



equiculture

developing responsible horse ownership

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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of the equiculture newsletter. Starting this newsletter has been something that I have been meaning to do for a couple of years however it has taken this enforced break due to the Equine Influenza outbreak to get me to finally sort out my mailboxes and put the newsletter together. The newsletter will now go out quarterly and is free so if you know anyone who you think would benefit, get them to send their email address, full name and the state of Australia (or country) that they live in to me so that I can file them in the appropriate mailbox on my computer.

The aims of this newsletter are to keep everyone informed of workshops or clinics that are coming up. This way you do not have to keep remembering to check the web site. Each newsletter will also contain articles about riding and property care, tips about horse care or safety and a feature about one of my favourite web site links and one of my favourite books.

Equine influenza update

At the time of writing our own horses do not have EI but the nearest cases are less than 5kms away. We are doing all we can to make sure our horses do not get it. I strongly believe that eradication is the answer and that relying on inoculations is not. I hear many people saying we should just let this outbreak run its course, this is not the answer, some horses will become very ill, some may even die, and we still will be in a state of crisis for at least the rest of this year.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank certain organisations such the Queensland Horse Council (www.qldhorsecouncil.com) and the Australian Horse Industry Council (AHIC) both of which I am a member and have been for many years, for doing such a sterling job of keeping us all informed throughout this outbreak of EI. These organisations represent **all** horse owners and rely on memberships for funding. Please consider joining or if you are a member of a club encourage your club (or its affiliated body) to join if they have not already done so.

The Australian Horse Industry Council is continuing to play a key role in the equine influenza outbreak by providing the most up-to-date information for people who register on the Horse Emergency Contact Database (HECD). All sectors of the horse industry are being encouraged to ensure they are kept fully informed by registering their details on www.horsecouncil.org.au.

The AHIC is representing the entire horse recreational industry in all of the top level meetings/groups trying to eradicate this disease and welcome any feedback or concerns that people might like addressed. People are encouraged to fill out the economic impact survey at <http://www.surveymaster.com/AHIC/Q4.asp>. Once the outbreak had died down the AHIC will continue to work on our behalf with the relevant bodies to try to prevent another situation such as that we now find ourselves in.

If anything good comes out of this crisis (apart from this newsletter hee hee!!) it should be that we horse owners finally recognise that even though we have diverse horse interests we have many things in common and that exotic diseases in particular affect us all. Therefore the more consolidated we are the better we will be able to cope with crisis in the future. Please remain vigilant, reduce contact between horse properties and always follow any quarantine guidelines set out by the DPI. **We can beat this!**

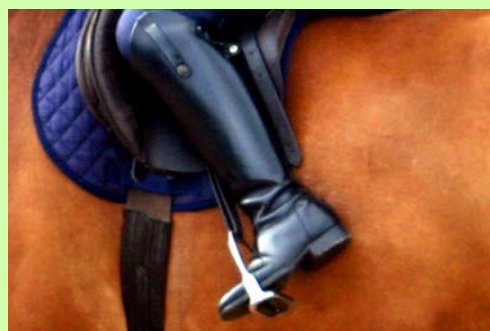
Ankles and why we need them!

This is the first article in the first edition of the Equiculture newsletter. I will be talking about various other parts of the rider (in detail) in other articles but I have chosen to start with ankles as this is an area of the riders body that gets most neglected and is yet vitally important. Conversely it is an area that once improved can rapidly lead to a better position, balance and security and of course an independent seat.

If you have read my web site (see the independent seat page) you will know that I teach riders of all levels, and problem ankles is a common thread. Everyone from beginner to experienced riders can have a problem with their ankles partly because it is an area often neglected in traditional teaching. However, if your ankles are not working properly it is difficult to achieve an independent seat, you will tend to lose your stirrups (or they will slide around on your feet), you may experience ankle pain and you may find it difficult to have equal weight on each side of the horse.

First of all you need to assess the ankles you have. Ankles tend to fall into one of three groups but if you are unlucky your ankles may differ (and each ankle may fall into two separate groups) due to past injuries (usually) and therefore you need to treat them differently.

Stiff ankles: Some people are just naturally stiffer in their joints than others and some people have stiff ankles due to past injuries. People who have naturally stiff ankles will usually have stiffer joints, throughout the body, in general. Don't worry, it is not necessarily a bad thing, as you will see when you read about people who have naturally floppy ankles. Naturally stiff ankles need a careful stretching program and good stretch in particular is to stand with the balls of your feet on the edge of a low step and gently lower your heels. It is important to stop if you feel pain, and hold a prolonged stretch rather than bouncing up and down. This should be done each time before you mount your horse and then when you are mounted you can further warm up by standing in the stirrups and allowing your weight to pass down your legs and into your heels.



If you have not already done so work through the balancing exercises described on the independent seat page of my web site. I have found people with stiff ankles initially may not even feel the stretch down the back of the calf (because the ankle is so inflexible that the calf muscle and Achilles tendon does not get to stretch) but when they do their ankles are finally starting to behave as they should (like a shock absorber, more about that later).

