

HOT WEATHER PRECAUTIONS FOR YOUR HORSE

Hot weather can have devastating consequences for horses. Dehydration, impactions, founder and increased stress levels can all be partly related to the hot weather. Show horses are especially prone to problems with heat and dehydration. We put them in boxes, haul them hundreds of miles, place an animal that thrives on routine in a totally new environment and then expect them to be at the peak of their abilities. We have been experiencing an unusually hot summer this year. In addition, for many of us, keeping costs down is important while we attempt to keep our horses in optimum condition and good health. While they may not work for every horse or barn, the following methods of preventative maintenance have helped our show horses maintain good health prior to, during, and returning from a competition.

Cost is an integral aspect that all of us have to consider when preparing for a competition. If the cost is too great, there is no money left to get to the show. We have attempted to be creative to be creative in our approach while keeping the welfare of the horse paramount and the owner's monetary expense to a minimum.

HYDRATION

Four days prior to the departure to a show, the horses will get sports drink powder, ie; Gatorade, added to their water. We buy the largest container of sports drink powder that we can find, usually something "blue" (Arctic Frost). For some reason our horses have liked the berry flavors better than the citrus flavors. The containers have a scoop in them and each horse will get four scoops in their water bucket every time it is filled. The horses love the flavor, they are ingesting electrolytes, and because it is sweet they will drink in bigger quantities. They are left on the sports drink through the show and for three days after they return. One of the HUGE advantages of the sports drink is the horses will typically drink on the trailer when it is offered during breaks. Because the water tastes like the sports drink, finicky horses continue to drink even if the water itself tastes differently. The same holds true at the show, they all seem to drink much more than they typically drink at home if offered the sweet brew. You can get your horse to appreciate the sports drink by putting some of the powder in your hand and letting him lick your hand. Then put some in their feed bucket and let them lick it in their feed bucket to get used to the flavor. In addition to the sports drink, if the horses are going to be hauled six hours or more, a tube of electrolytes are administered the day prior to hauling in order for the meds to have time to metabolize for better results.

(Note; the use of a sports drink and electrolytes are also very beneficial during periods of extreme cold weather to encourage horses to drink)

Another means to hydrate can be accomplished by wetting their hay prior to the show, during shipping and while at the show. In addition, feeds higher in fat and lower in protein can help to keep a horse hydrated. The higher the protein levels, the higher the amount of fluid is required

for digestion in the hind gut. We make it a rule that horses are never fed grain 6 hours prior to shipping to reduce the possibility of compaction.

COOL DOWNS

A technique I have borrowed from endurance and competitive trail riders is the use of diluted alcohol to help cool horses quickly. I prefer to use the wintergreen alcohol as it has a fresh odor. Dilute 1/3 of a small bottle of alcohol into 3 or 4 gallons of water. Wipe this solution over the horse with a sponge. The alcohol will quickly cool the skin. It will also evaporate and dry quickly. After sponging, we towel the horse while they are being cooled by a fan. We like to use the low canister fans pointed upward. This direction of air circulation helps to cool the underside of the horse and moves air between the hind legs. The added benefit of the alcohol rinse is the ability to keep the hooves drier than if bathing or rinsing in the normal fashion. Nail holes expand with water absorption and contract when dry. This can cause splitting at site of the nail hole which increases the risk of losing a shoe. The alcohol sponging minimizes the amount of moisture on the hooves, and will dry quickly which doesn't allow time for the water to penetrate the hoof wall. This is a great technique to use at a show when the weather is hot just prior to a horse entering the ring when they have just broken a sweat. A quick wipe-down will cool, clean and refresh your horse for the ring.

Caution: The alcohol and water mixture is not recommended for use on their heads! You don't want to run the risk of getting it in their eyes.

SUMMARY

Hydration and cooling a horse effectively can certainly make your horse healthier and a better competitor. The methods discussed here are cost-effective means that you can accomplish yourself. But, if your horse appears to be sick, stops drinking or appears to be unduly stressed, ALWAYS contact your Vet. The best method of minimizing problems is resolving them early. Hot, humid weather requires a vigilant eye in regard to adverse changes in your horse's health.

* Information above provided by Jim Paden of Cedarwood Arabians at Grayland Farm in Durham, trainer and NCAHA Board member. Please contact Jim if you have comments or questions.