

MARCH 2024

EQUESTRIAN HUB zine



Tristan Tucker
The art of Zen

Nicole Tough
Talks double bridles

Windsucking
What's behind those
bad habits?

The athletic horse
Italian Government's
landmark ruling



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On the Cover
Tristan Tucker has gained international acclaim for the TRT Method (Image courtesy Tristan Tucker).



OUR CONTRIBUTORS



Amanda Mac

As *Equestrian Hub Magazine's* editor, Amanda's two long-standing passions, one for horses the other for writing, come together perfectly. Recently she had the pleasure of talking to Tristan Tucker (aka Brett Kidding) about his internationally recognised and very successful training program, and also with Amy Kennedy, who's been busy raising the bar for Standardbreds.



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. Thinking of introducing a double bridle? Then Nicole's article is a must read.

Amy Kennedy

Amy has ridden enough horses over the years to recognise her heart horse when he came along. A WA girl, she's worked in racing stables (currently she's the foreman at Rebecca Bayless Racing), and to date has rehomed just over 20 OTT Thoroughbreds. Fancying a change of pace, she bought OTT Standardbred Goandcollect, and the pair have been showing just how versatile the breed can be ever since.



David Nash

Director of Nutrition Technology at KER, David is an equine nutrition professional with many years' experience. He advises on feeding and managing horses across all disciplines, and has been instrumental in quality control, pasture research, and laboratory management and analysis. If you guesstimate how much you feed your horse, you won't want to miss David's article on the value of weighing feed.



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 best, and in our *Behind the Shot* feature, she shares her favourites and explains what makes them so special.



Tristan Tucker

To teach their horses how to be relaxed in all situations, over 56,000 horse owners from 74 countries have joined Tristan's online training program. An internationally recognised horseman, trainer, educator and Grand Prix dressage rider, who occasionally masquerades as the hilarious Brett Kidding, he has worked hard to accomplish all he has achieved – and it didn't happen overnight.

Dr Jennifer Stewart B.V.Sc., B.Sc., Ph.D.

With over 40 years' experience as a veterinarian in mixed and equine practice, Jennifer's special interest is equine nutrition. She was Senior Veterinary Officer with the Australian Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment for 10 years, and for two years was Biosecurity Veterinarian with the ACT Government. In this issue she discusses windsucking and cribbing, and suggests some helpful strategies.



Dr Caroline Spelta B.V.Sc. (Hons), MANZCVS, DECEIM

Caroline specialises in equine medicine. Boarded with the European College of Equine Internal Medicine and a Member of the ANZCVS, she has extensive expertise in Australasian equine internal medicine and toxicology, with special interests in ophthalmology, neonatology, and intensive care. In this issue, she discusses the skin problems that often plague horses in hot, humid weather.



BEHIND THE SHOT

Edwina Tops-Alexander

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.

Rider: Edwina Tops-Alexander (AUS)

Horse: Casquell

Event: 2019 Longines Global Champions Tour

Location: Stadio dei Marmi, Rome, Italy

Camera & Settings: Canon 7D Mk II 70-200mm Lens ISO 400 f 2.8 1/1000 sec

Challenges: This photo of Edwina and Casquell, coming right at me down the barrel of the lens, actually eventuated because I was trying to capture some images of the show jumpers competing with the Olympic

Stadium in the background. The sun was low in the sky and to one side, and unfortunately, I could not access the perfect spot with the sun behind me because to do so meant I would have had to go into a restricted VIP area. The next best option was straight on. Sometimes this works really well, especially if the horse is jumping an oxer which in this case he was. I do have some shadow in the image, which is not always ideal, but it does not detract in this image. While I was trying to capture the stadium I also captured one of the beautiful stone sculptures in the background, which in the end looked far more impressive than the stadium! When editing it afterwards I found I preferred the image in black and white as it highlights the marble statue more than when it's in colour.

Why this shot is special: In this photo, I feel as if Edwina is looking straight at me. Her focus and direction are captured right between Casquell's ears. At the time, the pair were competing for the St Tropez Pirates in the LGCT League. The shot is also special to me because I had the opportunity to meet and speak with Edwina who was very generous with her time. I have much admiration for her, her talent, and her love of the sport. It was also one of the most wonderful events, which I absolutely thoroughly enjoyed attending. Held in Rome in the spectacular Stadio dei Marmi, one of four stadiums in the colossal sports complex, dei Marmi is encircled with 60 four meter tall classical statues of athletes, all made from beautiful Carrara marble. I feel this image captures some of the sheer beauty and opulence of the stadium, as well as of the prestige of the competition. 🐾

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



HANGING TOUGH

Introducing the double bridle

It takes considerable skill to use a double bridle effectively. **NICOLE TOUGH** explains why.

Dressage riders are permitted the option of riding with a double bridle from medium level upwards. This doesn't mean you should graduate to the double bridle as soon as you start competing at medium level, and it certainly shouldn't be the reason to enter a medium level test.

You should never go to a double bridle to fix or address a contact issue. Any contact issue is only exaggerated in the double bridle. If the horse is evading or resisting the contact in a snaffle, they are not going to miraculously accept the double. Added to this, the simple cavesson noseband on a double bridle cannot deter a horse from opening or

crossing their jaw, or evading contact by using their tongue.

Graduating to the double bridle is a serious step, and should be something you undertake with a clear understanding of the function of the individual pieces, and with the help of a trainer. Ideally, you should be able to feel how the snaffle and curb rein have different effects in the horse's mouth. When introduced at the right time and when used correctly, the double bridle is designed to refine communication at the advanced and higher levels. It should not be used for control or to fix issues.

The double bridle is made up of two bits: the Bradoon and the Weymouth, often referred to as the snaffle and the curb. There are many different types of both these bits and many different anatomical mouths to work with, so some trial and error is needed to find the right fit.

