

AUGUST 2023

EQUESTRIAN

magazine

NEW HUB

ne

Nicole Tough

On why there's always room for improvement

Bitting your breaker

Pitfalls to avoid

Spring grass

What you need to know

First aid essentials

Why it pays to be prepared

And to all our beautiful horses,
Happy birthday



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Mary Nitschke
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On the Cover
Wishing all our wonderful horses large and small a very happy birthday.



OUR CONTRIBUTORS



Amanda Mac

As editor of *Equestrian Hub Magazine*, Amanda's two long-standing passions, one for horses the other for writing, come together perfectly. Although much of her time is spent busily editing away behind the scenes, in this issue she talks to Melbourne lawyer and horsewoman Emma Turnbull about her love for dressage and for Future Score, her recently acquired OTT and a star in the making.



Nicole Tough

An EA Level 2 Dressage Specialist Coach and National A Level Judge, Nicole has over 30 years' experience in training, competing, judging and coaching. She enjoys presenting seminars and masterclasses, has trained in Germany, Spain and The Netherlands, and has produced nine very successful FEI horses. Don't miss her article on the discipline that's never completely mastered.

Anna Minogue

Anna is an equine dentist and independent bit fitter with a strong focus on horse welfare and ethical practices. Drawing on science, technology, and her own considerable experience, she helps riders find the right contact with their horses, leading to partnerships that flourish. In this issue, she explains her approach to biting for breakers; what's best for baby and what's best to avoid.

Leisa Hofstetter

Leisa is an Equine Nutritionist and founder of Hof Equine. She has a Bachelor of Equine Science, specialising in nutrition, and lives just west of Brisbane, in Queensland's beautiful Lockyer Valley. Spring is on the way, and with it comes the risk of increased levels of NSC in the grass, laminitis, and insulin resistance. Read Leisa's fascinating nutrition article to learn more.



Paula Jeffery

Paula is a Registered Qualified Saddliffiter with the UK Society of Master Saddlers in Australia. Drawn to start saddle fitting full-time almost 15 years ago, she has 25 years experience as a FEI dressage rider, trainer and coach in Australia, the UK and Europe. Be sure to read her excellent article on the link between your saddle, pressure and movement - your horse will thank you for it.

Michelle Terlato

Michelle grew up with horses and has always loved them. When she's not travelling the globe photographing the world's top equestrian athletes, she's home riding her own horses. It's the behind the scenes and the unexpected shots that she likes the most, and in our Behind the Shot feature, she shares her favourites and explains what makes them so special.

Emma Turnbull

Emma is a partner in a specialist criminal defence law firm with offices in Melbourne and Ballarat. She is also an accomplished and dedicated horsewoman with some impressive show wins and awards to her name, including 2022 Amateur Owner Rider of the Year. More recently, she took ownership of Future Score, a beautiful OTT she is currently training for dressage and the show ring.



Dr Clare Williams-Paterson

Clare is an equine veterinarian who works with Apiam Animal Health, a leading Australian rural organisation. With 332 highly experienced vets, 73 clinics, and a team of dedicated professionals, Apiam aims to enrich the lives of animals and their humans. Are you a little hazy about what should be in your equine first aid kit? Then be sure to read Clare's excellent Vet Vibes article.



BEHIND THE SHOT

Boyd Exell

One of Australia's top equestrian photographers, **MICHELLE TERLATO** travels the world capturing equestrian athletes in action. Each month she shares one of her favourite shots.

Driver: Boyd Exell

Horse: Four In Hand Carriage Driving Team

Event: 2018 World Equestrian Games

Location: Tryon International Equestrian Center, North Carolina, USA

Camera & Settings: Canon 7D Mark II 70-200mm Lens ISO 100 f 5.1/640 sec.

Challenges: The most challenging aspect of this capture was that in 2018 I had never really photographed Carriage Driving before. I felt very nervous on Day One, the dressage phase, as it was a totally different type of capture. Obviously, there is a lot more depth to the subject with four horses plus a carriage and driver. It was necessary

to up the F stops a little to try and gain more depth of field so I didn't get focus on only one horse or alternatively, just the driver. While I look back at it now I still think there is room for improvement, but I actually love the way there is some movement especially in the water droplets. The way they are streaming off the tail of the lead horse shows the pace and gives the perception of action. The other challenge was the weather. It was very hot and very bright which can make for a long day and dark shadows. But I survived until the end (Boyd was one of the last to come through) and despite the light challenge and the dark horses there is still plenty of detail.

Why this shot is special: This image shows what an amazing horseman Boyd is. He is working as one with his horses. While to some it may be just driving, it is hard, physically exhausting, athletic team work. When this image was taken, Boyd was going for his 8th World Championship title and I had never seen him compete before so I was extremely excited to see him in action. He was also the medal favourite so he was Australia's best hope for the event - doubly exciting! He took the lead after the dressage phase, then once the marathon phase was over he was still leading and had to hold on during the final day, which he did. It was a Gold Medal for Australia and I was so excited. To see the Aussie flag and hear the National Anthem played so far from home was wonderful. Later, Boyd came in for his press conference in the media room and he was just such a lovely, generous and approachable man (I may have taken a selfie!). It was a highlight of the Championships for me personally. In February this year, Boyd went on to claim his 10th FEI Driving World Cup championship. He truly is a megastar in the equestrian world.

Michelle is available for event, commercial and private shoots. Visit [Michelle Terlato Photography](http://MichelleTerlatoPhotography.com).



HANGING TOUGH

Room for improvement

Dressage is a sport of development and, as frustrating as it might be, it's one that is never completely mastered, writes **NICOLE TOUGH**.

Dressage is a discipline in which there's always room for improvement and refinement, making it equally addictive and maddening - all at the same time! In this article, I want to share my thoughts surrounding training, and the teacher/

trainer/student dynamic.

The dressage rider wears many hats:

- Horseman/woman and primary carer
- Student of the horse
- Teacher
- Personal trainer

- Councillor and exercise physiotherapist.

For a rider to undertake the sport of dressage, they need to actively engage in studying horses and embark on a learning journey that will never end. For a horse to successfully perform dressage movements, they need knowledge and they need strength. But first and foremost, they need to understand.

Prior to elementary level, the rider could be likened to a primary school teacher, and the horse to a student in a classroom learning the base curriculum. These fundamentals include maintaining one tempo in all three gaits, travelling on specific lines, accepting and yielding to pressure, and sustaining these concepts in all the transitions. This is the familiarisation phase, where we lay our foundations and install knowledge and confidence, which in turn leads to more and more rideability.

