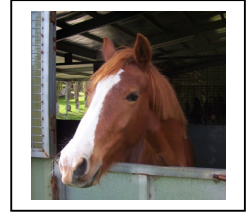


OVER THE STABLE DOOR BY "HAMISH" From 2009 Cherry Chatters

Greeting fellow equines and owners!

MARCH

I hope you all shared some lovely carrots over the festive season. This dry weather has been very taxing on all of us. We all need plenty of clean fresh water in this weather, anything up to 60 litres per day. Our water troughs need more attention because of the heat and need to be cleaned regularly. Some of us like to have that extra salt lick to make for lost salts through sweating. This is especially so if travelling for long distances. Specially formulated electrolytic salts can be purchased from your feed supplier. Always check labels carefully before administering. Out in the paddock shade is essential both from the sun and the wind. Horses with white faces and noses can be burn very easily. Fly veils can be useful and some come complete with noseguards. Fly repellent jars can be installed near stable areas to keep down the fly population. All these things will help to keep us more comfortable during the hotter months. My training is going along quite well. Every now and again I will have a little setback, but mostly these are pretty minor and have been easy for my owner to fix. What my owner must remember is that my training is ongoing, and will continue for the rest of my life. Just because I 'park' or stand still at home being saddled up, or next to the float, doesn't mean that I will necessarily park when I go out to a show, or if something untoward happens. Mostly all this requires is some more repetitions of stopping, going forward in an increasing number of situations. Consistent repetition will improve the responses until they are light, immediate and unconditional. Unconditional meaning that the obedience will occur anywhere at anytime. Any forward or sideways movement of my front feet is corrected with a backward step (back to where I started). If I step backwards, then one step forward will correct that. My owner's responsibility is to be both very observant and consistent. When we are trained in this manner, we become calmer and calmer. Well there is some food for thought so to speak!



APRIL So much has happened since the last article. The tragic fires in Victoria and so fortunately some rain at last. Not a lot, but enough to ease the burden on many stock and landowners.

As we are heading into Autumn, we need to be thinking about our worming program and where it is at! We have seen at least a couple of bot flies around recently, so no doubt there will more. Horses nearly always have some worm presence in their gut, but a regular worming program will certainly help to control this. A 6 – 8 week cycle is generally recommended by the paste manufacturers. If you get your horses drenched by the vet, it is not needed so often. Some owners prefer to go the 'natural' way and use garlic additives. The only real way to know how worm free your horse is, is by having a worm count done. When he has dropped a manure, you simply pick up one of the 'balls' of manure, place in a small plastic container, label with the date and name of your horse and keep refrigerated until you need to take it to the vet. It usually takes around a week for the result and then your vet will advise where to go from there. If you are using a pasting program, it is advisable to change the paste after several uses as the worms can develop a resistance to that particular paste. Read the labels carefully to see which are the active ingredients and change accordingly. If in any doubt at all, consult with your vet and he should be happy to advise you.

One of the easiest worms or signs thereof to detect are the bots. The bot fly leaves cream to yellow eggs on any part of the horse's body, but mainly on the legs. They are easy to see and can be removed with a bot knife. Take care to remove the eggs away from the paddock so that they cannot continue their cycle.

Signs of worm infestation can be a rather dull coat, runny manures and a lethargic attitude with a dull eye. However that is not always the case and your horse may still have a shiny coat and have worms. If you have an event coming up and want your fellow to be at his best, make sure that if you do worm him, that it is at least 10 days prior to that event. If the worm infestation is substantial, the chemicals from the paste will be knocking things around in his gut and he definitely will not be feeling his best. So plan ahead and do keep a record of your worming schedule (on the computer is a good idea!). If your horse is the only one in the paddock, his risk of infestation will not be as great as a horse sharing a paddock with many others. By keeping your yards and paddocks clean and free of manure you will also lessen the chance of re-infestation. The bottom line is that it is the responsibility of the owner to ensure a healthy, well looked after equine!

Time to check your rugs before winter and get those patches done!

