

OVER THE STABLE DOOR BY "HAMISH"

From 2012 Cherry Chatters

Greeting fellow equines and owners!

MARCH I hope you have all enjoyed the Christmas break and are looking forward to many more hours in the company your equines this year.

With some early rain, it brings to mind what needs to be looking at in the next month or so. Firstly, drag out all last years rugs and check over for repairs or replacements and get it done now, before they are really needed. Go over your horse's diary – when are teeth and worming due and how are his/her feet?

Paddock feed will be getting sparse and supplementary feeding may be required. Speaking personally, my good self has such an efficient metabolic system that I still have to be locked up for a short period during the day. If you have an equine like myself, then it pays to be vigilant when checking the pasture. Our own paddocks are starting to show little outbreaks of clover, which is not good for me or my good paddock mate who foundered last year. Fortunately he is doing really well, but he too is getting locked up for some periods during the day.

If your paddocks have not been either soil tested or topped up in the last couple of years, then it may be a Hamish cont.... good idea to get this done too before winter. A good time is just after the first autumn rains and then you will need to book in straight away, as the contractors tend to become quite busy at that time of year. Everyone wants it done at once – a bit like hay cutting really!

On a personal note, my training has been coming along quite well. I am now 8 years old (read young!) and my owners broke me in at 3 years, so I have been in training now for 5 years. The time has flown, but I am (most of the time) a very well behaved young man. My dressage work has progressed to flying changes and lateral work. I can also trail ride quite nicely and even play with a big fitness ball and kick it around the paddock.

As far as the bigger horse picture goes, do check the HorseSA website <http://www.horsesa.asn.au> for equine news on horse health, horse regulations, happenings, trail maps, horse riders 'code of conduct' etc. Or better still, join up and support this worthy organisation – it is there to help you.

APRIL By now all your rugs should have been checked and repaired ready for the coming colder, wetter months. If you have leather gear, then it may be needing some leather conditioner. Synthetic gear is much easier to maintain, but it still needs to be checked for cracking or tearing. Signs of wear to look for in leather gear may include stitching on where girth points attach under the saddle flaps and stirrup leather stitching. Or the panels may have flattened out over time. If this is so, then get the saddler to repack the panels. If you are not sure how it should be repacked, then some saddlers will be happy to come to you and fit the saddle to your horse. It is all too easy for a badly fitting saddle to give your horse a sore back. Save your horse and your pocket by paying a bit more at first and getting it right. A regularly used saddle should be checked every couple of years. Bear in mind also that the good old saddle you have had for the last 20 years or so will not necessarily fit your new horse. Think of it as a pair of shoes and how they mould themselves to your feet over a period of time. Your best friend may wear the same size shoe, but may find your pair of shoes incredibly uncomfortable! Modern technology has improved saddle design greatly, and this



is especially evident in the synthetic range. Examples include longer girth points (eliminating extra and unnecessary thicknesses between the rider's thigh and the horse), lightweight (easier for children to handle), ease in cleaning, adjustable gullets to suit horses of different widths, Webber stirrup leathers (they slide onto the stirrup bars with a loop, eliminating all that extra buckling), which gives in effect one layer of leather instead of three. Who hasn't felt that horrible hard buckle bulge on the inner thigh? And of course, being lighter, one would expect that it is more comfortable for the horse too.

Storing both leather and synthetic gear should be similar in that the gear is kept indoors (not a tin shed!) at a fairly constant temperature. Extreme heat can warp the fibreglass in a synthetic saddle and literally 'cook' the leather in a conventional saddle. Also damp, cold conditions are not good either. Both extremes are conducive to hardening and splitting of the leather, rotting of the stitching and rusting of buckles etc, all of which present a safety hazard. Again think of that pair of leather shoes kept out in the tin shed for a year and then you go put them on – they will hardly be the most comfortable set of footwear!

Last month I mentioned soil tests and paddock conditioning. At the moment owners can get a soil test done for free if they set up a property plan with the assistance of an officer from the NRM (Natural Resources Management) board. Five years is the recommended time period for getting soil tests done. This is especially so if you crop off your land, but also if you are just using it for stock grazing. Land in the Adelaide hills is prone to high acidity and leaching of other trace elements, so a soil test will highlight those deficiencies and the owner can then follow up with the appropriate action. Both your horses and the quality of your hay will benefit!