When riding with a double bridle, you should predominantly use the snaffle, with any curb pressure applied only



ABOVE LEFT: It takes skill to use a double bridle. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Practising with four reins in the snaffle bridle (Image by EK Photography). **LEFT:** Using a dominant snaffle rein with relaxed tension on the curb (Image by Christy Baker Photography).

intermittently and for a reason, never out of a habit or because it was an accident. The four reins of the double bridle need to be managed well, so as not to cause irreparable damage to the mouth or undermine the horse's confidence. This management requires practise and should be undertaken when you have eyes on the ground to ensure good habits are learnt from the get go. If a horse is performing well in the double bridle, a high degree of skill, good training and competence is being shown.

Fitting wise, the curb is attached a little lower in the mouth, where the horse's jaw is narrower, and so should be 0.5 - 1.0cm smaller than the snaffle. Functionally, a tighter curb chain will reduce the leverage of the curb bit, but will put more pressure on the horse's lower jaw. Importantly, the curb should never be used to achieve or improve lateral flexion from the poll joint. If a rider attempts to use the curb for this purpose, the horse will very likely tilt at the poll and/or drop their chin towards


their chest, and will quite possibly open their mouth to avoid discomfort.

As a coach, my pre-requisites before introducing a student to the double bridle, are that the rider should be well on the way to having an independent seat, the horse should be willing and able to carry their weight on the hind legs in self-carriage, and should be working confidently through their back in the snaffle bridle.

At this point, a good way to introduce a double bridle is to connect a second rein to a snaffle bridle, giving the student the opportunity to practise organising four reins with just the snaffle bit. Then if they accidentally tighten the 'curb' rein, or stay on it for too long, they don't interrupt their horse's way of going or cause any confidence issues. They can practise shortening the snaffle rein without shortening the curb rein; and learn to tighten and loosen the curb rein as required. When they can do this mid-movement in walk, trot and canter, they are ready for the double bridle.

To ensure that the horse doesn't associate it with pressure, the first few rides in a double bridle should be easy sessions, even a trail ride.

As a horse develops correctly more and more gears are implemented, culminating at Grand Prix level with seven gears in trot and five gears in canter. When used properly, a double bridle can help the rider manage all the power and energy of these increased gears. This results in a more pleasurable experience for the rider and a more sustainable use of the horse's body.

It takes considerable skill to use a double bridle effectively and to teach the horse how they should respond to the curb bit. The onus is on us to improve our skill level so we can use the reins and bits separately. And if we are not yet proficient in the use of a double bridle, we should not be using one to pilot our horses through the highest movements of an FEI test just because we want to ride the tricks. 



FEATURE

Tristan Tucker and the art of Zen

Tristan Tucker has an enviable way with horses. But it's not an ability that developed overnight, it evolved over many years. **AMANDA MAC** investigates.

Other than perhaps the occasional quizzical glance in his direction, the horses that Tristan Tucker works with remain cool and composed as he cracks whips, waves umbrellas, and unfurls flags over and around them. So, what is it about Tristan's method that lulls his protégés into this calm, Zen-like state?

Now an internationally recognised horseman, trainer, educator and Grand Prix dressage rider, who occasionally masquerades as the hilarious Brett Kidding, he has worked hard to accomplish all he has achieved – and it certainly didn't happen overnight.

Born in Cornwall in the UK, his parents emigrated to Australia just before Tristan's first birthday. The family settled in Melbourne where his mother, who loved horses, worked in a racing stable. Growing up around horses as he did, he was desperate for a pony of his own, and his parents were happy to oblige.

However, Tristan also loved motorbikes: "I'd started at Mentone Pony Club and was eventing and jumping with the pony and racing bikes every other weekend, which became an expensive exercise for my parents," he explains. Inevitably, crunch time came and he was asked to choose between the two sports, and, since he'd crashed his bike a few weeks earlier, he opted for horses!

Fast forward a few years and Tristan was lucky enough to meet a visiting Danish trainer who helped him improve his dressage, which had become his discipline of choice. At the time, he was also riding track work, driving trotting

ABOVE LEFT: Tristan's alter ego Brett Kidding. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The TRT method has evolved over many years.

LEFT: Tristan believes that it's our responsibility to give horses the skills they need to thrive in our environment.

horses, and retraining off the track Thoroughbreds, all of which honed his horsemanship skills. "I was exposed to a lot of different types and breeds, and everything sort of grew from there," he tells me.

But like many parents, Tristan's were keen for him to get a degree. So, he went to university and completed a finance and a visual arts degree while continuing to work with horses. With the degree box ticked, in late 1999 Tristan travelled to Europe (the first of many trips) with Morten Thompson, his longtime mentor and dressage coach.

While Tristan learned a lot from his teachers in Europe, he also had very good mentors at home in Australia. "I was riding for Heatherton Park, owned by Jim and Emmie Schmul, who were great mentors not only in horses, competing, and making a name for myself, but also in business and life in general."

Their business mentorship certainly came in handy. After buying a property some 60 kilometres from Melbourne's CBD, Tristan had launched his own brand and business and was starting up to 100 horses a year. It was a busy and successful time, but he had begun to feel isolated. "I realised that if I wanted to expand my knowledge and experience, then Europe was the place to be."

His decision made, he relocated to The Netherlands, which became home to his TRT Equestrian brand and later, in collaboration with his business partner, to the TRT Method. But, as Tristan points out, that method had been developing from the first contact he'd ever had with a horse. "And it's still evolving," he adds.

Delivered online, the TRT Method has attracted 56,000 members from 74 countries, and the success stories are truly remarkable. But obviously, Tristan's isn't the only training program available,

so what's his point of difference? "That comes from my influences and where my focus has been," he explains, "and that's to build a self-management system that gives the horse the skills to know what to do with themselves in all the situations within our human world, which are, of course, not the skills they're born with. So, we're not teaching people how to control their horses, we're teaching people how to teach their horses to be in control of themselves."

