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**Equestrian
Edition**



Talking Horses

The newsletter with news, views and practical advice

from the editor

It's the countdown to Christmas, the festive holidays and, if the forecasts are correct, a long, hot summer. Feed costs are increasing with most feed suppliers raising prices as grain and meals become scarcer under the impending drought conditions. Hay is already in short supply in many areas on the mainland and suppliers are predicting prices over \$20 per bale! Perhaps it's time to go back to basics and look for alternative feeds and a comprehensive but affordable supplement of concentrated trace-minerals and vitamins.

Our last issue Feature Article on Sacro-iliac Pain certainly hit the spot as we received 100's of enquiries from owners who have finally found a possible cause for their horses' reluctance to corner, dragging the hind limbs and lack of topline.

In this issue, we review the underlying reasons for 'fizzy', 'spooky' and unsettled, 'fidgety' and 'good at home, bad away' behaviour in horses, discussing some new research on horse behaviour and attitude. We provide some simple guidelines on how to manage these behavioural problems. We also include a review of chronic fatigue in horses and some of its underlying causes. We've shoe-horned in some hints on drought management and how to reduce feed waste.

And lastly, if your mare has had, or is expecting a foal, we've outlined some of the early signs of joint pain in young growing foals.

Regards John Kohnke

Contact Details: FREECALL 1800 112 227

FREE FAX 1800 112 228

Website: www.kohnkesown.com

email: info@kohnkesown.com

Postal Address: PO Box 3234, Rouse Hill, NSW, 2155

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**THIS ISSUE
Feature Article**

➤ **Unsettled and Anxious Behaviour**
– New Research

Also a brief on

- **Chronic Fatigue** – does it affect horses?
- **Joint Pain in Young Foals** – Early signs
- **Drought Management** – Some helpful hints

HANDY HINT **1**

Locking or "clicking" stifles? Occasionally a horse will start to 'lock' when it tries to move forward or 'click' in the stifles as it walks. It's called Upward Fixation of the Patella (the human knee cap) in technical terms and there can be a number of underlying reasons – sprain of the stifle joint when getting up from resting, rapid growth rate in a young horse, possible selenium deficiency in a young horse and 'sickle hocked' conformation. If a horse starts to "lock" or "click", try trimming the front edges of the hind hooves back and squaring them off – it will improve breakover as it walks, reducing backward flexion of the hock and 'locking' of the stifle in 80% of horses with a 'locking' problem.

2

HANDY HINT

Mimimising 'Queensland Itch'. Many horses are highly allergic to midge or sandfly bites as they swarm in the early evening and morning in endemic areas. Try rugging from 4.00pm to 8.00am with a full light rug and tail flap to reduce 'midge' or sandfly worry. Washing the horse in a permethrin wash at 7 day intervals over 4 weeks will also help in most cases. If all else fails, apply a menthol based gel or 'vapour rub' – dissolve a tablespoonful in a cup of warm water – seal it in an old jam jar (label it 'POISON' and 'KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN') and using a sponge, dab a little over the head area, withers and tail butt – the favoured sites for sandfly attack in the early evening. **Midges and sandflies hate biting through menthol! In a few days, the itch will settle down and the horse will have a happier life.**

Unsettled and Anxious Behaviour - New Research

A horse can develop a reputation for being 'fizzy', 'spooky', fearful, aggressive, unsettled, anxious, or to sum it up simply a nervous, unpredictable or reactive temperament. Young horses are often immature and become frightened more easily during handling or training, whereas older more experienced horses are less reactive. However, in many horses, a 'trigger' point exists where a normally placid, settled animal will become anxious or unsettled when exposed to new stimuli including windy conditions, other animals, crowds of horses or people or during travelling. Some horses are **good at home, but bad away**, suggesting some type of problem that makes them unsettled and **even** aggressive when travelled or competed away from the security of the home stables or handlers and riders that they have become accustomed to and accept.

The most common problem in equestrian horses is 'fizzy' and 'nervy' behaviour and many owners search for a 'cool feed', a 'nerve powder' or some other type of medication to keep their horses cool, calm and collected.

Did You Know ???

