

COMPETING IN THE HEAT

With the hot weather forecast we thought that these tips would be useful. On the whole horses cope better than us in the heat.

BEFORE THE COMPETITION;

1. CLIPPING; Some rather hairy horses may benefit from being clipped, particularly older horses greys or coloureds, who tend to be hairy and some black horses struggle as they absorb more heat. (be careful to protect coloureds with a white sheet for the first week after clipping as they easily burn where they are pink)
2. SUNCREAM; Apply high factors liberally to pink noses.
3. SALT or ELECTROLYTES can be added to food during hot weather, the salt will help make them drink more, the balanced electrolytes will replace those lost in sweat.
4. FEED SOAKED HAY or SPEEDY BEET remember our ponies are used to eating lush grass but currently for most of us they are eating 'standing hay' or have no grass at all so it is much more likely for them to get a colon impaction than usual.

AT THE COMPETITION

1. WATER; take plenty of drinking water for your horse and offer regularly. There maybe water at the venue but horses are more likely to drink water from home. Always use your own buckets for hygiene reasons
2. WASHING OFF; research by Dr David Marlin shows that we should wash horses off with large amounts of water ALL OVER and NOT scrape it off as they cool fastest by evaporation - 'a wet horse cools quicker than a dry one'.
3. SHADE; make the best of it where you can, remember stationary lorries and trailers do get very hot.
4. COOLING LEGS; again recent research shows that some form of ICE boot or simply ICE cube freezer bags placed over a wet jay cloth are the most efficient way to cool legs (water boots were actually found to heat the leg over time and trap the heat; so better to wash the leg and allow evaporation than to use these if you don't have ice wraps)

SIGNS OF OVERHEATING

The signs vary, some horses become dull and less responsive but often they look very agitated, initially the handler may think that they are playing up, they may seem wobbly or some may scrape the ground and try to get down. They tend to have high respiratory rates and heart rates and will have a raised rectal temperature (above the normal 38.3) In reality they are often too agitated to examine well so immediate cooling with a lot of water all over is needed first.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF OVERHEATING IN HORSES

The following advice is the current best-practice for preventing and treating overheating in horses, with credit to the British Horse Racing Authority (BHA) and the Racecourse Association.

Overheating or Heat Stress is a serious condition that has a huge impact on the horse's welfare. It is possible to reduce the likelihood of overheating by considering the following:

- **Horses should have constant access to water.**
- **When hot or humid consider cooling on arrival at an event, again before riding and immediately after riding.**
- **Cooling is best achieved by applying large amounts of cold water over the large muscles of the shoulders and hindquarters. Repeat this process until the water on the horse is still cool to the touch after about 30 seconds in-contact.**
- **Horses should be kept walking as it helps create a slight breeze which aids evaporation.**
- **Saddles and numnahs contribute to overheating after riding and should be removed as soon as possible. Do not apply sheets or rugs**
- **Signs of Heat Stress include anxiety, agitation, wobbling, staggering and trying to go down. If you notice any of these signs KEEP THE HORSE MOVING AND REQUEST VETERINARY ASSISTANCE IMMEDIATELY.**