The TRT Method slogan is 'to create a life for horses better than nature intended', a philosophy that underpins Tristan's unique approach. "Because we bring horses into our environment, it's our responsibility to equip them. It's our job to give them the skills so that there are less moments of insecurity and uncertainty; so that they're able to thrive through the knowledge and understanding of how to manage themselves in the presence of



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ABOVE: Teaching the horse so that they can be in control of their own physical and mental soundness underpins the TRT Method (All images courtesy of Tristan Tucker).

everything they're presented with in a life with humans."

Among the many horses he's worked with, Tristan says he hasn't found one yet that he wasn't able to shift from 'survival mode' into a place in which they felt comfortable, relaxed and happy in their own skin. Ironically, it's a horse's human that sometimes presents more of a challenge! "It's difficult when the owner isn't prepared to let go of their preconceived ideas of what they want for that horse. But not all horses are suited physically or mentally, or have had the life experience to make it easy for them to perform in a particular discipline. However, it's for sure possible for every horse to get to the stage where they find a place of comfort and ease."

While Tristan is very serious indeed when it comes to being the best mentor he can be for the horses he meets, he gives his wicked sense of humour free rein when he steps into the skin of Brett Kidding – and if you haven't already been entertained by [Brett's antics](#) in the dressage arena, now's the time!

Brett came about after Tristan had spent a very cold winter in Germany, attempting

to convince the German Equestrian Federation that his philosophy might enhance the lives of horses operating within the traditional aspects of the sport.


Increasingly frustrated in his efforts, he had a call from Carl Hester and Richard Davison, who were running The Dressage Convention in the UK, asking him to come and give a demonstration, assuring him that whatever he wanted to do would be OK with them. Wanting a contrast to the seriousness of his months in Germany, he decided to showcase what the TRT Method could achieve in a comical way.

With that in mind, Tristan settled on the persona of John Notaclue, an Englishman with few horsemanship skills. But concerned that it wouldn't go down well with a largely English audience, Carl and John advised him to present the skit as an Aussie. "Richard was wondering what a recognisably Aussie name might be. Carl suggested Brett, Richard said 'You're kidding, aren't you?', and Carl said 'That's it! Brett Kidding'." Tristan laughs at the memory.

Tristan had a few points to prove as his alter ego. "Brett's the guy who's

not giving much support to his horse at all, and yet the horse is still able to go through Grand Prix and perform all the movements happily under their own responsibility and motivation. I wanted to show that your horse can be in control of their own physical and mental soundness, and that if we teach them what the job is, then they're able to actually do it."

He was also determined to address some of the less positive aspects of the sport. "There's pressure around what we should be doing in the ring and how we should be presenting ourselves in order to become successful dressage riders, which in turn creates unnecessary pressure on the horse - and that can ruin the experience for them as well as for ourselves. So I wanted to make some cracks in that culture, to bring some humour and some self-reflection, and to allow people to laugh at themselves by laughing at me."

Could it be that by creating empowered, relaxed horses, Tristan's TRT Method also creates confident and happy riders? Something Zen for you to ponder. 

Visit the [TRT Method](#) to learn more about their range of courses.



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IN THE NEWS

Italy leads the way

In a landmark decision, the Italian Government has passed a Legislative Decree conferring legal recognition of the role of the horse as an athlete.

The Italians, it would seem, take their sport very seriously indeed. In September last year, the Italian parliament passed a reform to include sport in the Italian Constitution, citing the 'educational and social value of sport, in all its forms ... and recognising all those who operate and work in the world of sport'.

And now that same acknowledgement has been extended to horses. Following *The Horse Athlete: Protections and Prospects* conference held in Italy earlier this year and organised by the Italian Equestrian Federation (FISE) under the patronage of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI), a Legislative Decree has been passed 'conferring legal

recognition of the role of the horse as an athlete, alongside the women and men who partner them in competition'.

The President of the Italian Equestrian Sports Federation, and the Federation's Secretary General (also acting for the European Equestrian Federation) headed the conference, which was attended by representatives from the FEI, the Italian Ministry of Health, numerous legal experts, and Director of the International Jumping Riders Club (IJRC) Eleonora Ottaviani.

In a speech given by Ottaviani, she noted that the legislation "provides the opportunity to finally recognise the horse as subject, and no longer object, in our sport. The well-being and welfare of horses has long been an area of mutual collaboration between the IJRC and the FEI ... [and now] ... for the first time, the words 'athletic horse' or 'athlete horse' have become a legal term."

Specific requirements must be met in order for a horse to be defined as an athlete horse. They must be:

- Registered in the equine directory
- Declared as not intended for food production
- Registered in the directory of athlete horses kept by the FISE as shown in the identification document.

A spokesperson for the FISE, the organisation responsible for requesting the landmark decision, commented on Italy's pioneering stand in the legal recognition of horses as athletes: "Italy, with FISE at the forefront, is therefore a world leader for equine welfare, in particular regarding 'athlete horses' involved in equestrian sports. This is an historic decision by the Italian government."

The legislation may well have a flow on effect when it becomes the benchmark for other legal developments in areas such as horse transport and veterinary controls at both a national and EU level. 🐾

ABOVE: Italy's Arianna Schivo riding Quefira de L'Ormeau at the 2020 FEI Eventing Nations Cup (Image © FEI/ Massimo Argenziano).



VET VIBES

Rain, humidity and skin health

Rain, heat and humidity – the perfect storm when it comes to horses and skin conditions. **Dr CAROLINE SPELTA** looks at some common problems.

Along with the wet, hot, humid weather many parts of Australia have been experiencing in the past few months, comes the potential for problems with our horses' skin health. Some of the ailments these environmental conditions favour are contagious, others are not, but as with

any health condition, they all need to be taken seriously and treated appropriately.

Rain scald

Dematophilosis, more commonly known as rain scald, is the skin infection caused by *Dermatophilus congolensis*, a bacteria that is in its element in warm,

wet conditions. The infection earned the label rain scald due to its appearance, which is similar to the way horses' coats look after they've been out in the rain. The infection even spreads in much the same pattern as water runoff on a horse's coat.