From this basic knowledge, and to be fair on the horse, they need strength. They get stronger because of what they do. That includes the wrong use of their muscles, making them stronger in unhelpful ways. And horses can be quite good at training their riders into accepting half measures and a 'near enough is good enough' mentality.

From elementary level upwards, the rider becomes the personal trainer and the horse is our trainee in the gym. There are some new concepts to learn, like lateral work and flying changes, but essentially it's all about building more suppleness and strength, and continuing to develop forward thrust and carrying capacity, which over time produces more elasticity, power, and uphill tendency. If we train and condition their bodies well, their physical development is a given and we produce a happy athlete, which essentially means our horse is mentally coping with the required tasks and willing to keep exerting themselves. When the horse is physically struggling with the work, they break down mentally and find ways to evade, resist, and avoid work, which can escalate to disobedience.

No matter what stage we are in, everything we do in the saddle is supposed to make our horse better, and part of being a good rider means that as their trainer, we should have a plan for every session: beginning with the warm up, steadily building in intensity, working on targeted goals, offering rest breaks, and finishing with the cooling down period.

For every session, the trainer needs to be happy with small progress and ensure their horse understands what is being asked. They should not expect perfection, but instead, feel that their horse is trying to do what is asked. They should remember that all horses

are different: some are brave, some are scaredy-cats, some are laid back, some are stubborn, and others are highly strung. Our challenge is to find a way to get the best out of our horse, and we all need direction from a coach to help us be the best and fairest trainer we can be so we can develop our horses.

The trainer should always remember that the horse is a sentient being who didn't put their hand up to say 'pick me, pick me, I want to be a dressage horse'. And training isn't always fun for them: some days they don't feel like it, other days they might feel drained or

“ As a trainer, we have to think about everything we do. The rider's every action, including wrong actions, gives information to the horse - so we owe it to them to be mindful and present in our training sessions. ”

tight in the gluteals, or their shoes are on too snug. It's up to us to always be open to exploring any physical reason they might be resistant to learning and training. Horses can't speak, so we have to listen to and explore their feedback.

As a trainer, we have to think about everything we do. The rider's every action, including wrong actions, gives information to the horse - so we owe it to them to be mindful and present in our training sessions. There should be a reason behind every aid applied, with reward offered in the moment our horse is trying their hardest.

Here are some tips to achieving a progressive approach to training;

- Make realistic goals for each session.
- Horses thrive on routine and consistency.
- Practise makes progress.
- Rewards need to be on point.
- Train a level above your competition level. Then everything your horse does in competition will be easy, instead of the hardest thing they've had to do.
- Challenge them at home where they are most comfortable.
- Sometimes we have to accept more is not possible today.
- Horses are not the same every day, and some days we need more patience than others.
- Progress is not always linear. We do not get a bit better every single ride, and occasionally we'll feel like we're getting nowhere.
- As we are training muscle memories, we should avoid consecutive days off.
- Always finish on a good note and capitalise on it tomorrow.
- Make their sessions and their time with you special and something they look forward to: a good curry comb before tacking up; tacking up with treats; sugar cubes or peppermints once mounted; a molasses drink post session. All or some of these incentives may have your student running to the gate to be the next horse in your gym.

In summation, dressage is a very disciplined sport. To be good at it, we must be and remain very disciplined at home. Excellence is a struggle worth working towards, and moments of oneness are their own reward.

And remember, as Carl Hester says, the more you ride the better you get. 



FEATURE

Bits for the breaker

There's much to consider as you begin acquainting your youngster with the feel and the use of a bit, writes **ANNA MINOGUE**.

It's more than fair to say that with all the various types of bits available, the severity of each and every one lies in your hands. As riders, that's something we all should keep firmly in mind, no matter how old our horses are. And for a young horse being introduced to a bit for the first time, the obvious choice is to opt for one that offers the

greatest degree of comfort, and is as safe for that young mouth as possible.

Setting the scene

Before going into greater detail on bits for your young horse, I should first explain why bits and their correct fit are my passion.

I've owned and ridden horses for 30 or so years. I was a veterinary nurse

for 15 years, and in 2011, I qualified as an equine dentist. It was while working in that profession that I saw numerous mouth injuries caused by bits, which set me off on a new trajectory. I studied first with The International College for Professional Bit Fitting Consultants in The Netherlands, before undertaking courses with Horse Bit Fit UK and with Bombers Bits, at Neue Schule's The Academy, and with others.

I do not work for a biting company, nor do I work for a shop or a brand – and this is because I prefer to give an unbiased opinion about the bit and brand I think will be the best option for you and your horse. Essentially, my goal as a bit fitter is to make horses more comfortable and to improve their performance through an ethical approach to bits and bridles, and by teaching riders, who are sometimes frustrated by a lack of results after using increasingly severe bits, that there's a better approach.



TOP: Bomber Moulded Mullen - great for developing a soft contact in a more sensitive horse. **LEFT:** TBF 14mm Full Cheek Barrel Bit – the sides are good for direct steering and for stopping the bit moving laterally. **RIGHT:** Avoid 'key' bits, or any that encourage the horse to fiddle with the bit. Once they've learned to 'play' with the bit, achieving a quiet mouth and steady contact is very hard.

But back to young horses and their bits. The first point I'd like to make is the importance of building a huge amount of confidence around the bit, educating the horse so they learn to be soft into the contact and are happy to follow the contact and the bit without taking advantage of it. Basically, it's all about making sure that they're comfortable and confident with the feeling of a bit in their mouth, and that you, as the rider, don't make any erratic movements, or apply constant and unrelenting pressure, which is one way to really distress a horse. Building trust and confidence in the bit is a number one priority.

When it goes wrong

I commonly see problems that have originated either in the breaking process or during training, and are the result of practices such as applying constant and unrelenting pressure; using a sudden and strong pressure (using a ten when you could have used a two); not

escalating pressure in an appropriate way; and pulling on the mouth for no reason and with no aid in mind. You'll sometimes see riders jab on their horse's mouth, and if that's done when a horse is a breaker, or very early on in their education it will absolutely destroy any confidence in the bit.

“ I commonly see problems that have originated either in the breaking process or during training ... ”

If a horse lacks that confidence, you'll get anxiety around the bit which will manifest in behaviours such as chewing the bit, which can be a big and ongoing problem; leaning into the bit; backing off the bit; overbending with the bit – any one of a number of evasive behaviours

in which they're trying to get away from the pressure of the bit because they've never been taught what it means.

Communication not control

A bit is a communication tool, not a control tool. It's the way to communicate whether I want their shoulder to move over, whether I want them to go into the hand, whether I want them to stretch down into the contact, and so on. It's all about communication, but a lot of horses are trained with a bit that has been used as a method of control, and from that you usually don't get a positive outcome. They're often quite anxious because too much pressure has been applied or applied too quickly. Worse still, horses can continue to be anxious around the bit and to manifest those behaviours for their entire ridden careers if they haven't been properly trained right from the start.