MAY Two main topics for this month.....

Firstly, once again I was disappointed to hear of a courtesy by a motorist (slowing down and giving plenty of clearance room) being ignored by a rider. The rider clearly saw the motorist approach and go past, but showed no sign of acknowledgement to the courtesy. The motorist happened to be a knowledgeable horse person and was doing what any sensible motorist would do when passing near to a horse being ridden on the road verge. Conversely, it has also come to my attention that some horse riders in the local area have had a number of 'close calls' with negligent motorists. So it appears that there are faults on both sides. Horse riders can only help their cause by politely giving a wave or calling a thank you to those motorists who do slow down and/or make room. Also motorists in rural type areas need to be aware that it is not uncommon for horses to be ridden on the road verge (when there is nowhere else to go) and that appropriate safety measures should be taken. An out of control 500 kg horse coming through your windscreen is potentially fatal to either party. So, please everybody consider other road users – they are all friends of friends or someone else's family.

Secondly, information handed on to me is about road rules. The full information is in the South Australian Police News. Here are some interesting points as follows: Did you know that horses are legally classed as vehicles?

Riders must give way to pedestrians on a footpath or nature strip.

Riders can travel two abreast as long they are no more than 1.5m apart.

It is not permitted for motorists to beep the horn when overtaking horses and riders.

An animal drawn vehicle is not to be ridden at night unless it is fitted with lights which are clearly visible for at least 200m. There are more rules and more details

re the lighting and reflectors on animal drawn vehicles which can be accessed via www.legislation.sa.gov.au and search Australian Road Rules and Road Traffic Act.

It is also very sensible for riders to wear brightly coloured safety vests while out riding. They are easy to wear over any sort of clothing and can help motorists or other road users see you from a distance.

So, my apologies readers for being a nag (but isn't that what I am?), but sometimes these things just have to be said.

On a brighter note, I am getting very excited because I overheard my owners talking about getting another one like me! Now that is really exciting, as although I know lots now, I am still young enough to enjoy a play. Hopefully I will be filling you in on all the coming adventures and training.

JUNE Firstly a few reminders for items to tick off on your list of equines chores. Paddock spraying and ongoing hand picking, paddock rejuvenation (super etc). A fence check, rubbish and/debris check and also a branch check. It is not unusual for horses to step on a fallen branch and get a nasty gash on their legs as the branch springs up. Rugs all repaired, so that spares are ready to be used if need be. Leather tack in good condition if you plan on riding during the wetter weather. Also your own gear, hats, boots and gloves in good condition.

This month let's look at float loading. This is quite a big topic, so I will try to cover some basic principles. For those of you familiar with Tom Roberts the old principle of getting the horse to go forward and stop on command this will be quite clear. Basically the training starts on the ground before the horse has even seen a float. Initially the horse needs to go forward on the lightest command in self carriage and stop lightly on command. By self carriage I mean that there will be minimal weight in the handler's hand as he leads the horse. So after the initial forward signal, the horse should walk besides the handler without pressure – not rushing and not pulling or holding back. The onus here is on the handler to be consistent with the signals and most importantly the removal of that signal when the horse has given the desired response. For example, with horse in hand with a halter, the handler (standing in front and to the side facing the horse) taps the horse at the girth area with a good length whip. The tap should be light and lightly repetitive. If the horse is slow to respond, do not increase the pressure of the taps, but rather the frequency. Immediately the horse makes a forward step the tapping must cease. After some repetitions, the horse should be responding quite promptly from the tap. After a few error free responses, the handler can then move to the horse's shoulder and walk alongside, leading with the right hand and using the tap with the whip in the left. Make sure that the signal to go forward occurs before the handler makes the step himself, so that the horse is responding to the signal, not the handler (that comes later). Also make sure that you can do this from both sides. To deepen the go forward response and make it more reliable the handler can then ask for the horse to make bigger steps in the walk. Once the horse walks, just increase the forward pressure from the lead rope (do not walk quicker yourself) and reinforce this with a tap. Several repetitions of this with the handler being careful not to use his body first will bring more consistent results. Then with the stopping, the stop signal is applied backwards and upwards towards the throat for maximum affect (not a tug, but more a vibration as with the whip). The next thing is to see if you can signal the horse to stop while you take another step. This will show whether he is obeying the signal or your body. When this is really solid you will be able to 'cast' a horse onto the float. That is he will go on while you stand to the side and shut the

tailgate. Further on from this work in hand the horse can be asked to trot up, go faster, slower and halt (handy for the vet). This description is all very simplified and I haven't covered the times when the horse is totally disobedient and things are going haywire – that's another story!