The classic rain scald lesions show up as scabbing and crusting of the hair into clumps a few millimetres above the skin. Commonly found over the back and rump (where water doesn't drain away as easily) it can also affect the neck and extend down the legs and flanks.

Diagnosis: A diagnosis is based on the appearance of the skin lesions, which is then confirmed with impression smears of the underside of the scabs. The moist, dark environment under the scab is where the bacteria is living, and although the infection can appear on more than one horse at the same time, it is not considered to be truly contagious. Rather, it's just that all the horses in that geographical area are likely to be experiencing the same environmental conditions, which are, of course, detrimental to the health of their skin.

Treatment: Treatment involves the removal of the scabs followed by the application of a medicated shampoo. Sometimes this is easier said than done, because even the very gentle removal of the scabs with a soft grooming brush can be painful for the horse. Nonetheless, all the scabs need to be taken off. If some remain, the infection will continue to reoccur. If scab removal is difficult and painful for your horse, please talk to your veterinarian about pain relief options.

A medicated shampoo that contains chlorhexidine +/- miconazole works well to remove the infection. Other options are iodine-based rinses, but they can be drying on thin coated horses. Systemic antibiotics are very rarely ever needed, and usually only in immunocompromised foals.

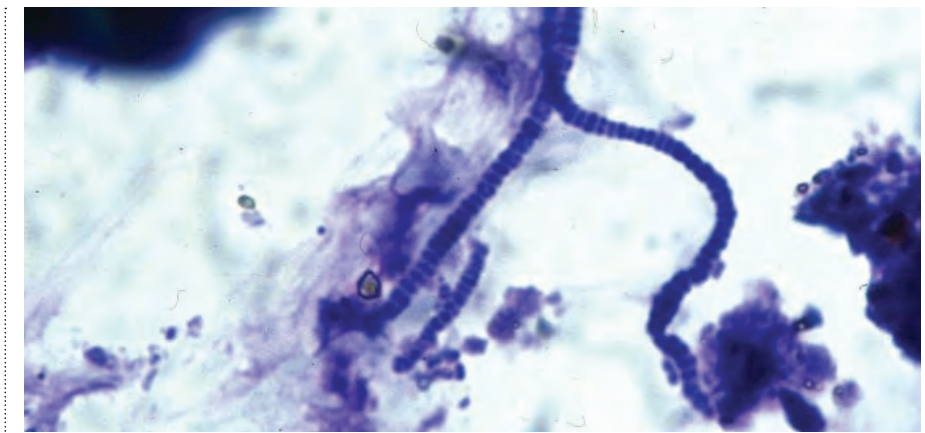
Ringworm

Another skin condition, which is often confused with rain scald, is Dermatophytosis (ringworm). However, there is a significant point of difference in that ringworm, unlike rain scald, is contagious. It can be spread between horses through grooming tools, tack, and their handlers. Humans can also contract the infection from their horses.

The infection is usually self-limiting but can be a more serious issue in horses that are stressed, undernourished or immunocompromised.

Symptoms: The lesion presents as the classic ever-expanding ring of inflammation. The infection heals from the centre of the ring out, so large rings can have normal hair growth in the middle of them. They can appear anywhere on the skin, but most commonly in areas where the infection first occurred, for example under the girth if contaminated tack was the source.

The incubation period (the time from initial infection to showing clinical signs) is several weeks. This makes controlling an outbreak difficult, because by the time the first signs of infection have appeared, it's very likely that other horses will have been infected.



ABOVE: *Dermatophilus congolensis*, the bacteria that causes rain scald.

BELOW: Rain scald commonly occurs over the back and rump (Images courtesy APIAM).

Treatment: The infection usually resolves on its own within one to six months. However, it should be treated to prevent other horses and staff becoming infected. A twice weekly medicated anti-fungal shampoo or rinse is recommended. If you are unsure of the best products to use, ask your veterinarian for advice.


Staphylococcal Pyoderma

Staphylococcal pyoderma is the other common bacterial skin disease in horses and causes a superficial pyoderma (pyoderma refers to skin infections that can manifest as spots and bald patches). The *Staphylococcal* infection can have a rosette appearance which is easily confused with ringworm, or it can appear as areas of pustules and crusting similar to rain scald.

Staphylococcal infections tend to be itchier than either rain scald or ring worm infections. Infections can be found anywhere on the horse but are commonly found on the legs, especially the pasterns. *Staphylococcus spp.* is

a common normal skin bacteria on horses. Infection occurs in hot humid environments when there is a break in the skin – either from fly bites; soft, macerated skin (water related skin damage) on the legs caused by standing for long periods of time in dams; or from other scratches or minor injuries. Although it is not common, the infection can become a cellulitis resulting in a systemically ill horse with a swollen, painful leg.

Diagnosis: Staphylococcal infections are not contagious. Confirmation of the infection is based on cytology of the crusts and pustules, and culture and sensitivity results.

Treatment: Treatment is with medicated shampoos combined with removal of the scabs. However, systemic antibiotics are often needed to affect a cure, so a consultation with your veterinarian will be necessary. 

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FEATURE

Those unwanted habits

Why do horses windsuck and crib? **DR JENNIFER STEWART** explains what's going on and suggests some strategies to help with the problem.

There's something special about the horse-human connection that makes horses strong contenders for the 'man's best friend' title normally associated with dogs. Domesticated some 5,000 years ago, horses have held a place in our hearts ever since, but before domestication their lives were very different.

Wild horses roamed free in stable social groups, travelling up to 80km over their

home range and taking more than 10,000 strides a day. In this natural environment, horses spent 16 to 20 hours a day grazing, and social relationships were reinforced by mutual grooming, food sharing, following behaviour, rest and play. Management of domesticated horses is very different: twice daily meals of high-energy concentrates and relatively little forage, plus housing conditions that limit social interactions.