Most horses have a degree of claustrophobia when confined to an unfamiliar place transport vehicle or poorly lit stable or shelter. Earlier studies concluded that reluctance to enter a darkened space was related to change of light intensity with a delayed adaptation to sudden changes to a low light condition. Recent research in Australia at Charles Sturt and Queensland Universities also found that there was no evidence of horses having difficulty in negotiating cavalletis under dark, moonlit, cloudy or sunny conditions. However, visual performance had a hereditary influence, with mares having a better visual acuity than stallions.

'Hot' Behaviour

The common term 'hot' behaviour is usually related to increased activity or excitement that often results from intake of high energy feeds or excess energy intake relative to daily work or exercise needs. Many horses are fed much more energy to maintain condition than they can utilize in daily exercise. Energy needs at 120% above daily needs, irrespective of the source of energy, will often trigger over-energetic, "hot" behaviour.

Excess Grain Intake

Feeding of carbohydrate cereal grains can increase the overall energy available to idle and lightly worked horses, with risk of "hot", energetic, "up on the toes" behaviour – in short, the horse has excess energy relative to needs and "feels" good. Horses are herbivore foraging animals that have only low levels of starch (glycanase) enzymes available to digest high levels of NSC's (sugars and starches) in their small intestine, with the large capacity hindgut uniquely adapted to digestion of structural carbohydrates, such as cellulose from pasture.

Mares Behaving Badly

In mares that become more aggressive, dominant and arch their necks when being handled and walked, a testosterone (male hormone) producing ovarian tumour may be the underlying cause, especially if the mare becomes progressively more dominant and aggressive to handle or with other horses. In this case, an ultrasound scan of the ovaries can be carried out by your vet to determine any abnormalities in ovarian size or consistency. Although specialised hormone therapy can be prescribed, removal of a cancerous ovary is the best long term option – mares can still breed successfully with one properly functioning ovary.

Immaturity and Fear

Young horses are influenced by 'group' behaviour to an unfamiliar situation, sight, movement or noise. They will overreact to stimuli that they eventually become accustomed to by repetitive exposure or confidence gained as they mature. Recent studies indicate that whilst imprinting newborn foals by rubbing, stroking and close human contact is helpful in handling, horses left to weanling age quickly become accustomed to careful handling and the only difference was the size and strength of the young horse as it grew and developed to yearling age. Domesticated horses are not generally "feral" by nature and most have a trusting attitude unless they are suddenly disturbed or subjected to rough handling or unfamiliar objects or circumstances. Problem horses that have, for a variety of reasons, become difficult need expert, professional re-education.

Horses Grazing on Lush Pasture

"Spring Fever" is a term used to describe more reactive and excitable behaviour of horses that are grazing high quality spring pastures, usually containing a high proportion of Non-Structural Carbohydrates (NSC) or soluble sugars that over-supply energy relative to needs for grazing or lightly worked horses. Restricting grazing to limit carbohydrate intake, as well as reducing the intake of fructan sugars or excess carbohydrates that can trigger a laminitic or founder episode in heavy 'cresty' horses, will often help to 'cool' them down for training.

3

HANDY HINT

Reducing Energy Intake from Grassy Hay.

Soaking hay in double its volume of luke-warm water for 60 minutes to leach out high energy sugars and air drying in a net from overnight for the morning feed, or vice versa, is useful to thin down overweight horses, whilst still providing adequate bulk. It is also mandatory for horses and ponies restricted to a hay diet during Spring to reduce the risk of laminitis or founder.

Breed Related Nervous Behaviour

It is well recognised that some breeds of horses have a tendency to be more "spirited" and "reactive" when fed and managed under identical conditions as other horses of similar maturity. "Hot blooded" horses (those having a red cell count above 8.0 million red cells/cubic mm), such as Thoroughbreds, Arabians, Standardbreds and Quarter Horses, have been bred and selected to be 'fright' and 'flight' reactive, whereas cold-blooded horses including most pony breeds, Draughts and Miniatures (those having a red cell count below 7.0 million red cells/cubic mm) are generally less "reactive". Warmbloods are a mix of hot-blooded and cold-blooded horses, and generally have quieter temperaments. Of course, individuals of any breed can have a "reactive" temperament and vary in their genetic ability to learn and be trained.