From the ground up

For breakers, I like the Bombers Moulded Mullen, provided your horse



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It's preferable that when you hold a bit up by its rings, it falls naturally into a 'U' shape (right) rather than a 'V' (left). The canons in a 'V' shaped bit tend to be too straight and will not encourage the horse to get a feel for the bit and thus gain confidence.

won't turn it into rubbery snack! At around 16mm it's quite thin for a rubber bit, and it's very flexible.

Another thing to consider is the size of your bit, I see far more injuries and wounds from bits that are too large than too small, even when there is little pressure on the reins. I generally try and use a bit that doesn't have a lot of movement in it - something like a Myler, a barrel bit, can be quite good for that reason. On the other hand, a bit with a lot of movement, such as a double-jointed snaffle, can be too much for a lot of horses, making them very anxious. Personally, I prefer not to use that type of bit until a horse is confident and well established in the contact.

Similarly, I don't use jointed bits on young horses because at some point, you may have to apply quite strong pressure. If you want them to turn right then they have to turn right, and you might need to open your right rein quite dramatically. With a double-jointed bit that might cause a lot of lateral movement – the bit will slide all the way over and those little joints can pinch on the inside of the lips and cause a bit wound.

Other than a rubber bit, I do like the full cheek 14mm thick barrel bit I had made (10mm bits are too thin – 12 to 14mm is

preferable for a young horse). But you do need some kind of direct steering, and a correctly fitted full cheek design prevents the lateral movement common with eggbutts and loose ring bits, even when you do open a rein. And ergonomically speaking, it's preferable that when you hold a bit up by its rings, it falls naturally into a 'U' shape rather than a 'V'. The canons in a 'V' shaped bit tend to be too straight and will not encourage the horse to get a feel for the bit and thus gain confidence.

Getting educated

Once your youngster is established in the basics, it may be appropriate to change their bit to one that allows for a little more finesse. Calling in a bit fitter at this point is a good idea. They will assess factors such as the shape and formation of the horse's mouth (do they have a skinny tongue or particularly wide bars?); their anatomy and biomechanics; their level of training; your level of skill; and how you and your horse function as a pair.

A horse needs to learn to connect with the bit and communicate with it, rather than be frightened of it. And of course, rider's make mistakes, perhaps they're unsteady in the hands, or they ask for a half halt when they didn't mean to –

the horse has to be confident enough in the bit that they forgive all that - but if they're fearful of it, then they don't forgive those mistakes and become quite frightened of the bit.

It's about communication

In closing I would stress that when you're choosing a bit for your breaker, look for one that moves very little in the mouth; is not too thin (shoot for 12-14mm); falls into a 'U' rather than a 'V' shape; and consider a full cheek to help prevent the bit sliding and causing injury. Finally, remember that a bit is all about communication, not control. More often than not, a stronger bit is not the answer, better education and greater understanding of, and confidence in the bit is.

As riders, I think we all need to take greater responsibility for how our horses are in the contact. And remember, generally speaking if there's a problem it's not always the rider's fault, nor is it always the horse. It's a combination of you both - it's always a combination. 

Anna is based in Chambers Flat, Queensland. To learn more about the expert services she offers, you can reach her at [The Bit Fitter](#), through her [Facebook](#) page, or call 0407 689 155.



VET VIBES

First aid essentials

Be prepared! It's a great motto to live by.

Dr CLARE WILLIAMS-PATERSON of Apiam Equine

Services gives some expert advice on putting together an equine first aid kit, and what you should prepare for.

Putting together a well-organised equine first aid kit is a great investment. These kits provide a ready and waiting tool, and should be made easily accessible to manage a frontline crisis - be it at home, during travel, or at an equestrian event.

Let's face it, emergencies are part and parcel of owning a horse. They can happen at any time of day or in the dark of night, can be very random, and can involve any body system. Commonly, these emergencies range from lacerations, puncture wounds and broken bones, to colic, choke and eye injuries – to name just a few.

We all know that a horse's favourite pastime is plotting how they can best cause their owner maximum stress at the most inconvenient moment, and

being well prepared can help defuse the panic and stress associated with these often highly emotionally charged situations, while contributing significantly to your horse's welfare, both during and after the crisis.

Once you have your basic kit together, maximise this preparedness initiative by taking the time to learn basic equine first aid skills. It also pays to be observant and understand what the baseline normal is for your horse.

What's in the kit?

Be sure to select an easy to carry bag. Think practical and simple – you can always improvise and improve. For example, a first aid kit that's stored in the barn at home has the scope to include more than say a backpack that you might carry during a bush ride – and this may vary again for the kit that is carried in the car or horse float to an event.

Physical Exam Tools:

- A digital thermometer
- Stethoscope
- Halter and lead rope
- Latex gloves
- A twitch
- A torch or headlight
- Hoof pick
- Hoof knife
- A couple of clean towels

Bandage Material:

- Pack 10cm x 10cm gauze swabs
- Roll of cotton wool
- Roll of cotton gauze (e.g. Gamgee)
- Non-stick gauze pads (e.g. Melolin)
- Non-adhesive wrap (e.g. Vetrap)
- Adhesive wrap (e.g. Elastoplast)
- Poultice (e.g. Animalintex)
- Duct tape
- Blunt tipped bandage scissors

Wound Care:

- Packs of saline solution for cleaning wounds/rinsing eyes
- Dilute iodine solution (e.g. Betadine) or chlorhexidine for cleaning wounds
- Bottle of artificial tears lubricant
- Fly repellent



FACING PAGE: Your equine first aid kit should include Latex gloves.

ABOVE: Fresh or open wounds involving a limb are a common case scenario.

Other: Wire-cutters and pliers (horses are experts at getting tangled up in wire fencing), baling twine/hay string, and cable ties

Emergency phone numbers: These days, most of us store numbers in our smartphones, but it pays to have a list in your kit in preparation for the worst case situations where your phone is damaged, lost, or has a flat battery, or you are incapacitated and unable to operate the kit and/or phone.

Back up emergency items: Fresh or open wounds involving a limb are a common case scenario. Obviously, it is critical to stop any bleeding and this is usually achieved by applying pressure. However, on the lower leg there is insufficient tissue to protect tendons and skin from this pressure, so appropriate padding is essential to prevent more damage.

And be prepared to think outside the square in an emergency. The polo wrap used to support tendons and ligaments from brushing and interference during work can double as an effective first aid bandage. For padding, cotton sheets or pillow covers cut into strips can serve you well, and individually

wrapped sanitary pads are both sterile and inexpensive. Thick or thin and cut to size, these can make effective wound dressings. Also, never underestimate the absorbability and padding value of the disposable nappy!