Stereotypies (also called stall or stable vices) are 'persistent repetitive behaviours that have no obvious goal or function'. Weaving, pawing, box walking, box circling, box kicking, tail-swishing and head tossing/nodding are examples of locomotor stereotypies. Oral stereotypies include tongue flicking, wriggling and rolling; teeth rubbing and grinding; lip licking and lip smacking; licking objects; sham chewing; self-biting; crib-biting, and, the most common, windsucking.

A horse who is crib-biting grasps a fixed object with their front teeth, arches their neck, pulls back and makes a grunting noise, seeming to 'swallow' air. When a horse doesn't need to grasp an object to do this, it's called windsucking. Horses may or may not draw air into the upper oesophagus, but x-rays show that the noise is a 'burp' and that air is rarely swallowed. Because of their similarities the two behaviours are often classed together.

Evidence suggests horses have been crib-biting and windsucking since their domestication. Between 15-37% of

domestic horses develop oral stereotypies and over 8% engage in crib-biting/windsucking, which can occupy from 15 to 65% of their day. The behaviour, not seen in free-ranging horses, develops due to how we keep domesticated horses. It's a problem we've created and therefore it really shouldn't be referred to as a vice.

Proposed causes of cribbing range from boredom, lack of free exercise, lack of social connection, stress, digestive discomfort, and an equine version of obsessive-compulsive disorder, to the presence of ulcers, a genetic predisposition for chronic stress, a desire to nibble, and a meal fed diet.

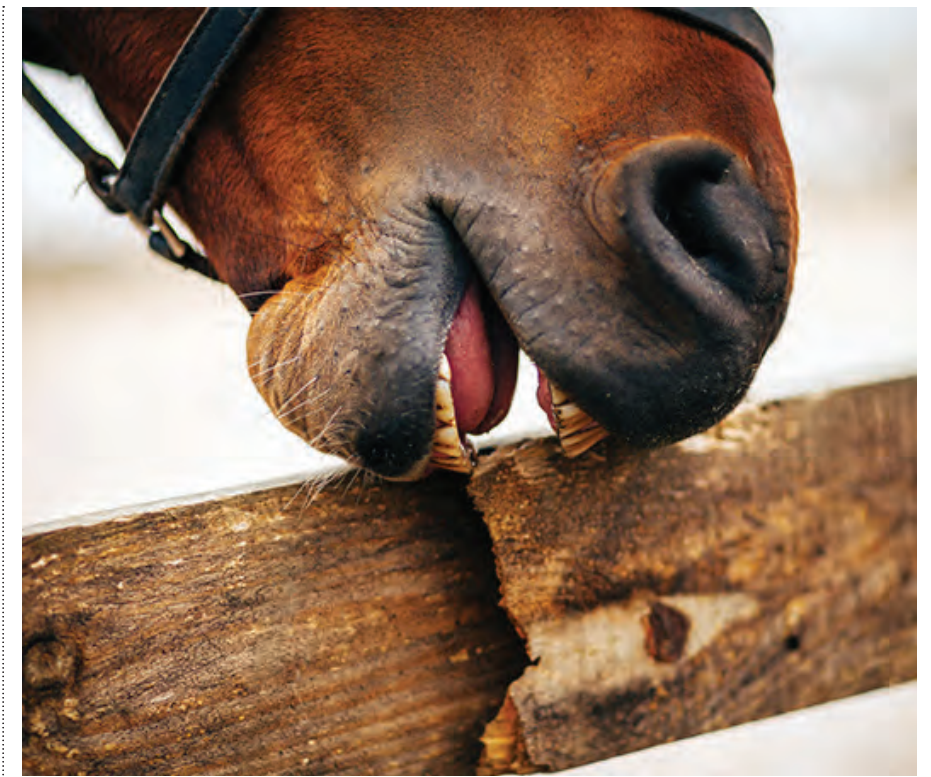
Crucial in the development of wind-sucking and other oral stereotypies are feeding practices, housing/stabling conditions, weaning method, social contact, meal frequency and diets low in forage. Furthermore, certain breeds and disciplines are more susceptible to stereotypy: Thoroughbreds 3.1 times; Warmbloods are 1.8 times more likely to windsuck/crib; while 32.5% of dressage horses, 31% of eventers, and 19.5% of endurance horses practice the behaviours.

So, broadly speaking, stereotypic behaviours can develop when horses are deprived of carrying out patterns of behaviour that they are intrinsically motivated to perform, such as when they cannot avoid a stressful situation, cannot exercise or graze, or when they're prevented from social contact.

Although crib biting/windsucking is found in horses spending a lot of time stabled, once established, they may exhibit these behaviours in other places. It can be quite disturbing to watch, especially for the first time. But why exactly do they do it? Is it harmful? Can it be treated? Can it be prevented?

Why they do it

The psychological need for foraging, roaming and social contact, combined with frustration, stress and modern diets, are the most likely causes in the development



ABOVE: Cribbing and windsucking are often a symptom of another problem.

of stereotypies. Standard meal feeding and starch/sugary feeds cause a higher than normal release of stomach acid creating alimentary stress (stomach ulcers, hindgut acidosis), a source of discomfort and pain. Windsucking and cribbing increase saliva production and over 62% of affected horses exhibit the behaviour 2–8 hours after a meal. It's thought this is an attempt to buffer the stomach and counteract gastric pain and acidosis. Antacids to modulate acid production reduce cribbing/windsucking in some horses. Increasing meal frequency can also reduce the behaviour, likely due to the increased time spent feeding and increased saliva production.

Stress and dopamine endorphins: Cribbing/wind-sucking are thought to be coping strategies as afflicted horses have increased sensitivity to touch and stress, and decreased behavioural flexibility. Windsucking apparently creates a pleasurable sensation, releasing brain endorphins (the body's natural opiate). Injecting morphine-blocking drugs reduces windsucking in some horses, because, it's thought, they no longer gain

the pleasurable feeling from the activity and stop.