MAY There is always something happening in a horse's life to keep his/her owner on their toes! As you may know by now, I am just a relatively young fellow (5 y.o.). My life has coasted along quite comfortably, with my owners introducing new things to me gradually in my short life. In my first 3 years I was handled, led in hand and from another horse, floated and taken for walks around the district of Cherry Gardens. In my new home (in the next two years) I was broken to saddle, taught to lunge, ridden on the road and taken on many outings to broaden my outlook on life. I have also been ridden out on my own (very scary!) and in company. My outings have included several competitions where I have acquitted myself with varying degrees of success! Most ridden sessions have been well spaced, so that I had time off to both rest and take in what I had been taught. So it would appear that everything has come along gradually, making sure that I have been ready for each new phase of my education.

This summer, with the prolonged period without rain and the hardness of the ground I suddenly came up with a couple of splints. I realise that many other equines have suffered the same complaint this season. Both splints came up on the inside of my front cannons. Luckily my owners spotted them early and were able to treat them. Splints can arise from a hard knock or when the limbs are under undue stress (as in worked on hard ground). In a young horse like myself, they are more likely to be from the hard ground. It is nature's way of protecting the growing bone by laying down extra bone at the time. If detected very early and the horse is rested, then the bone is often reabsorbed and the splint will disappear. If not, then it will remain as a hard lump. This is not usually a problem other than visual unless the growth is near a joint, such as the knee or fetlock. Luckily, most splints occur along the cannon bone away from any joints and do not become an issue. Early detection by vigilant horse owners is the answer. The first signs may be lameness, or by palpation, as the growing splint can be painful to touch. My owners noticed the splints while cleaning out my feet, which of course is the first thing done when I am brought in. I was not lame and did not react to palpation, but the growth was visible. The splints have a better chance of being reabsorbed if detected within 48 hours of appearing. So two weeks later, my splints are right down, but I am still being worked only lightly. So there you are, it really pays to be observant, even when doing some everyday thing, such as cleaning out feet. Our equines can tell us so much if we just take the time to look!

JUNE Hasn't the rain been wonderful! That beautiful green tinge starting to appear across the hills is such a relief. Let's hope that follow up rains come and ease that ever present burden on our farmers.

This month I thought that I would revisit the topic of introducing a new horse onto your property. I am sure that in the last twelve months some of you have acquired a new equine companion or maybe are planning to do so. Before bringing home your new equine, it is a good idea to have ascertained from the previous owner where your horse is at with his worming, vaccination and shoeing programs. It is also useful to know what sort of temperament he has in the paddock – is he bossy, or a wimp. Does he windsuck or fencewalk? You need to be prepared to address these issues if he does!

When the horse first comes home to you, it is preferable to be able to 'quarantine' him in a smallish area for up to a week before letting him loose on your regular paddocks. This will help prevent any new weed seeds being brought onto your property and if he hasn't been wormed, you can do that while he is in this small area. It also gives him time to settle into his new surroundings without going for a gallop and perhaps run the risk of injury. You can better observe him in this smaller area too, and it is a bonding time for both of you. If you own other horses, they will have been able to observe each other during that week. If you have only one other horse, then they will probably bond (but not always!). If you have several, then putting the new horse with the quietest one first can work well. Then gradually introduce the rest. Make sure that when they all get together that there is plenty of room for the new arrival to get away. It can get a bit frantic at first and they will crowd around the 'new chum'. If the new area is confined, and someone kicks out, there is a higher risk of injury than if there is room to escape. Depending on personalities, there can be quite a bit of activity until the pecking order is sorted out. However, once that is done, things usually settle down and all becomes calm. If your routine is such that you feed them all together out in the paddock, make sure that there is plenty of room between each horse. It is also better to feed in a large circle than in a line, so that the horse at the bottom of the pecking order doesn't have to pass the bossier horse to get to his feed. Putting out an extra pile of feed will also ensure that there is always a pile for someone to go to. There is no hard and fast rule about how long all this takes, as it will depend on temperaments, age and sex. The bottom line is safety, both physically and healthwise, so commonsense will prevail. If you are not sure how to cope, then talk with someone knowledgeable to get advice.