'Cool Feed' - What does it mean?

There are a very large number of "cool" and "calm" feeds available as pre-mixed feeds on the market. Most of these contain ingredients, including grains and byproducts that have a slow release blend of NSC's, or are based on carriers such as seed hulls, pollard and bran that are digested predominately by microbial fermentation of fibre in the large intestine.

High fat feeds, containing bases such as rice bran, crushed oil seed meals, as well as raw or refined vegetable oils, or Omega-3 and 6 blended oils, are often included to provide protein and fat as more slowly digested energy sources.

Extruded and micronised grain based feeds are also considered to be "cooler" than raw cereal grain mixes as they are digested in the small intestine to give usable energy, with a reduced risk of overload of undigested starch into the hindgut where it ferments rapidly to lactic acid. However, intakes have to be carefully controlled with 2 smaller feeds per day to ensure these feeds provide energy for exercise but do not overload excess into the hindgut.

High lactic acid build-up in the hindgut can trigger nervous behaviour, and toxin release, that can trigger soreness in the feet, and in severe overloads, of both raw or processed grains, onset of laminitis and founder. Dr Richards considers that inclusion of glycanase enzymes into heat-processed feeds would improve both the feed utilization and overall health of horses fed on rations high in extruded or micronised feeds.

Many oil seed and other grains are also regarded as 'cool feeds' because they contain little if any raw starch or NSC's, with energy provided by protein, fat and fermentable fibre. These include lupins (33% crude protein, 7% fat), canola meal (32% crude protein, 5-7% fat), copra meal ((23% crude protein, 7% fat – must be soaked if more than 500g fed in a single meal), sunflower seeds (23% crude protein, 26% fat – a very high energy 'cool' grain), tick (faba) beans (23% crude protein, 4% fat) and full fat extruded soya bean meal (38% crude protein, 18% fat). One or two of these sources are usually mixed 15-20% by weight with rice bran, pollard or bran as a 'cool' energy mix, along with chaff and hay. Limiting access to cereal grain starches will help to reduce the risk of "hot" behaviour. Oats has a reputation of being a "hot" feed which is due technically to its high content of soluble smaller particle starches that are readily absorbed (75%) from the small intestine, rapidly increasing blood glucose concentrations and muscle glycogen storage – both of which can lead to over energetic and fizzy behaviour. **Corn and barley have less digestible starch sources during breakdown in the small intestine and barley generally is a "cooler" feed, although excess of any grain relative to exercise needs, is likely to cause "hot" behaviour.**

HANDY HINT

6

Providing a supplement of Kohnke's Own **Gastro-Coat®** which contains natural feed compounds that physically maintain a protective layer on the upper gastric lining when given 10-15 minutes prior to travelling and at regular 6-8 hour intervals while waiting to compete, can help to settle irritation and reduce the risk of agitated behaviour to help protect the upper stomach lining in horses with a previous history of "bad away" type behaviour, or when being travelled interstate for breaking-in, training or to stud. Feeding 500g (4 litres) of dampened lucerne chaff or a quarter of a biscuit of dampened lucerne hay 30 minutes before training or travelling will also help to reduce gastric acid "burn" in susceptible horses.

Did You Know ???

Studies by Dr Nerida Richards, an equine nutritionist based in Newcastle, New South Wales, have shown that although extruded and micronised grains are better digested in the small intestine than unprocessed (raw) grains as a usable energy source in working horses, feeding processed grains are potentially more hazardous because any "overload" of cooked starch is likely to be more quickly fermented to lactic acid that can trigger nervous behaviour in horses.

HANDY HINT

4

"How to Cool Down" Oats in Reactive Horses.

Soaking oats in lukewarm water for 60 minutes will leach out a significant amount of soluble sugars into the water – be sure to tip off the soaking water before feeding – and reduce the "heating" effect of oats in a diet. As oats is one of the cheapest grains, reducing its "instant" energy content makes it an easy way to control a 'hot' temperament caused by feeding oats.

