



## A Care & Health Introduction For Your Horse Di Firth. Champion Show Horse Competitor & Judge. Orange NSW.

The foundation of a healthy horse, conditioned for whatever discipline you choose begins with ensuring that you attended to all the maintenance required otherwise all the money you've spent in feed & supplements will not be utilised to anywhere near its maximum effect.

Your horse's teeth must be well cared for to make sure that the horse can properly process the food reaching their stomach. Teeth can also affect a horse's performance & behaviour.

Some signs to look out for are:

- ✓ Smelly breath caused by food trapped between the teeth
- ✓ Dropping food whilst eating
- ✓ Resisting the bit by pulling or opening the mouth

Horses in the wild are able to care for their teeth by grinding them on different types of wood and stone but when we confine them to smaller paddocks and stables we take away nature as their maintenance. It then becomes our responsibility to care for things like teeth, worming, hooves etc. Horses kept in paddocks are recommended to have a equine dentist attend their teeth approximately every 12 months, stable animals every 6 months. The reason is that stabled animals do not have access to trees etc.

Worming is another very important regime to follow. Intestinal worms can easily cause a lacklustre coat appearance, an unsightly pot belly stomach and damage to the stomach lining itself. You need to follow a worming programme but also remember to rotate the chemical used in the drench so that immunity to the chemical used doesn't occur. In addition there are some great natural remedies to help keep worms at bay. Garlic is a natural antibiotic which will not only help against worm infestation but also aid other sicknesses and skin problems.

Hooves are another important duty that should not be overlooked with any hoofed animal. Once again, nature helps the horse in the wild but our small paddocks are usually cleared of rocks needed to aid maintenance so we need to call on a qualified farrier to attend to them. There are many problems arising from poor farriery so always be aware of any changes in hoof shape, any soreness, changes in digital pulse etc as all can place unnecessary strain on bones, joints and muscles which may lead to an unhappy horse and rider. It's worth remembering the common phrase "No Hoof...No Horse".

Having attended carefully to all of the above we can now start work on a feeding & training programme to suit. In my years of preparing show horses I have found the most cost effective and better behaved horse is achieved with a natural diet. The only downside to this is the time taken for preparation and so this is not suited to everyone. The one thing to always remember with processed pellets and mixes is not to get 'hung up' with all the marketing hype of how this feed or that supplement will improve your horse's condition, coat, hoof etc as it may also affect your horse's behaviour significantly. Two reference sources you may find useful if you are to choose a natural diet are Catherine Bird's 'A Healthy Horse, The Natural Way' and Victoria Ferguson's 'The Practical Horse Herbal'. If you decide to go with a conventional diet, John Khonkes 'Nutrition Book' will be great for you.

Tack is another important topic to discuss with every horse owner. The correct fitting of gear is an absolute 'must' to achieve the best performance possible. An ill-fitting saddle can be likened to you trying to wear clothing or shoes that are too small. It will leave you sore and uncomfortable as it will your animal. Ideally if you are not sure of your saddle fit then call on an expert to assess it. By doing this your animal will perform at its best and it will help prevent any back or muscle damage.

The way you ride your horse can also cause many problems. A horse ridden on the diagonal and one canter lead will develop muscle on that particular side of the animal thus making a well fitting or custom made saddle useless. This may also require the careful assistance of a qualified Chiropractor, Massage Therapist, Bowen release Therapist etc.

At the end of the day it pays to observe your horse on a daily basis taking into consideration everything we have mentioned to hopefully achieve the maximum performance for you and your equine friend.