JULY I was saddened to recently hear of one of my kind becoming quite 'naughty'. By naughty I mean that he was no longer well behaved when doing all the simple things that are normally asked by his owner. He wasn't always like this, although sometimes he did misbehave. Now the misbehaviour has escalated to such an extent that he is not safe to ride. Unfortunately, little misbehaviours can creep in without the rider noticing or choosing to ignore or explaining it away by saying 'it's just an off day' or some such explanation. There is ALWAYS a reason for a change in behaviour. Once the pain factor has been eliminated, then the rider has to go back to themselves and question what it is that has caused this change. The majority of behavioural tensions, such as shying, bucking, spinning etc all to a greater or lesser extent go back to the horse's stop, turn and go. The tensions arise from confusion; often when leg and rein aids are applied at the same time. In the higher levels of dressage, these aids come closer and closer together, but still should never occur at the same time.

If there is a delay in the go forward response, there is usually a corresponding delay in the stop response. The stop will be slow and probably heavy. I am sure that most of you have felt that at some time or other. Slow and systematic work, with the rider not only being correctly consistent in the aids, but quick to remove the pressure once the desired response is achieved will help to improve a horse's behaviour. Making sure that the go forward response is prompt and that the leg does not nag (pardon the pun!) once the horse has gone forward, will improve the responses. Also making sure in the turn that the horse does not turn just with his neck and bulge out with his shoulder, but turns with the corresponding leg i.e. left rein means turn with the left front leg. At this stage avoid making the horse 'round' as this will only confuse the stop response. Also avoid using the leg through the turn as this can cause confusion too. It is helpful to have 'eyes on the ground', i.e. An instructor or someone knowledgeable to keep the rider from making mistakes as well as keeping the rider consistent.

Riders are keen to further the education of their horse (which is ongoing throughout their life), but remember that the rider's education should also continue throughout THEIR riding life!

Much food for thought!

AUGUST By now we will all have had that extra carrot for our birthdays! The winter rains have been a blessing, but I see the weeds are also trying to compete. A sunny still day is good for doing that catch up weed spraying. Some weeds like thistles and cape weed can be easy to hand pull. Dock, Jane and dandelion however are not so easy. At least if you can get them before flowering then that reduces the amount of seed production for the following year. Whichever way you look at it, it is an ongoing job. The benefits make it worthwhile – less competition for your preferred pasture, healthier horses and paddocks. And it does get easier over time. It also improves the appearance of your property and can add to its real estate value! It is helpful to keep a 'farm diary' to record when and what you have sprayed each year e.g. when soil tests were done and what was needed to bring your soil up to scratch. What brand of pesticide you used and which was more effective. Always make sure that you read the directions carefully on these products for maximum results. You might also record the relevant costs for future comparisons.

Getting back to the rains – unfortunately they also bring boggy conditions in the hills. Keep a check on your equines' feet. Greasy heel is a nasty condition and quite painful. Soft soles can be prone to stone bruising and hoof abscesses. If possible, keep your equines out of the mire as much as you can. Having a well drained stable yard and shelter makes managing any of these winter conditions much easier. Even if you decide not to ride because of inclement weather, it is a good idea to at least clean out your horse's feet as a precautionary measure. Every second day should suffice. Working on the prevention rather than waiting for it to happen is certainly worth it.

SEPTEMBER Spring is in the air and the grasses are really starting to grow rapidly. After an unusually wet winter (the wettest July for 13 years) and consequently less user friendly riding weather, our equines will be feeling rather 'fresh'. Unfortunately for some of us that can be a dangerous and lethal combination.

Many ponies and some horses can be prone to laminitis, commonly known as founder. This debilitating condition can occur any time from mid winter through to spring. Those of you who own an equine prone to founder will be on the alert for the warning signs.

Things which are easy to spot include a hard, cresty neck, standing with the front legs angled a little forward with the weight taken on the heel rather than the toes. The feet themselves will be hotter than normal and lameness will be evident. The condition involves an inflammation of the

laminae in the hoof and is extremely painful. In severe cases, the pedal bone inside the hoof can rotate and penetrate the sole. Unfortunately the condition is not reversible and the horse/pony may have to be put down.