HANDY HINT

5

Barley helps improve Condition. Barley is considered a "conditioning" grain that helps to improve condition and "bulk" in horses, which could be in part due to its relatively high chromium content (5mg/kg) which has an effect of controlling the insulin response and muscle tissue development. Products such as **Muscle XL** are especially formulated to provide specific amino acids for muscle bulk as an aid in improving topline and muscle strength when fed as directed in conjunction with exercise.

Aggressive, Unco-operative Behaviour

There are a number of reasons for normally placid horses that cope well with everyday life to change their demeanour and become agitated, unsettled and less co-operative often when travelled and competed in different situations.

Gastric Acid Irritation

One of the common causes for "good at home, but bad away" behaviour is related to gastric acid 'reflux' or 'heartburn' in horses being travelled or competed. Many horses are considered "nervy" or "fizzy" away from home as they become anxious, agitated, "starry eyed" and are unable to concentrate or keep their mind on the job when being competed, often after travelling. Dr Scott McLure in Alabama USA has associated irritation of the upper unprotected gastric lining with travelling and change of location in horses, with up to 80% of horses exhibiting reddening and inflammation of the upper gastric lining and oesophageal (gullet) reflux area, as well as development of gastric ulceration after long distance travelling.

ABOUT GASTRO-COAT

Gastro-Coat contains natural feed compounds that assist in maintaining a protective layer on the upper stomach wall to help provide a physical coating against gastric acid burn – ideal for travelling horses.

HANDY HINT

7

Use an Older, Quiet Horse. An older, settled companion horse, such as an aged gelding, to 'nanny' weanlings and yearlings can reduce risk of injury and 'over-reaction'. Working or travelling an unsettled or anxious young horse with an older, more experienced horse is also helpful to settle them down.

Other Nutritional Influences

Studies have indicated that certain mineral, electrolyte and vitamin deficiencies relative to need, can result in nervous or 'fizzy' behaviour. Providing a supplement containing one or more of these nutrients in a high amount may help settle 'nervy' horses.

Vitamin B1 (thiamine or aneurine)

In humans and dogs a dietary deficiency of Vitamin B1, (from consuming only cooked foods) and in horses, consumption of Bracken Fern containing an enzyme (thiaminase) that destroys vitamin B1 produced during microbial fermentation in the hindgut, have been associated with nervous behaviour and unpredictable temperaments. Although not proven by exhaustive scientific studies, supplementation with high doses of Vitamin B1 at 10-100 times recommended daily needs have been used for many years with varying rates of success for nervy behaviour in horses.

Low Magnesium Uptake

It is reported that poor availability of magnesium from feeds, excess magnesium excretion due to sweat loss (140mg/litre of sweat) and reduced uptake of magnesium in diets high in calcium and iron, may lead to increased nervous reaction in horses due to a relative magnesium deficiency in the diet.

Although many 'nerve' powders contain magnesium in an oxide, sulfate or carbonate form, competition for absorption sites with calcium in the small intestine may reduce the effectiveness these forms of magnesium replacement to make up shortfalls in grain, 'cool' feeds and cereal hay based diets.

8

HANDY HINT

"Organic" forms of magnesium, available as proteinate or "amino acid chelates" (as incorporated into yeast), are considered to be presented in a complex "organic" form to intestinal lining cells and are less likely to compete directly with calcium for uptake, making magnesium more able to correct low or inadequate levels to maintain proper nerve and muscle function.

High Intakes of Tryptophan

The essential amino acid, Tryptophan is also a popular nutrient given in higher than required daily doses to help settle nervy or excitable horses, often combined with high doses of Vitamin B1. Tryptophan is a pre-cursor to serotonin, a brain neurotransmitter that imparts a sedative and calming effect, reducing stress, fear and aggression in humans and animals.

Although many horse owners consider it is useful as a 'calming' nutrient, there is little scientific evidence to support its use in nervy horses. Studies by Australian and UK researchers using Tryptophan in a paste form at 12.4mg/kg body weight showed that although plasma (blood fluid) increased concentration of Tryptophan, it alone at this dose rate did not alter behavioural responses when horses were presented with an unfamiliar person or object. However, this dose rate did reduce the 'vocalisation' made by horses challenged under the experimental conditions.