Alterations in brain dopamine levels are also found in windsuckers. Stressors such as social isolation are commonly associated with stereotypy development, which induce significant alterations to dopamine function. If the horse's environment prevents them from attaining goals (movement, socialising, feeding), they stay in a heightened state of goal-attainment. Temporary elimination of crib-biting has been reported with naloxone, nalmefene or diprenorphine (used to treat alcohol and drug addictions in humans). These work in the brain to reduce the goal-attainment state, and when continuously infused for one week, no cribbing was observed. However, the behaviour returns when the drug is stopped.

Dopamine, a hormone that helps control pleasure and reward centres in the brain, is released during windsucking and affected horses have significantly more dopamine receptors in the part of the brain that controls goal-directed behaviours. Research into an area in the brain that deals with habit forming and the

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body's reward centre, shows remarkable similarities to people with autism. This goes some way towards explaining why these horses find the action of cribbing/wind-sucking satisfying compared to a normal horse. Other studies found reduced blood selenium levels – an important anti-oxidant.

Is it harmful?

Yes - windsucking/cribbing can be harmful. Health risks include:

- damage to teeth
- overdeveloped neck muscles
- arthritis in the bones behind the throat
- reduced appetite and weight loss
- high incidence of ulcers: these may be the cause rather than the result - cribbers should be managed as an ulcer-prone, colic-prone horse
- double the risk of medical and surgical colics – not because the behaviour causes colic but because horses with colic are commonly fed less frequently, with less hay and more grain. This supports the theory that cribbing/windsucking is associated with gut discomfort and underlying gastrointestinal dysfunction.

Can it be treated?

There are behavioural, mechanical and surgical controls for cribbing. Placing a snug leather strap around the throatlatch area may control the behaviour (care must be taken to avoid interference with airways). The strap allows the horse to eat but inhibits their ability to arch the neck and use their muscles to suck air.

More severe cribbing straps that include points and chains injure horses and rarely work; cribbing cages allow the horse to eat food but prevent them from grasping objects on which to crib. Cutting muscles and nerves in the throat/neck has a 70 to 80% success rate, but works best in younger horses who have been cribbing/windsucking for less than a year.

Horses with these behaviours are highly motivated to perform them, and will,

unless the cause is treated, continue to perform them at higher levels after intervention. If they are crib-biting to relieve discomfort or improve their digestion, preventing them from doing so may be harmful. When the habit is firmly ingrained, it is virtually impossible to stop without either mechanical or surgical means.

A special note on weaning

Weaning is important in the potential future development of stereotypies because it is the initiation point. Over 65% of windsuckers/cribbers develop the habit within a month of weaning, and 10.5% of weanlings show the behaviour by 20 weeks of age. Foals fed on starch/sugar, grain and grain by-product based hard feed have a four-fold increase of the incidence of cribbing, and a greater degree of stomach ulceration and inflammation. Stabling is also associated with increased risk compared with paddock and natural weaning where the mare is allowed to wean the foal.

Is it contagious?

Clinical studies have shown this is not a 'contagious' condition. If other horses in the same environment as the windsucker/cribber start to do this, it's a good indication that there's a problem with stable management. Additionally, the idea that there is a genetic component to stereotypies is unproven.


Can it be prevented?

There is no single solution for all horses, and a combination of treatments may need to be tried (see list on right). Changes to husbandry and management can decrease stress, cribbing and windsucking practices and the response is best when the habit has recently developed.

It's extremely difficult to stop cribbing in horses once they develop the behaviour. Many vets and behaviourists suggest it's actually cruel to try and do so. Cribbing is seen as a coping mechanism, so rather than prevention, it's better to identify the reason for it and implement the appropriate solution. Behavioural cues are often the earliest sign that something

STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION

- plenty of social contact or a companion such as a goat or small pony
- changing from a stall to a pasture or allow 4 hours pasture a day
- mirrors, chew toys and even a painting of a horse!
- always have forage in front of your horse
- diets suitable for laminitis or ulcer-prone horses - no cereals or molasses, low starch AND low sugar
- lucerne and unmolassed sugarbeet are good at neutralising stomach acid
- antacid supplementation may help some horses
- ensure adequate anti-oxidants – use a well-formulated diet balancer
- provide a mineral lick
- natural, gradual weaning
- avoid carbohydrate-based feeds (grains and by-products millrun, bran, pollard)
- increase feeding time with slow-feeder methods
- don't isolate - scientific evidence does not support that abnormal behaviors are learnt/copied by observation.
- use straw bedding
- drugs that alter dopamine transmission
- or without drugs through ad lib feeding, pasture access, socialisation and acupuncture which reduces dopamine activity in the brain and reduces crib-biting and wind-sucking in some horses
- oil-enriched and fibre-based diets result in calmer patterns of behavior

is not right. Cribbing and wind-sucking may be indicators of alimentary stress or some other problem, so it's important to find the cause. If you're worried about your horse and their health, always contact your vet. 

Dr Jennifer Stewart BVSc BSc PhD is an equine veterinarian, CEO of [Jenquine](#) and a consultant nutritionist in Equine Clinical Nutrition.

All content provided in this article is for general use and information only and does not constitute advice or a veterinary opinion. It is not intended as specific medical advice or opinion and should not be relied on in place of consultation with your equine veterinarian.



ABOVE: Amy and Ajay, Rookie Award winners and 12th in the Diamond Class at Equestrian in the Park 2023 (Image by Vickiphotos).
LEFT: Flying around 1.10 metres at the Swan River Championships (Image by Vickiphotos).

LIFE AFTER RACING

Raising the standard

Not often given the same share of the OTT spotlight as Thoroughbreds, it's time we celebrated the truly outstanding Standardbred, writes **AMANDA MAC**.

When you've found your heart horse, there's no denying – and for Amy Kennedy, there's not a shred of doubt in her mind. Partnered for the past five years by Standardbred off

the track Goandcollect (Ajay, to his friends), Amy says he's that very special, one in a million horse. "He's definitely my soul horse and I just I can't give him sufficient credit. He's amazing."

And it's not as though she hasn't ridden enough horses over the years that she wouldn't recognise The One when they come along!

