



*At last...
Something really new
in horse grooming*



Choosing, Using and Caring For Your Horse Rug/Blanket

The materials used in the manufacture of horse rugs/blankets were only two or three in number many years ago. Choosing the correct material for the circumstances and then looking after it was relatively easy. Indoor wear stable blankets were heavy cotton or wool. Turnout or outdoor blankets were canvas with perhaps a wool layer lining.

Now, in our modern world, the choice is far more varied making the whole process less simple. Modern fibres mixed with the older traditional give the shopper a huge and sometimes confusing choice. However, the modern horse rug/blanket keeps our pride and joy warmer and drier and offers better protection than ever before.

There are some simple terms to understand first:

- Ü Water repellent – means that the fabric has a surface coating or weave that makes it resistant to a certain amount of moisture. Exceed that limit though and the fabric will become soaked.
- Ü Waterproof – means that the fabric will keep out moisture. It should also be labelled 'breathable' too so that perspiration can evaporate. Normally a coated outer layer combines with a breathable inner surface layer to give both qualities.

Blanket or rug 'fit' is important as you want to make sure that your horse is fully protected and comfortable at the same time too. Imagine yourself in an ill-fitting jacket that's so tight that it cuts up underneath your arms – after a while it could become unbearable. It's the same for your horse.

- Ü Check the rug length. If it's too long then your horse may not be able to lift his tail. Messy!! If it's too short then he won't have the total protection he deserves.
- Ü When the blanket/rug is fitted, use your hand in these 3 specific positions on the horse to ensure a snug, but not a tight fit.
 1. Under the blanket at the shoulder. It should feel snug but your hand should be able to move around easily.
 2. Along the hip and rump. The same movement conditions apply.
 3. At the withers – check that the neck hole is the correct shape and size.

There are a huge range of fabrics and fibres available for you to choose from:

1. Natural Fibres

Wool – a great natural fibre but loses strength when wet. Very useful in liners and is often used in combination with synthetics.

Cotton – still used in many products. Make sure you buy high quality to avoid shrinkage

2. Synthetic Fibres

Fleece – used to be used as a term for wool. Now applied to any soft fibre synthetic or otherwise

MATERIAL TAKEN FROM MANY SOURCES

Nylon – often used as a liner. Reduces friction and can be used as an outside layer when waterproofed
Polyester – the basis for the outer fabric of most blankets/rugs and usually combined with cotton/fleece liners. Cheap and difficult to deform
Polypropylene – waterproof and popular as an outer layer but is sensitive to high temperatures
Teflon – often used as a fibre coating to reduce staining
Other proprietary names include Aquatrans, Cordura, Ballistic, Fibrefill, Gore-tex, Hollofill, Polarfleece, Polartec, Thermaloft, Thinsulate, Ripstop, Synpatex and there are more

Rugs & blankets can get very dirty and messy. Don't let this go too far or you'll be forking out for another expensive replacement. Here are some tips:

- ü Brush or vacuum away any hair and excess loose dirt
- ü Use a brush or even a paddle to loosen off caked-in dirt and mud.
- ü Pre-treat any nasty stains.
- ü If you've got a LARGE washing machine then you can attempt to wash the rug/blanket at home. Failing that, check your local Laundromat. Use non-allergenic washing powder if possible (enzyme containing powders can be very allergenic).
- ü Ensure that you drain the rug/blanket well!
- ü Air drying is preferable as machine drying may damage the fabric. If you do machine dry then use a low heat setting and consult the fabric label for guidelines.
- ü Finally, brush thoroughly to remove any unwanted hairs. Check for cleanliness around straps or fixtures.

It's wise, as we said to look after your blanket/rug and it will give you and your horse years of service. Here are a few tips:

- ü If it's damaged then repair it promptly. A minor rip can transform itself into a large hole – and an expensive replacement! Use a temporary fix if necessary.
- ü Make sure that the size is right 'this year'. Horses grow and blankets may shrink. Always check the size against your horse before use. If it's too large then it's likely to snag and tear and if it's too small then it will be uncomfortable.
- ü Teeth and hooves can make short work of blankets and rugs. Check to find the culprits and take appropriate action.
- ü When not in use, but 'between' wearings, hang the blanket/rug up properly. It isn't there for a bored horse to chew on or to clutter up the place and provide something to trip over.
- ü Clean it thoroughly at the end of the season. Follow the instructions on the label for best results.
- ü Store it properly when not in use. A large plastic bag or a secure bin if you have one and make sure the rug/blanket is dry and clean first. Secure the container – you don't want a nest of rats or mice!!