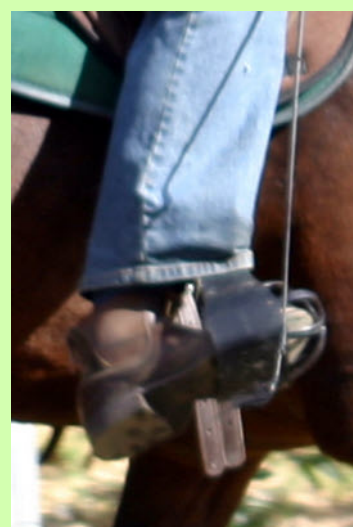
If your ankle/s are stiff due to old injuries you should see a physiotherapist (or similar) about some specific exercises. It really is worth the effort and expense as your ankles are crucial to your riding.

People with stiff ankles are usually better off wearing short boots and chaps rather than long boots, at least until they improve the flexibility of their ankles. This really does make a difference as long boots hold the ankle much stiffer.

Floppy ankles: The opposite problem, floppy ankles usually belong to people who have very flexible joints throughout the body. In these people the main problem is that the ankles can roll to the outside rather than just dip and spring as they should, in the downwards/upwards plane when riding. People with floppy ankles have usually 'gone over' on their ankles on numerous occasions as it is so easy for them to do (when walking on uneven ground for example). The more this happens, the weaker the ankle/s become.

The problem becomes more apparent when the rider with floppy ankles tries to balance standing in the stirrups. In this case a sharp pain may be felt in the outside of the ankle joint if the ankle is allowed to flex to the outside.

People with floppy ankles should wear long boots and may even need to strap their ankle/s when riding until the joint has strengthened. In my experience it is easier to loosen a stiff ankle (unless it has been badly injured) than firm up a floppy ankle (because once ligaments etc have stretched they tend to stay that way) so long boots may be a permanent fixture in this case. Great news if you are just looking for an excuse to have some long boots made to measure!



Take care when standing in the stirrups that you do not allow your heels to drop too far. Practice standing in the stirrups and keeping the foot almost level (the heel just slightly lower than the toe). Indeed you will find that it is harder to balance if you allow your heel to go too low. Work through the balance exercises on the independent seat page of my web site. Again consider seeing a specialist if your problem is due to injury.

If you liken your ankles to the suspension on your car you can understand how important your ankle are. Shockers that are too stiff (like stiff ankles) jolt the passengers upwards every time the car travels over a bump, shockers that are worn out (floppy ankles) can only dip but not spring. Again an uncomfortable ride for the passengers in the car as they are unable to dampen the jolts. Ideal ankles dip and spring, absorbing (and dampening) the movement of the horse.

Improving you ankles involves, firstly, identifying your particular problem. Then taking the appropriate steps such as wearing gear that allows the ankles to move more freely (in the case of stiff ankles) or supporting floppy ankles with strapping and boots. Then working through the balance exercises to get the ankles working properly in the downwards/upwards plane.

Equine Flu- What to do with your time!

Well, who would have thought? Several weeks (if not months) of enforced standstill for many of us. Whilst we all offer our sympathy and support for owners of properties who have contracted the flu virus, and to people who rely on the horse industry for their income (including ourselves), what can horse owners without equine flu do to keep their horses and themselves occupied through the coming weeks?

Plan for the worst but hope for the best! First and foremost make sure you are prepared if your horses get EI. Think about where you will put them if they are sick, remembering that the weather could turn wet over the next few weeks so if you do not have covered yards make sure you have a waterproof rug to hand. A horse that is sick with flu must be kept comfortable, dry and warm while ill.

Prepare an area such as a yard and try to obtain some bedding that is not dusty. This may mean buying in some form of dust free bedding. In the event of your horses getting EI you will also need to think about soaking your hay to reduce dust. Any dust will make the coughing worse.

Stock up on feed and hay so that you do not have to go to the produce store as often if your horses get infected. Also stock up on disinfectant and buying a large spray gun (at least a couple of litres) is a good idea.

Stay vigilant, follow the guidelines set out by the DPI. EI is not a disease that we want in Australia. Vaccination is not an easy option for this disease. Eradication is the answer. Think about who else comes onto your property who may have visited other properties, tradesmen, meter readers, door to door salesmen etc, have you a plan for ensuring they do not bring the virus onto your property.

Now that you have prepared for the worst here are some things that you can be doing to keep you and your horses occupied over the coming weeks (presuming your horses are healthy).

Give all your gear an overhaul. Strip it, clean it and put stuff that needs repair into bag that can be taken for repair once the EI out break is over. Do the same with your rugs. Re water proofing rugs now before the wet season arrives.

Harrow your paddocks now (using an old gate tied to the back of your car if you do not have pasture harrows) so that when the rain starts any manure is broken up ready to be washed into the ground and utilized as fertiliser.

If you have somewhere flat to ride on your property you could practice the balance exercises outlined on the independent seat page of my website www.equiculture.com.au .