Western Australian born and bred, Amy comes from a 50/50 horsey family: her mother loves everything about them, her father wasn't quite so much of a fan. After first learning to ride when she was around eight, Amy then decided to follow in her car-loving dad's footsteps and for a few years switched to racing cars as her sport of choice before returning full-time to her first love by her mid-teens.

A member of both the Albany and King River Pony Clubs, she tried out all the disciplines, rode in the odd show or two, but didn't begin competing in earnest until she had her driver's licence and could get herself and her horse to and from shows.

Over this period of time, Amy had been

working at a racing stable, and to date has also rehomed just over 20 off the track Thoroughbreds. But a change of pace was beginning to appeal. "Although Thoroughbreds are amazing horses, they can be quite hot," Amy explains, "and I wanted something of my own that I could just enjoy."

Deciding that a Standardbred might fit the bill quite nicely, she went along to the trots one night and began asking some of the trainers if they knew of a quiet horse who was looking for an off the track home. "I was pointed in the direction of Ian Mulchay, Ajay's trainer. Ian told me that Ajay was being retired in around two weeks, so I said I'd take him."

Over his five-year track career, Goandcollect (by Gotta Go Collect from the Parsons Den USA mare Keroshelle) had 66 starts with four wins, two seconds

and three thirds, earning \$26,065 by the time he retired in March 2019 as a nine-year-old.

There to watch Ajay's final race, Amy took him home the next day and began the journey of retraining the previously unbacked horse. "I broke him to saddle and he was super, he made it really easy. He paced but he soon came around to learning how to trot and canter. He was just so willing to learn."

Given her considerable experience with Thoroughbreds (she retrained her first when she was just 15 and is currently the foreman at Rebecca Bayless Racing), I'm interested to know if Amy noticed any real difference while working with Standardbred Ajay. "He had a better mind," she tells me, "but he took a while to get the hang of things, only because he had to work really hard to learn to canter

as obviously he wasn't bred for that. But he was more than willing to learn, I think he just wanted to please me."

Since those early days, Amy and Ajay have enjoyed considerable success: finishing on their dressage score at the 2020 Woorlooloo CCN, they placed sixth out of 34 in an Off the Track WA sponsored EvA 80 class, and, just 18 months after Ajay had retired from racing, they won the 80cm open class at the 2020 Dryandra ODE. The following year the pair debuted in the show ring, competing in the Standardbred Pleasure & Performance Horse Association of WA's (SPPHAWA) Dual Code Spectacular and State Championships, where they earned the 2020-21 Rising Star Award.

Last year, Amy and Ajay were selected as the SPPHAWA's sponsored combination, proving their value in promoting the breed


when in November they took on their biggest challenge to date by entering what is probably the premier event on WA's equestrian calendar: the prestigious and hotly contested Equestrian In The Park.

Held at Perth's magnificent Burswood Park, Ajay was the lone Standardbred among a field of quality entrants. But the 23 obstacle course, a mix of 1.05m fixed jumps and 1.25m brush fences, did nothing to deter Amy and Ajay, who finished 12th in the Diamond Class, taking out the Rookie Award in the process. A result that brought a tear to Amy's eye and one that was not at all shabby for a previously unbacked Standardbred only five years off the track!

Ajay is such a well-mannered gentleman that he has also successfully partnered with a much younger rider, the talented 15-year-old Mackenzie Wallrodt. The pair compete up to 90cm and have placed at every event they've entered.

Amy credits much of her own success to Les Bunning, her mentor and supporter of many years: "He's been a massive, massive help to me," she says. But she also has a keen eye for detail. "I love watching equestrian events at the Olympics, and all the show jumping on TV. I think you pick up a lot by watching how other people ride, by noticing their technique and then working out what might be a fit for you. I also do a lot of research, I still ask questions, and I did get a lot of help in our Pony Club too," she adds.

Of course, the other secret of Amy's success is Ajay: "He is honestly the best horse I've ever owned. He loves people, and you can take him anywhere; how he behaves at home is exactly how he behaves at a show. Nothing fazes him."

And as for Standardbreds in general, Amy believes they're a much-underrated breed: "Their work ethic and the way they want to please is just next to none. I think if you give them a chance, you might find a little bit of a diamond in the rough like I did with Ajay." 



ABOVE: State Champion Intermediate Hack at the 2021 SPPHAWA Standardbred State Championships (Image by Vickiphotos).

BELOW: Talented young rider Mackenzie Wallrodt and Ajay in the 2021 APC ODE (Image by SWB Photography).



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TOP: Determine feed amounts by weighing a scoop of each type of food in your horse's diet (Image courtesy KER).
LEFT: Know how much you are feeding your horse by weight, not by volume.

NUTRITION

How much do you feed your horse?

Equine nutritionists often ask owners how much they feed their horses - an important question, but the answers can sometimes be vague. **DAVID NASH** explains.

How many times have you been asked about your horse's ration and found yourself saying 'they get a scoop of this, a cup of that, and a pinch of this'? Although many owners describe their horses' diet in this way, there are significant disadvantages to measuring the

amount of your horse's feed in scoops rather than by weight.

Why weigh?

To determine dietary requirements, your horse's characteristics should first be considered. These characteristics include age, breed, workload,

metabolism, and weight. For example, for optimum digestive health each horse requires at least 1% of their body weight in forage every day, which would be at least 5kg for a 500kg horse.

If you have a horse who is restricted from pasture or has access to very little pasture and you are looking to substitute hay as a forage source, it is important to know how much hay they are receiving by weight (not biscuits) in order to establish whether it meets the 1% of body weight guideline.

When looking at fortified feeds, experienced equine nutritionists have formulated these in accordance with the characteristics of certain classes of horses, including their weight. Based on the formulations, they then recommend a minimum amount of the feed that each type of horse requires to meet their specific nutrient requirements.

Therefore, by weighing feeds you not only know exactly how much your

horse is getting daily, but also whether your horse is receiving a balanced diet and meeting their requirements for forage, as well as the nutrients that are important for achieving optimum health, development, and performance.