When you feel that the horse is really reliable in all these commands the float can be introduced. Make sure that the float is attached to a vehicle and on a good footing. A non windy, dry day is also preferable. Also make sure that you are not in a hurry, the horse will pick up on this. Having some hay already in the float can be helpful (and carrots in the pocket!), although not necessary. Having the centre partition across or removed can also reduce complications. The inside of the float should be clean and free of litter. After some repetitions of going forward and stopping in front of the tailgate, gradually ask the horse to go in. You will know that he is becoming more reliable when you can stop him anywhere on the tailgate or in the float and then move him forward also at any time. If he starts to back off , do not pull (very tempting!), but rather commence tapping at the girth while following him back until he takes a step forward, which he will do eventually.

Consider that it is not natural for them to walk backwards forever, so that eventually the horse will stop. Once the horse is standing calmly in the float you can then ask him to step back. Again, if he rushes, commence tapping until he stops and makes a forward step. Eventually you should be able to have him standing calmly while you walk off. It is handy to have a helper here so that you can ensure that the horse doesn't turn around when you leave the float. Shut the tailgate and maybe leave the horse to have a quiet munch. Always make sure that that you are standing to the side when shutting the tailgate in case the horse takes fright and barrels backwards. Only tie the horse up after the tailgate is shut. Similarly when unloading, untie the horse first before dropping the tailgate (again standing to the side). This is really a huge topic and I haven't covered it all, but hopefully it is of some help.

JULY Sharing the Trail or Roads - Tips for Horse Riders & Cyclists

RESPECT: If you offer respect, you are more likely to receive it. Trail user education with friendly respect will diminish negative encounters on the trail for all users.

COMMUNICATION: Let other trail users know you're there — before you're there. Riding up on horses can be dangerous even if they are well trained. For bikers and hikers; 1. Make yourself known to the horse rider. A simple "Howdy" works to get attention. 2. Step downhill and off trail.

HORSES UPHILL: Horses are prey animals. That means they think everything wants to eat them; even the hiker with a large, scary backpack and especially the fast-moving biker "chasing" them. When startled, horses go uphill. Other trail users should move downhill to avoid an encounter with a 500 kg horse. Whoa!

YIELD APPROPRIATELY: Do your utmost to let your fellow trail users know you're coming - a friendly greeting is a good method. Anticipate other trail users as you ride around corners. Cyclists should yield to other non-motorized trail users, unless the trail is clearly signed for bike-only travel. In general, strive to make each pass a safe and courteous one.

General tips for horse riders

Check your riding skills are up to going out on the trail
Select trails to match you and your horse's skills & ability
Check your horse has enough training to cope with most trail experiences including spoon drains, rubbish bins, vehicles, alpacas, golf buggies and more!
Practice training your horse alongside a cyclist at home
Ride out with a more experienced horse & rider
Wear light coloured or reflective clothing. Be Seen to Be Safe.
Talk to cyclists and face your horse towards them if needed, don't allow your horse to turn away
Most of all, enjoy your ride

Prepared by Horse SA using the following references:

Rider www.trailridermag.com

And www.horsesa.asn.au

AUGUST Well it seems ages since I last sat on my tail to talk to you, but since we have been on the subject of road traffic and horses, I thought a logical follow up would be on floats.

Most horse owners either own a float or at some time need to float their equine to an event, an outing or to the vet.