Brush up on your groundwork techniques teaching your horse to move forwards, backwards and sideways from increasingly lighter cues. Ground work pays dividends when it comes to riding again. Read the **One of my favorite books** section of this newsletter for a recommendation of a great book to buy and work through.

Teach your horse a new trick. I have been teaching mine to Spanish walk and then have a whole list of exercises and tricks and I want to do with them. If my horse were hoping for a break they need to think again!!



Upcoming events

Due to the equine flu, all clinics, workshops and lessons are cancelled until further notice. This includes Victorian workshops and clinics even though there are fewer restrictions in that State at the moment. We will inform you of any changes in our circumstances via email and our web site. We hope to see you all again ASAP.

One of my favourite links

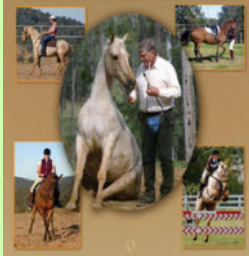
www.rirdc.gov.au

The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) web site is one of my favourite links. The web site is that of the government body of the same name and the reason that I like the site so much is because many of the publications that RIRDC put out can be downloaded (legally) for free from this site. A good example is the book Drought Feeding and Management for Horses by David Nash.

RIRDC also publish several horse books by Australian authors and these are generally very good and can be purchased inexpensively from the RIRDC bookshop page. After clicking on the link above go to the **horses** in the **established rural industries** section.

One of my favourite books

HORSE TRAINING
STEVE BRADY'S
Formula for Success



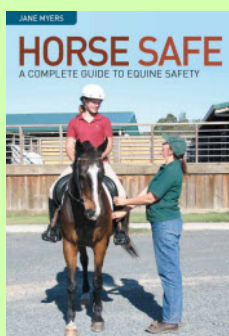
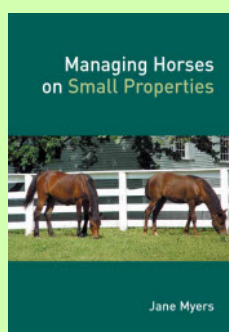
The book by Steve Brady, one of Australia's master horsemen, is called **Horse Training - Steve Brady's Formula for Success**.

This book is an ideal book to help you get through the current horse standstill. It has 14 groundwork and 14 ridden exercises that build on each other and if followed correctly result in a well trained horse. You can carry out the exercises in a small area and there are plenty of tips and suggestions for what to do with any possible problems. The book can be purchased from the web site www.stevebradyhorsemanship.com or directly from Steve or Linda Brady by phoning 02 65 502229. The book is \$55.00 plus \$8.00 p&p. Highly recommended!

My other favourite books

It would be remiss of me not to mention my other favourite books...mine!!

Managing Horses on Small Properties \$49.95 Horse Safe \$49.95 and Horse Sense (which I co-wrote) \$69.95 (p&p extra). All can be purchased through me or via the publishers CSIRO (www.publish.csiro.au) or from the Horses and People web site www.horsesandpeople.com.au



Mulching your horse property

Mulching is an important part of horse property care and with a little knowledge it is something that we can all do successfully with little or no expense and reap dividends.

Any bare areas on a horse property should be covered with some form of mulch for many reasons. Bare soil is very easily eroded by water and wind. It compacts easily with out its cushioning layer of grass. It is also unable to make use of any water that comes along (due to being compacted and having no vegetation to hold the water).

When the same area is covered in mulch it is protected from the wind. Water that arrives on that spot is slowed down and held in the mulch helping it to decompose. The water also soaks into the soil more easily due to this slowing process. Mulch also provides a cushioning layer between heavy objects (such as horses) and the soil. As the mulch decomposes it provides habitat for numerous species of insects, bacteria and fungi that are beneficial to the soil. The decomposing mulch also provides a medium for vegetation (such as grass) to become established again (provided the area is rested from damaging activity such as horses and heavy machinery).



Virtually anything organic can be used as mulch but common materials on a horse property include composted manure, shavings, shredded paper, old hay etc. A mix of various materials generally works best. As long as horses do not have access to the area whilst the mulch decomposes the mix can also include materials such as grass clippings and cane straw (the above picture shows cane straw). Grass seeds can then be thrown into this mulch after rainfall.

A great way to mulch an area when hay is cheap and plentiful (i.e. not at the moment) is to feed clean (from weeds) grass hay round bales on bare areas to a group of four horses. It needs to be a group of horses so that the hay is consumed quickly before it goes moldy from any rainfall. They will devour and spread the hay out (to approximately a 15 m circle), mixing it with their manure and urine. This takes about four to five days after which you can remove the horses. The area should be full of seeds from the hay itself or else you can throw a few handfuls of grass seeds into the mulch. After subsequent rainfalls you will get a beautiful crop of new grass on a previously bare area. Even if it does not rain for a long time (and therefore decompose the mulch) the mulch is still doing a great job protecting the soil until conditions become right for mulch decomposition and grass growth.

Remember

The information contained on this newsletter is the opinion or is based on the skills/experience of the author, and any use or misuse of any of the information is entirely the responsibility of the user. We cannot be held responsible for what you choose to do with the information.

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