Weighing feed leads to peace of mind from knowing that you are meeting your horse's nutritional requirements, and by determining how much of each feed is needed, costs can often be reduced. For example, when a fortified feed is fed at the correct daily amount, the necessity for expensive vitamin and mineral supplements is decreased. If you find you are not feeding the correct amount of a specific fortified feed, I would suggest changing to one designed to deliver adequate nutrition at the rate that you are feeding.

Weight vs volume

In any given feed room, you are likely to come across a wide variety of measuring utensils. Open scoops, dippers, ice

cream containers, tins, jars, and bowls are commonly used to convey feed to the trough, and each may hold a different volume of feed.

Equine nutrition consultants often hear from horse owners that they use a 1.0kg scoop. Due to different feeds having different densities, the size of the scoop is hardly likely to be an accurate form of measurement when it comes to weight. Although a scoop of chaff has the same volume as a scoop of pellets or muesli (textured feed), the varying densities of these feeds means that their weigh is very different. For example, a two litre scoop of a pelleted feed may weigh up to 1.2kg, whereas that same scoop of lucerne chaff will weigh much less.

Weighting methods

Feeds can be weighed accurately and conveniently using common types of scales. A hook scale, like those used for weighing fish or luggage, can easily be used to weigh hay or haylage by

hanging the hay net or hay bag on the scale. If you're not using a net or bag, then a bundle of hay can be tied with twine and then hung from the scale.

Feeds can be weighed in a similar manner using an empty pail or bag as a receptacle to hang from the scale. Simply fill your scoop with feed or grain and empty it into the bag before hanging the bag on the scale. In this way, you can determine the weight of all feedstuffs in each of the scoops you normally use. Be sure to take into account the weight of the bag, pail, or net by weighing it first and subtracting that amount from the final reading, or if you're using electronic scales, make use of the tare function if one is available.

If a flat platform scale is your device of choice, then weighing feeds and cereals can easily be accomplished by using either a scoop or a pail. First, weigh your scoop or pail and make a note its weight (or press the tare button



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ABOVE: Hay can be weighed either on a platform scale or by suspending it from a hook scale (Image courtesy of KER).

on the scales if they are electronic). Then, fill the scoop with feed and weigh again or empty it into the pail already on the scale to weigh the contents. For electronic scales with a tare function, the weight displayed should be the weight of only the feed contained in the scoop or pail. For other scales, you may have to manually subtract the weight of the container from the combined weight of the feed and container.

In order to weigh hay on a platform scale, you may need a larger platform. A piece of rigid cardboard or wood may work well for this. Be sure to zero the scale or note the weight of the platform before placing the hay on it. Then, simply balance the portion of hay or haylage you wish to measure on the platform and note the weight displayed. Again, depending on whether or not the scale is electronic, the amount displayed will be the weight of the forage, or the forage and platform combined.

Hay and feed shouldn't require weighing each time you feed your horse. You can simply estimate how many sections


of hay your horse requires daily by calculating the average weight of a section from each batch of hay you get. Feed amounts can be determined by knowing the approximate weight of a scoop of each of the foodstuffs in your horse's diet.

Pasture intake

This is an interesting one, as determining pasture intake takes into account many variables, such as the size of the paddock, quality and quantity of pasture, the demeanour of horse, and the turnout time. If they have 24 hour free access to pasture, horses will generally graze for around 65% of the day and consume 2-3% of their bodyweight per day. Having said that, a study was done with ponies who were confined for all but three to four hours per day, and they consumed at rates similar to horses with free access. So, for horses with weight or metabolic issues it is wise to monitor their condition and change pasture turn out time accordingly, or to use a grazing muzzle to reduce intake. A general guide for

intake of pasture is 0.45-0.65kg of dry matter per hour for a mature horse.

By now it should be clear that weight and not volume is the key to knowing what we are feeding our horses. And, additional to a set of scales, we now have several quality nutrition tools (like [Microsteed](#)) that can help us calculate whether our horse's diet is balanced. Alternatively, you could have your horse's diet prepared by a qualified equine nutritionist, who will take into consideration and calculate everything your horse is consuming.

Using any of the methods suggested above will allow you to assess whether you need to feed more; or to change feed type; or in many cases, to reduce your horse's intake; or to cut certain supplements out of their diet so that you are not doubling up on nutrients or simply unbalancing their diet. 

Visit [Kentucky Equine Research](#) and [Equineews](#)™ for information on all equine nutrition related topics.



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[Horseland's Arderin Tall Field Boots](#)

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Ariat Hybrid Rancher StretchFit Boots from [Trailrace](#)

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[Greg Grant Saddlery's Georgia Carbo-Tec Western Boots](#)

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PROPERTY

Elegant country estate

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There are three generously sized bedrooms, plus a massive master suite

with WIR and a stunning ensuite featuring floor to ceiling windows (allowing natural light to pour in), a large walk-in shower, and a free-standing bath that sits at the heart of the room. For your visitors, there's a guest wing at the other end of the home with a large bedroom that includes built-in cabinetry, a large WIR and a grand ensuite.

The large, recently refurbished open plan kitchen blends perfectly with the rest of the home's décor. Flowing out from the kitchen is a generous outdoor entertaining area, which can be enclosed for year-round comfort. And let's not forget the outdoor kitchen, complete with an oven, BBQ, range hood, pizza oven, and wine fridge. Yet another undercover seating area is perfect for autumn and spring

Interior spaces blend seamlessly into generous outdoor entertainment areas.



Care has been invested in the estate's thoughtfully designed equine facilities.



entertaining or for the family to relax, while ducted reverse cycle air conditioning throughout the home ensures your comfort no matter what the weather.

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area, an approximately 65x55m outdoor grass arena, a tack room, feed shed, seven main paddocks, two smaller paddocks, a five bay powered workshop, large implement shed, and an undercover truck parking area which could easily accommodate a caravan.

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