Vitamin E

High supplementary doses of Vitamin E, in the form of α -tocopherol provides the major antioxidant protection by scavenging free radicals and molecular oxygen, helping to limit oxidation of polyunsaturated fatty acids in muscle and nerve membranes. Feeds contain varying levels and loss during storage further reduces the activity of Vitamin E. Studies have reported nervous dysfunction in horses where the diet is low or inadequate in Vitamin E and over many years higher supplementary amounts of natural Vitamin E (d- α -tocopherol) has been a popular supplement to assist horses to cope with unfamiliar surroundings and transport.

Herbal Remedies

There are a number of herb "nerve" preparations and combinations of herbs and herbal extracts that are popular as dietary supplements to assist horses that adapt poorly to training or unfamiliar challenges. The most popular is chamomile flowers steeped in hot water and made into a tea and mixed into the feed. It appears to be of use in some horses as a calmative, but it is now subject to drug detection in show horses in some states and its use should be carefully monitored to allow adequate clearance of residues from the urine before competition. Chamomile has variable activity and is of little benefit to some horses. Another herb, valerian, was popular as a 'calmative' for show horses, but it too can now be detected in a swab and is not widely used.

Spooky, Jumpy, Shying type Behaviour

Some horses that have a normally placid and settled temperament can develop a spooky, shadow jumping and shying type behaviour when worked under hot conditions or after sweating heavily each day for 5-10 days.

Studies in the mid 1970's suggested that loss of high amounts of chloride and potassium salts in heavy sweating horses resulted in the development of a condition referred to as "hypochloreaemic alkalosis" – meaning low blood chloride salt levels that caused a compensatory accumulation of bicarbonate salt. It is often associated with dehydration, spooky behaviour and heavy 'thick-winded' respiration when exercising, as affected horses attempt to 'blow off' excess carbon dioxide, which is present in the blood as bicarbonate salt.

Some horses become jumpy, shying at objects they normally do not 'fear'.

Provision of a supplement of a salt mix with higher levels of potassium and chloride salts can help to correct this type of 'nervy', 'spooky' behaviour. Many horses return to normal behaviour during the winter months.

HANDY HINT

9

Providing a Salt Mix. A daily supplement of one scoopful of a salt mix, such as **Cell-Salts®**, which contains higher levels of chloride, potassium and magnesium in a slow-release formulation, combined with 1 scoopful of plain fine salt, will help to correct low or inadequate dietary intake to maintain adequate blood levels in heavily sweating horses.

Chronic Fatigue - Does it Affect Horses?

Occasionally, a horse owner considers that a particular horse appears to become easily fatigued, “flat” and lack energy when being exercised, with a dull, lifeless coat despite good feeding, regular worming and health management.

Although “Chronic Fatigue Syndrome” (CFS) is not a disease as such, and therefore not a researched or documented condition in horses, there is some evidence to suggest that, in common with humans, after a severe respiratory virus or other debilitating disease, horses appear to develop typical symptoms. **These include weight loss, lassitude, poor exercise tolerance, signs of tiredness or distress, and lack of interest in their work. In some cases, normally “good doers” develop a poor appetite despite being on a good quality diet with no evidence of gastric irritation or ulceration. Obviously, severe worm or lice burdens can also lead to symptoms of anaemia, lack of stamina and interest in work.**

Ross River Syndrome

Many horses that have been located in areas where mosquitoes carry the Ross River Virus that affects humans, are reported to show symptoms of lassitude, poor exercise tolerance, have a dull coat and develop general disinterest in their feed. Initially, the horse may exhibit fever signs with an elevated temperature, lose its appetite, and develop discoloured eye and mouth membranes during the acute phase of the infection.

10 HANDY HINT

Ross River Diagnosis. The diagnosis of Ross River Syndrome is often based on the history of the horse being located near to endemic areas, symptoms of chronic lassitude and reduced red cell and white blood cell parameters, with low lymphocytes and gamma-globulin readings. A blood test to measure the immune antibody levels (antibody titre) to Ross River antigens can be carried out to help confirm the chronic condition.