Some things to consider before hitching up that float – Australian Road Traffic rules require that the tow vehicle is at least the same weight as the trailer/float (loaded). Any modern 4WD will have a manual which will state towing weight allowances for that vehicle. As far as I have been able to detect, a vehicle and float can travel at the designated speed shown. However on discussion with a SAPOL officer, 80 kph was recommended. Obviously common sense should prevail here, as road conditions can have a considerable affect on the driver's speed. Factors include the density of traffic and how fast it is Hamish cont.... going, the width of the road, whether the conditions are hilly or flat, visibility can be affected by fog, rain, smoke and the time of day. Rain can affect the surface of the road surface too, making it slippery. The driver needs to allow extra braking room because of this. Also if travelling with or without a float attached at a speed of 30 kph, one should be able to come to a stop within 7m. In some states, it is also a requirement to have the float fitted with a self braking system (Breakaway), which comes into effect immediately if the two become separated. So far in SA this is not mandatory. If you have accumulated a long line of traffic, do, where safe, pull over and let those cars past. If you are floating two horses, it is generally accepted to put the heavier horse on the right hand side. When loading, tie up the horse after the tailgate has been put up. Conversely, when unloading, untie the horse before lowering the tailgate. Be very careful not get fingers trapped undoing the lead rope if the horse is fractious,

Make sure that the tow vehicle's mirrors give adequate rear vision and that all lights on both vehicles function correctly. Do not connect a float with a seven pin plug to a car with a five pin plug and vice versa. It can happen that when using the turn indicator, the brakes come on! If in doubt with your wiring, take the float to a specialist to check.

If possible keep your float under cover and never put it away dirty. Always clean out manure and hay. Preferably sweep out any excess urine. The risk with hosing out is causing rust in the underneath framework. Wooden battens on the

ramp will prevent slipping as the horse loads up. Keep a check on outside fittings, especially ramp closure fixtures. These can become loose over time and wear away to a dangerous level. Make sure that the interior of the float has a good non slip surface. A centre partition if you use one should allow room at the bottom for the horses to spread their legs, otherwise they may scramble. Many horses will stop scrambling after the centre partition has been removed. Adjustable breast bars, centre divisions and bum bars should all be removable. Finally, leave yourself plenty of time on the day, so that you are not rushed. It pays to do most of the packing up the night before (feed, tack etc). This will allow you plenty of time for loading and travelling to your destination.

PS. Last time I talked about road rules for horses I forgot to mention that it is illegal to use a mobile whilst riding a horse – the same rule as applies for car drivers!

SEPTEMBER Not so good news this time around. Yours truly has been lame since the last article. It appeared at first as a nagging front end lameness. My owners rested me, gave me anti-inflammatories, but to no avail. This was followed up with two vet visits and a visit from our chiropractor, still to no avail. After the third visit from the vet which included flexion tests and many x-rays, it was concluded that I have some degeneration in the coffin joint. The coffin joint is basically the last joint in a horse's leg, the equivalent of the last joint on a human hand. It lies between the pedal or coffin bone and the last metacarpal joint. As I am only eight years old and have never been overworked, this is hard news. However, the vet has given me cortisone into both coffin joints and recommended that I now have front shoes on. Our farrier has cut the hoof back at the toe by a couple of centimetres, setting the shoe well back with side clips rather than toe clips. This will improve the rollover of the hoof, hopefully reducing some pressure on that joint. My follow up plan is now to be in light work at walk and trot, mostly in straight lines and we will see how that goes.

By the time you read this, paddocks may have dried out a bit. All the ground is well and truly waterlogged, but it won't be long before those spring grasses start to push through! If you don't already have one, this could be a good time to look around your property and consider having a 'sacrificial' lock up area, such as a large yard to keep your equines in overnight or even during those risky spring times. Try to pick a site with good drainage, as you will find that a small area will soon deteriorate to a bog with constant use. It will probably need topping up with gravel/dolomite to help drainage and prevent pugging. Take photos, so that if the repair work is done in the summer, you will know where to concentrate the gravel. It is well worth the effort and will help maintain your paddocks and pastures. Areas which are frequented by horses will soon become bare, leaving room for weeds to take over. So the sacrificial area makes a lot of sense. If you have the room, even an extra yard will add to the flexibility, so that they can be alternated.

