

Cooling

Please find below the latest '**Simon Says**' column from the Club's Chief Welfare Officer and veterinary surgeon Simon Knapp MRCVS LVO of Scott Dunn's who offers his advice to all players and grooms on how to keep ponies cool, safe and comfortable in the hot weather:

'With the warm weather upon us we thought it would be a good time to bring up some important points to make hot weather polo safer and more comfortable for your ponies.

Hydration

Ensuring that ponies have ad lib access to fresh cool water right up until the two hours before they play is vital for ensuring that they are well hydrated when they take to the field. Optimal hydration is essential for every physiological function. Ponies that are dehydrated are more likely to suffer from muscle fatigue and tying up, they have a reduced oxygen carrying capacity and thus cannot perform to their best ability, and they are more likely to suffer from post match complications such as loss of appetite and even colic.

Electrolytes

Electrolytes are salts which are essential for the proper functioning of the nervous system and the muscles of the horse. These salts are lost from the body in sweat as the horse cools itself whilst playing in hot weather. As the body is unable to store electrolyte salts they must be replaced regularly. During the summer months it is important to add an electrolyte supplement to the feed daily. Mixing electrolytes in feed is preferable to putting them in water, as fussy ponies may not like the flavour and this may compromise drinking.

Cooling

- a. **Between chukkas:** ponies that are to play in more than one chukka must be quickly refreshed in order for them to recover adequately to perform in subsequent chukkas. Where time permits the saddle and bridle should be removed and the pony sponged with cool water and walked around. At the very least girths should be well loosened and noseband released and the skin sponged around the tack. Cool water applied where blood vessels course close to the skin (ie on the neck and between the hind legs) and sponging water into the ponies' mouth is an effective way to refresh hot ponies quickly.
- b. **After playing:** once ponies have finished playing remove all tack and use the wash bays and hoses to shower the whole pony, using low pressure around the horses face and ears. Apply plenty of cool water over the large muscle masses that will still be producing heat following exertion. Use a sweat scraper to scrape excess water from the coat. Water left in the ponies coat will warm up and can act have a heat retaining "wetsuit" effect so scraping is very important. As soon as the ponies have stopped blowing they should be offered cool water from a fresh bucket. Allow them frequent small sips of water during the recovery period. Allow them to quench their thirst fully before they are loaded onto the lorries to return to your stables.
- c. **On Arrival:** consider cooling ponies with a cool shower followed by scraping if they arrive hot and sweating at the field. Commencing play with a fresh cool pony will help to prevent heat related problems during and after the match.

Please remember to bring your fresh water buckets to polo and please refrain from allowing ponies to drink from troughs in the pony lines. Use the troughs as a quick way to fill water buckets, but not for drinking from directly, as this may contaminate the water and spread disease.

Heat Exhaustion

As the temperatures soar and the humidity levels creep up heat exhaustion becomes a serious risk. Being able to recognise the signs is essential so that prompt steps can be taken to treat and reverse it. Early signs of a heat stressed pony include:

- Rapid respiratory rate
- Increased body temperature
- Profuse sweating
- Ataxia (unsteadiness on feet)
- Agitation represented by head shaking, tail swishing and scratching at the ground. Some ponies will display uncharacteristic aggression such as striking or kicking so do be careful!

If severe, or left untreated, these signs can progress to the point where the horse collapses. If you or your groom recognise these signs please alert the duty vet immediately and if the horse is able to walk proceed directly to the nearest wash bay and commence the cooling procedure which involves repeatedly hosing with cool water and scraping off. Depending on the severity of the heat stress ponies may also require intravenous fluid and electrolyte therapy and/or electrolytes and water via stomach tube. The duty vet will be able to assess the pony and advise and provide the appropriate treatment.'

Best Regards

Holly Baird MRCVS

Club Vet & Welfare Representative