HANDY HINT

Improving the Nutrient Intake. Worming the horse out twice 3 weeks apart to break any risk of resistance build-up, and introducing a hard feed with a step-wise increase in energy, good quality protein and omega oils, as well as a graded exercise or training program will help to improve body proportions, exercise tolerance and coat condition. Providing a supplement of trace-minerals and vitamins, such as **Cell-Vital®** or **Cell-Provide®** will help to correct low or inadequate levels of these essential nutrients in the diet, including iron and copper for coat condition, along with 15mL/100kg of Omega oils (eg **Energy Gold** with Omega-3 and Omega-6 fats, Vitamin E and pure garlic oil flavouring) daily for 3-4 weeks, will help improve skin and coat condition.

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Inadequate Diet

A diet that is low in energy and protein will normally cause a loss in bodyweight, condition and muscle bulk and strength over a period of 1-2 months. The coat may become dry and brittle due to a lack of dietary fats, or an inadequate intake of trace-minerals, such as iron, copper and zinc or Vitamin A and E. The underlying cause of suspected ‘Chronic Fatigue Syndrome’ is often difficult to diagnose as it usually develops over a period of time following a severe bacterial or viral infection that may result in chronic poor condition and lack of exercise tolerance and ‘willingness’ to work. A thorough examination, including a blood count and biochemical profile by your vet may help to confirm a diagnosis of suppressed immune function, relative anaemia and electrolyte abnormalities often associated with CFS.

HANDY HINT

Loose Droppings in Spring. Many horses, especially aged horses, develop loose droppings in Spring, with some suffering ‘fluid scours’ and squirry, watery diarrhoea. The high moisture and sugar content and low dry matter in early spring pastures increases the ‘water flow’ through the horse, resulting in more water being passed in the droppings to reduce their normal ‘ball’ form. Limiting access to new pasture to 1-2 hours twice daily and providing dampened hay and a small hard feed will often help to settle down the seasonal ‘scours’. If symptoms persist, worm the horse and, if necessary, seek advice from your own vet.

12

‘Poor Doing’ Horses

Over the last few years, horse owners often report that a particular horse has become a ‘poor doer’ and lacks adequate condition despite regular worming, an adequate and well balanced diet, and freedom from gastric ulcers or gastric acid irritation.

It is possible that these horses have been ingesting and accumulating significant amounts of sand and small stones as a result of grazing closer to the ground under sparse, drought pastures or when confined to a yard on a hard feed and hay diet. “Hoovering” type, fossicking horses are often most commonly affected. A thorough check by your vet, including a suitable drench to remove sand, or a prescribed, adequate course of psyllium husk in the feed (70-100g/100kg body weight on 2 consecutive days once per month – seek advice from your vet) will often improve overall appetite and health in 7-10 days.

Long Training Programs

Horses that are in work, travelled and competed frequently over a 6-9 month period can become physically and mentally tired, developing a lack of willingness, poor recovery, dehydration and often a loss of appetite and a dull, dry coat, despite an adequate diet. These symptoms are consistent with long term training and the effects of natural cortisone exhaustion related to stress of competition on the appetite and willingness to exercise. A short-term turn out for 1-2 months, as well as worming out and a balanced, adequate diet with access to pasture if possible, will often help restore willingness and exercise tolerance.

ABOUT HOOF-SEAL®

Kohnke’s Own **Hoof-Seal®** is a blend of protective oils and UV biodegradable, breathable polyurethane that forms a thin protective film that lasts up to 7 days over the hoof wall and sole to minimise moisture variations, especially under hot dry drought conditions.

Kohnke's Own

Mag-E

Organic Magnesium, Vitamin E and Vitamin B1 Supplement for Horses

Kohnke's Own Mag-E is the ideal supplement for working or travelling horses to help them adjust to unfamiliar surroundings or anxious or unsettled behaviour during training or competition. Mag-E is a concentrated source of magnesium, with the majority provided as an "organic" amino acid (yeast) chelate that helps ensure optimum absorption. The "organic" magnesium reaches the absorption sites as an 'amino acid shielded' complex, which avoids competition for uptake from calcium and trace-minerals absorbed from the same locations.