Important to remember is that there is such a thing as over-cleaning wounds. Overly aggressive scrubbing can slow down blood clotting and make things dramatically worse. Application of irritant substances may also adversely affect local tissue and/or deeper structures such as bones. In the case of many wounds, less is more – remove gross contamination and cover appropriately, even simply with protective gauze or gauze moistened with sterile saline solution and wait for your veterinarian's expert assessment.

Vital information

Taking your horses' vital signs (temperature, heart rate and respiratory rate) provides invaluable information. But a note of warning here, only perform these checks if it is safe to do so. Horses are big, strong, fight or flight animals and when in pain they are usually not themselves and may not respect your personal space. Sometimes it is safer to wait for help.

Apiam's equine veterinary credentials are well-founded with a growing number of purpose-built dedicated Equine Vet Clinics and Referral Hospitals located in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, working alongside our network of mixed practice clinics in delivering quality equine veterinary care.



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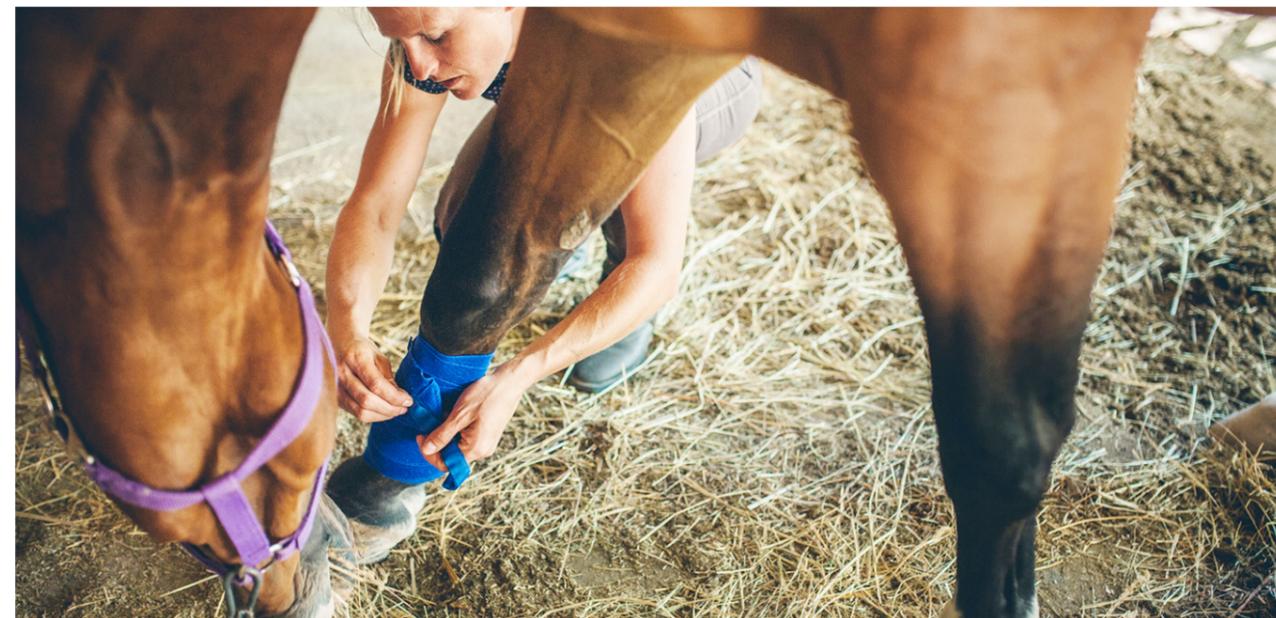
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Be prepared to think outside the square in an emergency - for example, a polo wrap can double as an effective first aid bandage.

In many instances, vital sign numbers relayed at the time of calling your veterinarian can be helpful in assisting them to gauge the severity of the situation, and occasionally, whether any medication should be administered before their arrival. However, for these numbers to be of real value, you need to know your horse's normal numbers. A normal temperature for an adult horse is 37.2-38.3°C; a normal heart rate is 28-44 beats per minute (which is approximately half that of ours); and a normal respiratory rate is 10-24 breaths per minute (a rate similar to ours).

Aside from respiratory rate, you can't guess the numbers just by 'eyeballing' the horse. For example, a horse may not be obviously sweating but could still have an inappropriately elevated temperature. So, you must measure their temperature with a thermometer, and this brings us to how to take an accurate temperature reading! The digital thermometer should remain inserted in the horse's rectum for the full length of time required (this varies between thermometers) - wait for the beep before removal.

Your horse's respiratory rate is easy to calculate. Simply count the number of breaths they take in one minute while watching the flank or nostril. To check their heart rate, feel for the pulse in the

artery on the inside of their jawbone. When time is of the essence, count the number of beats over 15 seconds, multiply that number by four and this will give you the resting heart rate. Alternatively, a stethoscope can be used to listen to the heart rate on the left side of the horse's chest (over the ribs and just behind the elbow). Palpating the pulse and listening through a stethoscope at the same time can help make sure that you are not double counting heart sounds. Because of the great variability among different breeds and classes of horses, it is wise for owners to make a point of knowing their horse's normal heart rate.

Ideally, in case of your horse becoming colicky, you should also be familiar with normal gut sounds. You want to hear sounds of movement; there should be gurgles in an area and then similar sounds a bit further down the line. Silence is abnormal as are over the top 'laundry sounds' that may indicate overactive bowels.

To get a good perspective on normal, use a stethoscope and practice listening to regular gut sounds across both sides of the abdomen while your horse is healthy.

It is also important to know what else equates to normal for your horse; their

usual appetite, water intake, urine and manure output, and their day to day behaviour and activities.

Prescription medications

Horses experiencing colic (abdominal pain) and eye injuries are common situations where medications have sometimes been inappropriately administered prior to veterinary arrival and assessment.

It is highly recommended to refrain from medicating your horse until directed to do so by your veterinarian. The last thing you, your horse, or your vet need in an emergency is a delay in achieving a diagnosis and treatment plan due to the potential masking effects of certain medications, or to inappropriate dosing.

Whilst the full scope of equine emergencies and their management is not possible to cover here, remember that common things are common. For first line basics, keep it simple, stay safe, and as much as possible, be prepared - then you can be confident that in a crisis you can offer the very best help you possibly can. 

Visit Apiam Animal Health to learn more about their range of services.



FEATURE

The link between pressure and movement

The fit of your horse's saddle and the way they move are related. But what does that mean? SMS Qualified Fitter **PAULA JEFFERY** explains.