My old paddock mate who had founder is doing really well. He is happy in himself and being kept active. My owners are keeping up the dry hay intake for him (and for all of us equines). The next few months will need to be closely monitored as he will probably be more susceptible.

My new young paddock mate is also doing well. He will be three in October and his education is well underway. He is learning simple things such as how to tie up, lead and pick up feet. How to stand still while being groomed, having a rug taken on and off and the basics of being on a lunge.

OCTOBER Ah, spring is upon us, all is lush and green and my feet just want to dance! Those few extra hours of sunshine make an amazing difference. Time to be eyeing off those founder-prone equines. My paddock mate started to show signs of foundering again and he was locked up quick smart. Our owners are trying to keep up a regime whereby he is let out twice a day for short periods of time, no more than an hour or so. And then topped up with more dry hay when yarded. His exercise regime has also been maintained. He is in good condition, not overweight at all, but the coming weeks will be a bit of a trial. My owners also invested in a muzzle for him to wear when out of the yard, but he is so smart he just rubs it off. My owners then put a halter on over the top and he still managed to dislodge it. He can also get out under fences if he so chooses, so he is quite a challenge! Most of the time the rest of us try to hang around nearby when he is yarded, so he has company.

OK this time of year take a look around your pastures. Probably you will see several predominant weeds, namely dandelion, capeweed, sorrel, dock, plantain, burr, thistles and salvation jane. Most of these are classified as broadleaf weeds and are relatively easy to control by spraying. Capeweed, sorrel, burr, thistles and early jane can be pulled by hand, but dandelion, dock and older jane can be difficult if not impossible to pull. If the ground is soft enough they can be dug out, but it is sometimes hard to know if you have got the whole root. If you have large areas of any of these, it may be easier to pay a contractor to do it for you, not always a cheap exercise, but worth it in the end. It isn't just the spraying itself which will kill the weeds, but the timing. Once the plant has come into flower, it is generally too late, so be guided by your contractor (or someone equally knowledgeable). Unfortunately with weeds like salvation jane, the spraying and pulling needs to be followed up year after year. Take heart though, because it does eventually make a difference, you just need to keep plugging away. They say the seed is viable for at least 7 – 10 years, so be prepared for the long haul! Other ways of control can be to look at your methods of stock grazing. Any areas where stock Hamish cont..... stand for long periods of time or high traffic areas are prone to large bare patches. These just invite weeds to grow. So try to manage stock movement so that areas are not overused. Then look at providing competition in the way of other grasses. This may entail having a fallow area at this time. Cross grazing can also be helpful, or if you are really stuck you may have to resort to agisting your stock elsewhere until the paddocks recover. Some of this isn't easy, but as landowners there is an inherent responsibility to take care of the land. Over the years the hard work pays off and you have a much better looking and healthy property.

PS. I have had a good rest and am not lame, so life is good!

NOVEMBER Last month I talked about getting stuck into those weeds. Next thing we might like to look at are weeds and other debris against and around shed and stables or wherever horses congregate. Bits of wood, sheets of iron, wire, weeds, just 'stuff' which has come into disuse or broken during winter months. Cleaning all this away will not only keep your horses safer, but reduce snake habitats around horse areas and also reduce fire risks. Clearing long grass away from fence line areas will also reduce hazards, both for owners and horses. As I said last month, as well as getting a pesky job done, it also makes your property look smarter and cleaner.

You may be starting to put away some winter rugs, so check them over for wear and tear. Get patches mended and clips and buckles replaced. There is nothing worse than going to put on a rug which hasn't been used for some months only

to find that it isn't complete. Also before storing it away, brush off any old mud, fold and store in a rodent, spider proof place. Old 44 gallon drums can be a handy weather proof container. Please don't add moth balls or the like, as this is toxic to horses. KISS principle here is usually the best!

You may have noticed that we are all shedding winter fur like crazy. We love nothing better than to get out on a warmish day and roll and roll to get rid of all that old fur and let the new summer coat through. This can be a tricky time of year, with unpredictable weather – to rug or not to rug? Remember we do have our own fur coat and that unless the weather is really extreme we can cope quite well without that extra layer. The modern synthetic rugs, although light, can get very hot. A good compromise is a light durable summer sheet which breathes. If you are at work during the day, you may have to get a good horsey friend to rug or unrug for you. Plenty of grooming will keep us happy and also looking good. It can also double as a bonding time between horse and owner if you are new to each other.

