

To Rug Or Not To Rug?

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I hate to mention it but the days will soon start shortening, as we'll all start to want to keep warmer – and that includes our horses and ponies. We might reach for a sweater but they'll want to be rugged up, but even this simple action has some guidelines that should be observed.

The range of rugs available is getting quite mind boggling – they are becoming the horse fashion accessory of choice these days! But before you rush out and get one or more, let's see if they really need rigging up.

Native cobs and ponies for example, naturally grow very thick coats, intended to protect them in the severest weather. Providing they are able to take shelter from strong winds and excessive rains they will normally cope well.

When do they normally need to be rugged up:

- If they are old infirm or injured
- They are underweight or in poor condition
- They have previously suffered from rain rash
- They have been fully or partly clipped
- They are normally stabled overnight and only spend a short time out during the day
- They are thin skinned and prone to the cold
- They are kept in a very confined paddock

Once they are rugged up they shouldn't be ignored, you should:

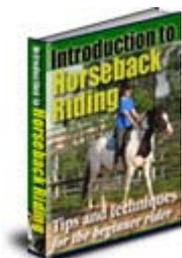
- Check them at least once a day to make certain that the rug hasn't slipped, been torn or damaged
- Remove the rug if it gets warm, but replace when it gets chilly again
- Remove the rug frequently to check that they have no injuries underneath or that its chaffing or rubbing their coat and could cause a skin infection

- Make sure that a spare rug is available if you have to remove the one they are wearing for any period of time

So if you have to get a rug, what should you consider:

- Buy a rug fit for the purpose it is required for – not as a fashion accessory!
- Consider any ‘special needs’ such as a tendency to rub at the shoulders. Some rugs are specially designed for such problems and the fabrics more resilient
- When other protective clothing is used e.g. hood, bibs etc, make sure that they complement and fit with the rug – otherwise they may cause an accident that harms the horse
- Measure the horse before making the purchase
- Before trying on the rug make sure that the horse is very clean, and put a clean sheet over him before trying the new rug on him – this will keep it clean in case you need to change the rug
- Horses change shape and grow – their rigs will need to be changed to make sure that they always fit properly
- Check the type of fabric that the rug is made of – some fabrics need to be fully wetted to allow the fibres to swell, so that it is fully waterproof. It will then need to dry off slowly before the horse can start wearing it
- At the end of the season the rug will need cleaning and repairing. They are best stored being laid across a rail or thick piece of rope. It is not advisable to store them folded as the fabric may crack along the fold line and such cracks will let water in.

I hope this helps! Buying a rug can be an expensive business and you don't want to get it wrong. Once you have them they will last for years if you look after them properly.



Roger Bourdon is the author of “Introduction to Horseback Riding” and owner of the site www.anyhorsebackriding.com. If you are interested in horse riding, then sign up for Roger's free mini course and news letters at www.anyhorsebackriding.com