Inadequate or low dietary magnesium intake, or reduced absorption in high calcium and iron diets, has been associated with abnormal nerve and muscle function in horses, which can result in unsettled and anxious behaviour.

Mag-E also contains both natural and synthetic Vitamin E to assist proper nerve and muscle function, as well as a small amount of Vitamin B1 to help correct low dietary intake. It is not a high dose Vitamin B1 type of product!

Mag-E is vanilla flavoured, blended with a small amount of highly refined vegetable oil and natural feed compounds to maintain normal gastrointestinal function. It is well accepted by even the "fussiest" eaters! Mag-E is available in 1.0kg (66 x 15g doses) and 2.5kg packs (166 x 15g doses).

HANDY HINT

13

Helping Horses Adjust to New Surroundings or Travelling. Some horses are unable to cope with new challenges, others are good at home, but bad away. A supplement of organic magnesium and vitamin E, as in Kohnke's Own Mag-E, given twice daily for 2-3 days before travelling can help horses adjust to new challenges. A double amount, mixed in 20mL of water and 20mL of cooking oil into a paste and given over the tongue 4 hours before travelling, can help them cope for up to 8 hours when away from home by correcting low dietary magnesium.

What's In the Next Issue?

- Common Habits and Vices – new research
- Joint Disease – new findings
- Water – fresh is best !
- Plus regular features

Joint Disease in Foals

You should observe all foals and weanlings on a daily, or at least twice weekly intervals, particularly 'good doers' that become 'too big, too early', for the early signs of developing joint disease.

Signs include:

- ★ **More time spent lying down**, especially after paddock exercise, than other foals – this is an early sign of joint cartilage pain and joint discomfort
- ★ **Minor joint fluid swelling**, in the front fetlocks, stiffness and difficulty in keeping up with the mare or other foals in the paddock, bony swellings (physitis) of the fetlocks and knees (epiphysitis)
- ★ **Tendency to stand with the front limbs slightly bent** forward at the knee when standing or just after exercise, with a straighter pastern and more upright conformation (often described as "Contracted Tendons") in the front limbs, because of low grade joint pain resulting from a developing cartilage defect.

If you note any of these signs, call Kerry on 1800 112 227 for a fact sheet on the management of early joint disease.

Drought Management Some Useful Hints

There are some important principles to adopt when feeding horses under drought conditions.

- 1.** Group horses relative to nutritional demand and amount of feed they consume. Growing horses, heavily pregnant mares, lactating mares and aged horses need an adequate, balanced diet. Consider reducing the numbers of horses in work to save on the feed budget.
- 2.** Check teeth and worm out regularly to ensure optimum digestive efficiency so that horses obtain the full value from their feed.
- 3.** Choose a "sacrificial" paddock or large yard to act as a holding area overnight to restrict full time access to grazing areas. This prevents horses "walking off" condition in search of feed and reduces overgrazing of sparse pasture.
- 4.** Provide shelter to reduce energy wastage, particularly during cold or inclement weather.
- 5.** Ensure feeders are provided to reduce feed wastage, dampen hay to minimize wastage and spoilage of feed at ground level.
- 6.** Take precautions to prevent fence injuries and risk of plant poisoning as hungry horses search for food, and control weed growth after rain.
- 7.** Economise on feed costs by selecting 'value for money' feeds to maintain condition, and add a quality supplement to make up shortfalls of trace-minerals and vitamins in stored dry feeds.

Disclaimer

The information and recommendations in this newsletter have been presented as a guideline based on the veterinary experience and knowledge by the author, Dr. John Kohnke BVSc RDA. Whilst all care, diligence and years of practical experience have been combined to produce this information, the author/editor, Dr. John Kohnke, accepts no responsibility or liability for unforeseen consequences resulting from the hints and advice given in this newsletter. **The information contained in this newsletter is copyright. We encourage its use in club information sheets or other newsletter, on request, as long as acknowledgement is given to the author and its source from this newsletter.** Other Editions – if you would like copies of the Racing editions, or back issues, contact your local feed or produce supplier