We talk a lot about how the biomechanics of the horse (the way they move) is affected by saddlefit, either in a positive or negative way. But what does that actually mean from an owner's perspective?

A great place to start is to understand

the role muscles play in moving your horse's bones. The muscles in their back, shoulders, hindquarters and neck control the movement of their front legs and hind legs, as well as the way their back and ribcage swing and lift. By nature, horses are built to move efficiently in a certain pattern to get themselves about in different paces

and speeds, while stopping, turning and balancing. When they are able to move freely, they limit injury to their muscles and joints.

When we place pressure on muscles, as we do when we put a saddle with a rider's weight on our horse's back, we have an impact on how well the muscles can do their job of moving those limbs. As the pressure increases, so does the impact on the muscle; we can restrict blood flow and oxygen, damage muscle fibres and nerves, increase muscle fatigue, and stop the muscle functioning efficiently and at its full capacity.

When we do this, we stop the muscle from moving the limb and joints in their full range of motion - so stride length, shoulder rotation, back lift and swing, can all be affected. As well as the direct impact on muscle function, we also have a pressure/pain reaction from our horse. Their tendency, just like ours, is to move away from pressure or pain, so they change their posture or movement in an automatic response to avoiding it.

How do we know?

How do we recognise when our saddle is having a detrimental effect on our horse? On a day-to-day basis, are there things we can look out for as owners and riders? And what long-term implications should we be concerned about?

Firstly, there are the obvious extreme behavioural reactions - such as bucking, pinning the ears back when girthing, and moving away when the saddle comes out - that hopefully most of us are now recognising as discomfort, not just attributing it to the horse 'being difficult'.

But there are many more postural, muscular, and movement issues created by high pressure from incorrectly fitting saddles that have both short-term impacts on the horse's ability to do their job, and long-term implications for their soundness, increased susceptibility to injury, decreased level of performance, and happiness.

Science is now leading the charge in analysing exactly what is happening

underneath a saddle. Current research has well and truly established that increased pressure from saddles can shorten the horse's stride length, limb rotation and efficiency, decrease the range of motion in the horse's back, and cause the horse to change their posture under the weight of a rider.

“... in trot the force impact is twice the rider's weight, and in canter it's two and a half times the rider's weight!”

These studies help us understand why we need to take a closer look at the way saddles are designed and how important it is to fit for each horse's unique conformation and muscular development in order to distribute the rider's weight correctly and limit the impact on the horse's movement.

One staggering finding from recent studies measuring the force transmitted onto a computerised pressure mat under the saddle, was that in trot the force impact is twice the rider's weight, and in canter it's two and a half times the rider's weight!

Now, that is a big enough fact to swallow if we are considering an exceptionally well-fitted saddle, with a well-muscled horse and balanced rider - but what happens when the saddle's gullet plate is too tight, or the balance is more rearward, or the rider sits a little crooked? What if the flocking is lumpy, the channel too narrow or the shoulder panels too full? Suddenly, instead of that two and a half times force impact being distributed evenly over the horse's back, it's creating even higher peak pressures on muscles and joints in the areas where the saddle is not fitting correctly.

FACING PAGE: Your horse's comfort will help to ensure you have many happy years together.

ABOVE: The connection between the horse, the saddle and the rider.

Follow the clues

Whilst all this might seem a bit gloomy, the impacts of pressure leave clues! When you know what to look for, it is much easier to recognise the signs indicating that your saddle needs adjustment or re-fitting by a qualified fitter.

So, what are some of the primary areas of high pressure that we see and what are some of their impacts on posture and biomechanics?

Below are some of the reasons for high pressure and the symptoms that can be a good indication that your horse is having difficulty with moving under saddle in an easy and comfortable way.

Learning to recognise and act on these symptoms early by calling in a professional to help you with your horse is the best way to minimise long-term effects on their comfort and soundness, and to ensure that you have many years to come enjoying your time with a willing and happy partner! 🐾

Visit Paula and her team at [Performance Saddlefits](#).



Areas of high pressure under the front of the tree: Tree width across shoulders, tree leg length, gullet angle, first girth point, stirrup bar.



Areas of high pressure at the back of the tree: Length of the tree, balance of the seat, pitch/angle of the tree rails, shape of the tree (too flat or too curvy).

Front of the saddle

Reasons for increased pressure include:

- Gullet the wrong size (too narrow or too wide)
- Too narrow a tree for the width of the horse's shoulders
- Panels sitting too high in channel
- Saddle sitting too far forward or slipping forward in movement
- Channel too narrow
- Saddle tilting forward into wither pockets
- Shoulder panels of the saddle restricting shoulder rotation
- Not allowing for asymmetric shoulders
- Not enough clearance over the top of the wither

Symptoms you might notice:

- Your horse having difficulty being on the bit, carrying their head and neck high
- Inconsistency in the rein contact or 'bracing' against the bit
- Throwing their head up in transitions
- Stumbling or tripping in their front legs
- Girthy when tightening the girth
- Difficulty bending or turning in one direction more than the other
- Refusing jumps
- Dropping jump rails with their front legs or 'dangling a leg' over a jump
- Throwing their head up on landing and racing off

Back of the saddle

Reasons for increased pressure include:

- Seat balance being too rearward into the cantle
- Saddle tilting backwards
- Flocking under the cantle too hard
- Channel at the cantle being too narrow for the spine
- Saddle being too long/past T18 or the last rib
- Saddle 'bouncing' at the cantle especially in trot
- Panel shape incorrect for back shape e.g. panel angle too steep for a flat back
- Saddle slipping to one side at cantle
- Rider in a chair seat

Symptoms you might notice:

- Horse is 'lazy' and hard to push forward
- Dragging hind toes in walk and trot
- Under tracking with hind feet in trot
- 'Plaiting' movement with hind legs
- Swinging hindquarters out on circles rather than bending
- Dropping in the lower back or tilting pelvis forward when mounted
- Knocking jump rails with hind legs
- Bucking on landing after a jump
- Difficulty striking off into canter

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LIFE AFTER RACING

Keeping score

From an almost Melbourne Cup contender to training for dressage – the leap is not as far as you might think, writes **AMANDA MAC**.

In 2021, Future Score, a Matt Cumani trained stayer, was scratched from the Melbourne Cup field after failing to pass his race morning vet check. The last minute scratching was a disappointment for owners and trainer alike, but the welfare of the horse, a nine-year-old imported Irish Thoroughbred gelding by Cape Cross out of Theola, had to come first.

