

Avoiding Musculo-Skeletal Injury

Musculo-skeletal injuries are a common reason for poor performance, this article will discuss some of the reasons for this and suggest methods of reduction in risk and how to enhance muscular function.

Common causes of muscular problems:

- Poor tack fit or inappropriate use of tack
- Poor hoof balance
- Uneven or slippery footing
- Overuse – including excess activity on a deep sand arena
- Poor rider balance
- Lack of systematic progression through training.
- Inadequate warm up or preparation before work and or inadequate cool down following work
- Accident/Injury

Webster's Dictionary (1990) gives the definition of training as "a course of systematic physical exercise in preparation for an athletic event". We train our horses to perform in a specific discipline and as such our training should systematically aim at enhancing the ability of the horse to perform the required activity, at the same time reducing the risk of injury. If we look at the above definition of training we can see two major points that should be considered in our training programs

1. The program should be systematic
 2. It should be preparation for an athletic event.
- ie. We should have a plan of where we want to be when, and plan our activity to increase the capacity of the horse to be at an adequate fitness to perform at the particular event.

Training affects many biological systems, attention to the cardiovascular and musculoskeletal systems can ensure your training program is implemented safely. But how do you measure and monitor this? Get to know the feel and shape of your horse, Feel your horse's muscles, legs and hooves each day before and after work – notice any variations in heat and or swelling before it affects performance. You can then apply the appropriate treatment to avoid a loss of training time.

By monitoring your horses pulse during and or after work you can monitor the cardiovascular system and also gain an insight into the possibility that the horse has pain related to training. This can be done simply by taking your horses pulse after work every 10 minutes until the pulse lowers to normal, or if possible use a heart rate meter during work, with increasing fitness, the heart rate at a given level of work will lower, letting you know when you can increase the workload. Any rise in heart rate during work will indicate a reduction in performance ability, alerting you that there is something requiring investigation.

Employ a highly qualified and knowledgeable tactile therapist (masseur) to assist in your monitoring procedure and to guide you through techniques to enhance training and muscle function. This will be of great benefit in assessing the effectiveness of your training program and let you know if your horse is ready to advance to a higher level of training.

Happy Training!

Christine Scully.

Principal Australian College of Animal Tactile Therapy