If your equine has been having a lovely time out during the winter and is coming back into work, introduce a work regime gradually. As with most things equine, although we are quite adaptable, we like changes to be gradual. This applies to feeding as well as work. Short sessions of 10 minutes or so, gradually increasing over a period of 2 weeks should work quite well. Of course this depends on the age and condition of your equine, the discipline you are pursuing, as well as his or her temperament. A principle of hasten slowly should ensure that all will be well. Although always be aware of changes in body language or behaviour which may suggest that you are progressing too fast. Things like ears back, resisting weight in the saddle, off their feed etc. are some things to be aware of. Anyway, now that those housekeeping chores are out of the way, it is time to ride!

DECEMBER This month I thought that some information on horse feeds might be useful. To start with, the first rule is the KISS rule (keep it simple sweetheart)! This is a huge topic, so will try to give you the basics.

Having said that, the basic needs are constant access to clean, fresh water, plenty of good quality bulk (hay), followed by sources of calcium, phosphorous, protein and trace elements. The trick is how to best combine these without over or underfeeding or endangering our best friends.

Perhaps if I start with some commonsense good feeding rules.

Access to clean fresh water (allow plenty in summer as a single equine can consume up to 60 litres per day).

Hay should be clean, fresh, good quality, sweet smelling, free of vermin and weeds.

Ideally feed little and often.

Feed according to the work done.

Make any feed changes gradual, say over 2 weeks.

Make sure sufficient bulk is consumed (i.e. Limit hard feeds such as oats).

May need to weigh feed.

Do not work strenuously after hard feed.

Be aware of your horse's allergies if any e.g. Some horses will react to lucerne.

Feed according to whether your horse is a good or bad doer.

Feed according to age.

A general rule of thumb for total amount to feed your horse may be 1 ½- 2 % of body weight if the horse is in light work or spelling. Again, this is general only and will depend on the good/bad doer factor. So for a 500kg horse, 2% equals 1/50th, which equals 10kg per day. In the past I have found that this rule tends to be

rather generous, so it can be a bit of trial and error. However it is very useful to weigh your hay. Each batt/bale will be different too, so watch for that. With hard feeds, it is the dry weight which counts, before water/ molasses is added.

There are two main ingredients essential for a healthy horse, calcium and phosphorous. Lucerne is a good source of calcium, so a batt or two per day for a 500kg horse will supply that need. With a horse allergic to lucerne you may have to resort to additives. Phosphorous is present in bran and can be mixed in with a hard feed. If you are using commercially prepared products, they should supply these things. These days there is a large range of specialised products to suit any horse or purpose. If in doubt check with your local feed agent. Always make sure that your horse has sufficient bulk, i.e. Hay. Lucerne is usually rich and sweet and horses tend to gobble it up quite quickly and if there is too much leaf, doesn't supply enough bulk. Second and third cut lucerne usually has more stalk. The most commonly used hays for bulk are meadow hay, oaten hay, wheaten hay, barley and clover hay. Triticale (a hybrid of wheaten and rye) hay can be used too, but with care, as it can be hard to digest. Meadow hay can vary from excellent to absolute rubbish that the owner has had baled to rid his paddock of weeds (it pays to check). Oaten hay can have a lot of whole oats in it, which you may not want. Wheaten and barley hay are also palatable, but again the seeds can be hard to digest. Clover hay is great too, but can be too rich for the good doers. Whole barley and split peas can be soaked and added to feed for fattening up. Also make sure you know how old the hay is. By the time it is 3 years old, it will have lost most of its food value.

As you can see, the more you look into this the more of a minefield the subject of feeding is.

I have tried to give some pointers, but much of this is sticking to the simple rules and knowing your own horse. Your local feed agent or vet can usually help out with advice. If I have missed anything, my apologies. I shall ruminate tonight over my feed bin and hope this has been of help to you all.

Well, that will do for now. I hope you get plenty of carrots for Christmas morning and have a safe and enjoyable Christmas break.

Hamish.