Meanwhile, Emma Turnbull, who is a partner in a specialist criminal defence law firm with offices in Melbourne and Ballarat, was keeping a very interested eye on the horse. “A barrister friend invited me to join his racing syndicate and it just so happened that Future was the first horse to be purchased in the syndicate when I became involved. From

the very first moment I saw him, I knew he would make a magnificent show horse and hopefully a dressage horse. He's so well put together and he's a really lovely person. Everyone loves him!”

Not one to let a potential opportunity slip by, Emma told Matt that if Future was ever to retire sound, she'd gladly give him a home.

With plenty of experience in the saddle, Emma had begun riding when she was eight years old and didn't stop until her first year practising law when career priorities took over.

But some eight years ago, Emma returned to the sport she loves with Zephyr, a kindly Friesian Warmblood schoolmaster, and competed at Horse Riding Clubs Association of Victoria (HRCAV) events. “I did a little bit of everything with him. I've ultimately settled on dressage, so now I just do that as well as some showing. I am hopeful that Future will be the show horse I've been waiting for.”

Another of Emma's four-footed favourites is LP Lucky (Bubbles) a Welsh Cob pony. It was in partnership with Bubbles that Emma was awarded the 2022 Amateur Owner Rider (AOR) of the Year, having won the AOR Preliminary, Novice, and Open Novice Championships at the 2021 and 2022 Dressage Festivals. Bubbles also won the 6-Year-Old Dressage Pony Championships at the 2022 Victoria Dressage Festival and went on to win the national championship at 2023's Dressage & Jumping With The Stars, with Emma's coach Karen Blythe in the saddle.

And then of course, there's Future Score. Over his impressive Australian track career, he earned \$742,706 with 31 starts for six wins, one of which was the 2020 Cranbourne Cup. His race form includes a 3rd placing in the 2022 Adelaide Cup and 4th in the Sydney Cup that same year. Based at the Cumani Racing stables in Ballarat, Future was a consistent stayer who always ran his



ABOVE: Ready for new beginnings, Future with Emma (left), Elisha Hassan and Matt Cumani. **FACING PAGE:** From the first time Emma saw Future, she knew he would make a magnificent show horse and hopefully a dressage horse (Image courtesy Cumani Racing).

heart out. But with a hairline foreleg fracture that had been surgically reinforced, there was concern that the problem may become acute if he continued to race, so the decision was made to retire him from the track. But for Emma, that wasn't a problem. “When I said I'd take him on if he retired sound,

“ He's the loveliest horse, he's learning and he tries so hard, which was his attitude as a racehorse ... he really wants to do the right thing. ”

I'm not talking about racing sound, I'm talking about riding sound, and they're two entirely different propositions.”

So, in February this year she drove to the Cumani yard to collect Future. “I've got some photos from that day and it was pretty funny. Future had been on box rest since retiring and Matt led

him out in this hideous plastic halter,” Emma laughs. “The racing world is more practical than the equestrian world where we're all a bit matchy matchy. I was like, oh, no, we'll take that off and put this sheepskin halter on, and I think it was then that Future decided this was a life he could take!”

Next on the agenda were several months off so Future could let down. “It's the fair thing to do,” Emma says. “They've got to get all that grain out of their system and just learn to be a horse. Then he went to Cath Sfregola's, one of Racing Victoria's accredited retrainers. I knew Cath from the HRCAV scene, and had great respect for the way she deals with horses. She has a kind, soft, holistic approach, which is evident in all her training methods.”

And it was fortunate that Emma had become good friends with Elisha Hassan, a Cumani trackwork rider and strapper who was fond of Future and knew him well. Although otherwise beautifully behaved on the ground, one of the big issues Emma had with Future was that she could not get him near a mounting block. “I have Elisha on speed

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dial and anytime anything happened, I immediately contacted her. I explained the problem, and she was like, 'Yeah, that's right. You just do a flying leap like a jockey and off you go'. Well, this body doesn't flying leap! But Cath did the most beautiful job with him and now he'll stand at the mounting block with the loosest rein while you hop on. It's so nice to see him learn those simple things."

And it's these training steps that Emma believes are vital. "Some people think you can just get an off the tracker and it's an easy transition to turn them into a hack. But there's a lot of horsemanship required to change the way they think. Future's job as a racehorse was to run fast. Now he has to learn to think slow, and to learn that slow and steady is a good thing."

And Future's career is looking bright. "He's the loveliest horse, he's learning and he tries so hard, which was his attitude as a racehorse and he's still like that now. Cath's feedback was that he really wants to do the right thing. And he's really clever. Although we're still in kindergarten, we're doing little things in training that perhaps in some ways are a little bit more advanced because he is so willing."

Emma has some ambitious goals in mind for Future, but she's in no hurry and wisely doesn't want to rush his education. "If he's ready next year, or in two years, it doesn't matter. I'm not in the business of producing horses to move on. I'm an owner rider, so it's a different focus. Whether he's nine or twelve, he'll do it when he's ready to do it and not before."

Included in her long-term plan is to compete with him in Racing Victoria and the HRCV's Off The Track events, with both dressage and the show ring in mind. "Racing Victoria have a great sponsorship program where they provide very generous prize money, saddle blankets, rugs, all sorts of bits and pieces, designed to help in training



TOP: Future Score getting acquainted with some of life's little luxuries.

ABOVE: Future earned nearly \$743,000 on the track (Image courtesy Cumani Racing).

and encourage and support riders to get off the trackers going out and competing. I'm hoping we'll be ready for the 2023 series, but we'll have to see because our left canter is still pretty dodgy," she laughs.

Also on her radar is the prestigious, and hotly contested, Garryowen showing class. "I think he's the perfect Garryowen horse. He's the size and

he's the type so yes, I'd love to do a Garryowen on him, but we're not putting any pressure on him at all."

Meanwhile, Future is living the life out in the paddock. He's got his friends all around him, knows which pockets he'll find a treat in, and is surrounded by humans he loves: "He really is such a lover," Emma chuckles, "he just wants to be your friend." 🐾



NUTRITION

Beware, spring is in the air

With a change of season on the way, there's every chance of increased levels of NSC in the grass.

LISA HOFSTETTER explains why that could be a problem.

If you have a horse that's prone to laminitis and you live in a warmer climate where the grass grows rapidly in spring, you might have noticed that that's when your horse's laminitis seems to get worse, or that the condition occurs more frequently. You may also

have noticed that horses and ponies prone to laminitis are also prone to being overweight.

The two often seem to go hand in hand. Just as the increased weight gain you have observed in your good-doer pony is likely due to the spring grass, so too

is the laminitis. To understand why, we need to look at what makes spring grass different, how it affects a horse's digestion, and how that affects the prevalence and severity of laminitis.