Things which you can do to help prevent founder include regular exercise and limiting of access to those green, sugar sweet grasses. A conscientious owner will be on the lookout for any telltale signs and act accordingly. There are also products on the market which can be added to meals which can help. Using a muzzle can also limit grass intake. The worst times of day will be from 9am to 3pm, when the sugar content will be at its highest. It may be safe to put your equine out at night for a graze if he is really needing that room to move. Every horse will need to be treated differently as some methods work better than others with individuals. Keeping his feed simple with plenty of plain (but good) hay is much better for him. The best thing is to know your horse and how different conditions suit him. And of course if you are in any doubt, get onto your vet straightaway.

Research is ongoing with this condition, but the bottom line is to work at preventative maintenance so that your equine is founder free!

Hope you all enjoy your Spring riding

OCTOBER Well I have to say we have certainly had our share of rain this winter. You have probably noticed during those wet weeks that certain areas of paddocks have been somewhat degraded. Horses, like sheep, cattle, dogs and cats are creatures of habit. They have favoured areas for standing in or walking along. During the wetter months and particularly in areas with a bit of a slope, these areas become very cut up and puggy and subject to erosion. As the ground dries out, these bare areas are prone to invasion of weeds and dust (and hence colic, but that's another story!).

Various courses of action are open to horse owners. Having a stable/shelter with a yard attached can be a useful 'sacrificial' area. This has the double benefit of preserving the quality of the grazing area as well reducing the area of land degraded. The yard could even be improved with some added surface cover of dolomite or small quarry rubble. Make sure that there is enough slope for excess water runoff.

Dividing grazing areas so that one area at a time gets rested also helps preserve pasture and wear and tear. If you have mixed stock, rotational grazing can help too.

If the areas are degraded through use/traffic, some additional quarry rubble will improve the surface as well. Even old manure on these patches may encourage some healthy regrowth. Fencing off now will allow time for the soil to recover before next year. In more severe situations, fencing off may need to be longer.

For a small amount of effort your equine's living and grazing area can be much improved, both healthwise for him as well as aesthetically for you!

Time to get spraying and weed pulling (if you haven't done so already) as this will be a bumper year for weeds.

NOVEMBER Hamish was away on camp during the month of November.

DECEMBER By now we are well and truly into summer. If you haven't done so already, there is much work (clearing) to be done.

There has much vigorous spring growth with both weeds and feed. To keep both our horses, ourselves and our properties safe all long growth around fence lines, stables and any outbuildings should be slashed or mown down. Make sure you do this on a non fire risk day. The benefits are many, snakes will be discouraged from cleared places, the fire risk will be reduced and your property will be improved in appearance.

While you are at it, check for any other hazards such as sheets of iron, wire, rotting timber, glass or tin. Also ensure that the area around the drinking bath/trough is cleared too.

Other areas might include the favourite standing spot under a tree or near a fence line where other horses are. That extra bit of work may just save your equine's life!

Depending on their construction, stables themselves can be a fire hazard. It is so easy to let things which are not used regularly 'collect' in and around the stables. They are also places where dust from various types of bedding and feed accumulate and settle on everything. Cobwebs too can build up and collect masses of dirt and dust. Cobwebs can be quite flammable, so get in there and give those stables a good spring clean too!

I have also noticed along the road verges that the grass has become very long and dense. This also poses a snake threat for walkers and riders alike, so be aware! There are some areas where is no choice but to go off the trail onto the road, so extra care may need to be taken regarding oncoming traffic.

My education is still progressing as I become more and more consistent in my work. Although I can still spook at times (growing up is so hard!). Most of the time though I am told that I am a pleasure to ride and that I look so spunky. So basically, things are 'on track'. My canters are much improved and better balanced.

So everyone, keep up the good work with your equines, keep consistent and thorough and your horse will appreciate that. You will know because he/she will be better behaved and more predictable in his/her behaviour.

Until 2010, have a safe and enjoyable Christmas and New Year. Your equine friend Hamish.