitation of animals. Founded in 1877, it is a charitable, tax-exempt organization with headquarters in Denver, Colorado, and offices in Washington D.C. and Hollywood, California. There are over 3,000 agencies in the United States and Canada which are concerned with the prevention of cruelty to animals. Learn the name and address of your nearest humane agency. Then, when you need advice and help with any animal problem, you will know where to turn for help. If you do not find an agency near you, ask:



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