Laminitis refers to the separation of the hoof wall from the bone inside it (the pedal bone). In a healthy hoof, the hoof wall is attached to the pedal bone by connective tissue called lamellae. It is the failure of this connection that causes the pedal bone to rotate downwards. This is understandably very painful and is usually accompanied by inflammation. It is because of this inflammation that signs of laminitis can include excessive heat in the affected hoof and an elevated digital pulse. Additionally, laminitis can cause lameness. Once a horse has had laminitis, recovery is possible but the chance of it reoccurring becomes more likely. Although laminitis can be caused by a range of factors, this article will focus on the potential of a carbohydrate overload from spring grass and its effect on insulin.

Non-structural carbohydrates

Non-structural carbohydrates (NSC) are the carbohydrates in plants that do not contribute to the structure of the functioning plant. Examples of NSC include starches, fructans and simple sugars. Structural carbohydrates, as the name suggests, do contribute to the structure of the plant and include cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin. Although lignin is not very digestible, cellulose and hemicellulose help to promote a healthy microflora balance.

Grasses at different stages of growth have different quantities and types of carbohydrates. New growth, such as grass in spring time, is usually higher in NSC than in structural carbohydrates. Mature grasses, including those found in late summer, are generally higher in structural carbohydrates.

Microflora magic

Humans can only digest the NSC in plants, whereas horses can digest both types of plant carbohydrate. They are able to do this because of certain microorganisms in their digestive tract that do the digesting for them. Ideally, NSC are digested in the small intestine, while structural carbohydrates are digested in the large intestine in a chamber called the caecum. If there are more NSC than can be digested by the small intestine, what remains will be digested in the caecum and colon along with the structural carbohydrates. If this happens, the microflora balance can tip in favour of the microflora that specialise in digesting NSC, which may have serious consequences.

There are many different types of microflora in the equine large intestine, and each type has a specific diet. For example, some microflora might specialise in digesting structural carbohydrates such as cellulose. As long as there is plenty of cellulose, the microflora will continue to flourish and maintain a healthy number.



FACING PAGE: With spring comes the potential for an increased risk of laminitis. **ABOVE:** New growth, such as grass in spring time, is usually higher in NSC than structural carbohydrates.

There are also large intestine microflora, lactobacilli for example, that specialise in digesting NSC. It's perfectly normal for these bacteria to exist in a healthy large intestine. However, if there is an oversupply of NSC, especially a sudden one, it can cause a rapid growth of lactobacilli.

“If there are more NSC than can be digested by the small intestine, what remains will be digested in the caecum and colon along with the structural carbohydrates ... which may have serious consequences.”

This increase can be a problem in that lactobacilli produce lactic acid as a by-

product of digestion. If a large quantity of lactic acid is produced in a short time, it can alter the pH of the large intestine, making it more acidic. This shift in pH to a more acidic environment can cause some other species of microflora to die.

Acidosis

One consequence of killing off microflora is that it reduces diversity, which in turn decreases the nutrients that the horse can obtain from their feed. However, the most important consequence of the sudden death of significant numbers of large intestine microflora is the release of endotoxins. Endotoxins are usually perfectly harmless to the horse, because they are contained inside the microflora. It is when the microflora die and disintegrate that the toxins are released. Horses can usually deal with a little bit of endotoxin release at a time, after all, microflora aren't immune to death. But when there is a mass death event, such as one caused



Just as the increased weight gain you have observed in your good-doer pony is likely due to the spring grass, so too is laminitis.

by an environment that has suddenly become too acidic, the endotoxin release is too much for the horse to neutralise, resulting in a condition called acidosis, a potential trigger for laminitis.

The symptoms of acidosis can resemble those of colic. Additionally, a horse with acidosis usually has a reduced appetite and may develop gastrointestinal ulcers. However, the most relevant potential complication arising from acidosis is laminitis.

But this is not the only way spring grass can cause laminitis. It can also contribute to insulin resistance, yet another factor in the laminitis equation. Insulin resistance, which can develop as a result of feeds high in NSC, is quite complex - but where laminitis is concerned, it helps to know that insulin resistance results from a higher than normal amount of insulin in the bloodstream. Studies have shown that increased insulin levels in the blood can induce laminitis in

otherwise healthy horses. An increase in a horse's weight, when in excess, associated with the NSC in spring grass further increases the chances of insulin resistance and with it, the possibility of laminitis.

Decreasing the risk

Although it is important to decrease the risk of insulin resistance by maintaining your horse at a healthy weight, care should be taken when trying to trim down your obese horse, because the absence of feed entirely in the 'starvation' paddock can be another cause of acidosis. Horses need an almost constant supply of structural carbohydrates to maintain healthy microflora. Their saliva acts as an acid buffer for their stomach, which is constantly producing acid. Unlike Pavlov's dogs, horses don't salivate in response to the thought of food, they salivate in response to chewing. So, depriving them of food for extended periods not only risks acidosis in the hindgut, leading to laminitis, it can

also cause stomach ulcers from a build-up of non-neutralised stomach acid.

Managing their health

Although it can be challenging to manage your horse's nutritional health during spring, there are steps you can take to make sure spring grass is not an enemy. Your equine nutritionist can put you on the right track to maintaining your horse's weight, while preventing or reducing the incidence and severity of laminitis, and also avoiding acidosis. With their help, you can reduce the dangers of NSC during spring, safely slim down an overweight horse, all while maintaining your horse's gut flora at a healthy balance. 🐾

Leisa Hofstetter is an equine nutritionist offering ration analysis, designer diets and customised mineral supplements. She can be found at HofEquine, or send her an [email](mailto:leisa@hofequine.com).

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“ The idea of social license is that it is a negotiation tool that you have with the community, so when improving things you are giving people who may not understand your industry the chance to engage with you. ”

Karen Day

We speak to Karen Day
Head of Welfare for
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PRODUCT REVIEW

Formulated for feeding success

Dressage rider Zanna Northam swears by Jenquine feed products. We spoke to her to find out why she's such a fan.

Zanna Northam has ridden horses all her life. She has also enjoyed a 25-year career in television and film. “I was a successful Young Rider but for probably 17 years I really didn't have anything to do with horses because I was working in Europe. So when I came back to it, I

decided I wanted to make my hobby my work.” And as a born achiever, she succeeded!

At one time involved in Richmond TAFE's performance horse program, teaching all aspects of horse management, Zanna is now a FEI dressage rider and full-time coach.

She's also on the Dressage NSW committee, and runs the NSW High Performance Dressage program. A fine example of a rolling stone gathering no moss!

With a long-standing fascination in the the science behind horse nutrition, Zanna has, for the past six months, been feeding the Jenquine product range to her horses. “I use [all-4-feet](#), which is my base feed balancer pellet, as well as the [EzyMAG+](#) magnesium supplement, and [Bone Formula Forte](#), a fortified calcium supplement.”

Zanna is absolutely sold on the Jenquine range. “It's been a bit of a journey for me. I've always been someone who has been very driven by science-based evidence and best practice. From what I've observed through my work over the years, I've been frustrated to see how some people feed their horses. I have also been trying to get the very best for my horses and it just seemed that



PREVIOUS PAGE: Zanna with Warmblood Tyger by Totilas.

ABOVE: Bethany Lawson-Ho and the magnificent Electra, who's thriving on Jenquine's all-4-feet.

these products were able to give me everything I was looking for."

One of Zanna's main concerns is the sheer quantity of some products that have to be fed for the horse to get the nutrition they need. "Sometimes it's between four to six kilos for a horse in full time work. And if you think about that, it's hugely difficult to get everything that they need without completely blowing their minds!"

Having seen how horses are fed in Europe, Zanna decided to apply the same principles to her own competition horses, all of which are in full time work. "A major issue for dressage horses are repetitive strain injuries. When you consider the strain on their muscles and joints, if you're not getting the amino acids and the protein levels right, they are going to be affected by that. But on the other hand, you can't have a horse that's overweight due to the amounts

of feed they've had to be given to get the nutrition they need, because then you have even more strain on those tendons and joints."

Zanna is particularly impressed with the expertise and science behind the creation of Jenquine products, as well as how nutritionally concentrated they are, allowing for much smaller rations while still meeting nutritional needs. "Because horses have small stomachs, I believe they need to be fed little and often, I have a regime in which my horses are fed probably around five times a day. But I give them very, very small feeds based on 300 grams of all-4-feet, plus supplements and a little bit of soybean meal, Speedi-beet and raw linseed oil. So, the feed in a pail is just over one centimetre deep. It's minute!"

Dr Jennifer Stewart BVSc BSc PhD, the driving force behind Jenquine products, is a vet with a special interest and

experience in horse nutrition, expertise that has been very beneficial for one particular Warmblood that Zanna is training. "This horse is particularly expressive, a very, very big moving horse. But I was always feeling that he lacked both energy and the ability to recover – he always felt fatigued. I know that my training methods are sound, so whatever I was feeding was clearly an issue for him. He was always a little bit light-on. We'd had him checked for ulcers and all that kind of thing, so it was becoming obvious that he wasn't feeding through to his muscles in a good way; he wasn't taking into his system the food I was providing, and therefore he wasn't recovering."

Knowing that horses need magnesium for muscle function, Zanna began to feed him the EzyMAG+ magnesium supplement as well as all-4-feet. "I noticed a considerable difference in his performance within a month," she says. "Particularly I think for this fellow, EzyMag+ has just been exceptional."

Another horse benefiting from Jenquine's all-4-feet is Electra, Zanna's very successful 17-year-old FEI mare, currently a schoolmaster for Young Rider Bethany Lawson-Ho. Electra thrives on the product. "It's been ridiculous," Zanna says, "she looks magnificent. A friend who has known her since she was three years old has told me that he has never seen her looking like that."

For Zanna, having confidence that she's providing her hard-working horses with scientifically backed, targeted nutrition is paramount. "I feel that very strongly. My horses do an incredible job, so knowing that I'm feeding them products that have been created by someone who is passionate, knowledgeable and expert in their field is a beautiful thing."

For more information, head over to Jenquine to browse their full range of products.



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levels. A showpiece honed-granite kitchen features cleverly designed storage, and a range of premium European appliances including a pyro oven, a Smeg cooker, and integrated Miele fridges and freezers.

Immaculate and spacious, the living areas comprise a formal lounge and dining room, a versatile office, and a

second living room with parquet floor. Wraparound verandas offer lush views of the home's picturesque gardens, lily pond, and a spring fed with water from the Blue Mountains. Four large bedrooms include a master retreat with restful views, beautifully appointed his and hers dressing rooms, and a stunning ensuite. A spa and swim jet pool take

the heat out of summer, while a wine cellar, double garaging, a mudroom with drive in ATV parking and motorcycle garage all feature internal access and comprehensive smart-device tech and security.

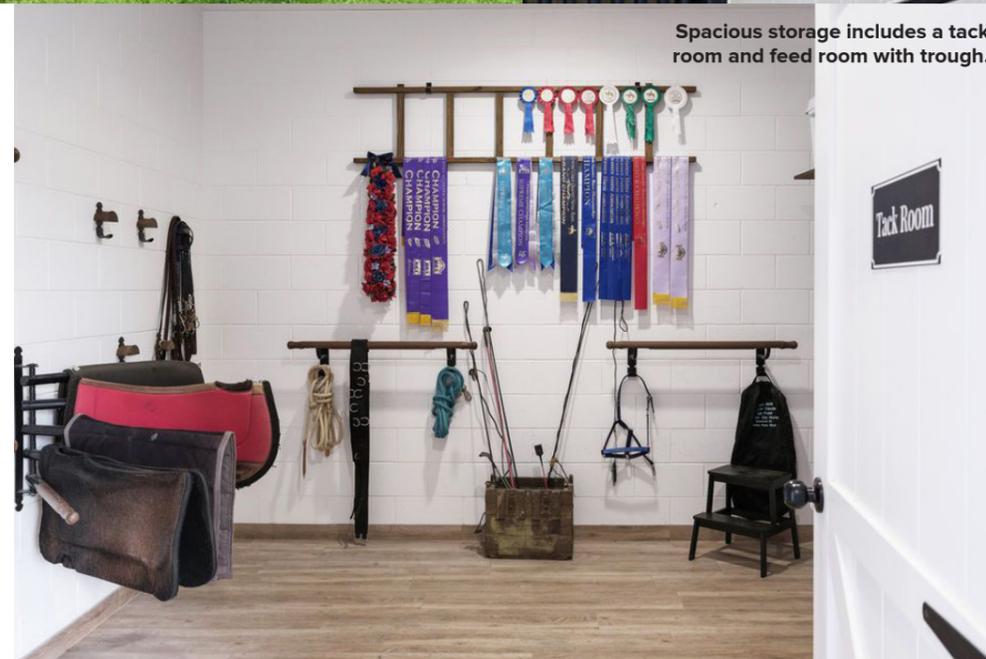
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Spacious storage includes a tack room and feed room with trough.

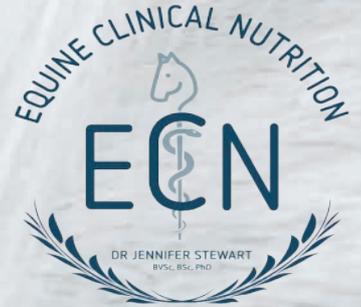


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