

Warming up for the task (all year round)

Keeping warm in front of a fire, putting extra rugs on those equine partners and dreaming of the warmer weather, are all par for the cause in winter.

Muscle warm ups are especially important at this stage of the eventing year so that muscle tears and damage are not inhibiting your horses potential.

Did you know that it takes one and a half times as long to warm up as it does to cool down muscles? “Always warm up at the trot for 10 minutes during cold weather before pace work, or a hard training session. Warm down at the trot for 3 – 4 minutes after hard exercise.” (J Kohnke 2001).

This article will show you how to warm up muscles on the ground prior to the ridden warm up.

We have in past article on joints discussed how muscles and joints need to be placed under stress to gain strength and maintain flexibility.

It is a constant juggling act of stress vs. strain that keeps good horses increasing in performance and over strained horses with attitude and muscle injuries.

To increase the odds in a positive favour the warm up and warm down phases of training are paramount.



Massage and stretching balances the body and prepares it for the work ahead without placing the body under any strain.

All horses whether large and small need to be warmed up properly.

Pre ridden warm ups

Treat any injuries prior to warm up. If they are long standing muscle injuries you may need to add additional exercises to this warm up regime.

Poll warm up= improved dressage flexion, jumping balance

Poll warm up. This area should not be rushed. Flexion in the poll and neck is important.

Method:

Get the horse to lower its head onto your shoulder. Overlap your fingers across the poll and lightly apply compression pressure, hold for 1 -2 mins. You will feel the horse relax.



Warms the nuchi ligament at the occipital crest and softens fascia of the poll.

Neck warm up= improved self carriage, better bend

Neck warm up for all the cervical vertebrae. Using the compression technique of lifting the muscle with your palm of hand and squeezing gently work along the rhomboids (top of neck).

Also work along the brachiocephalic muscle, which is the major muscle along the lower edge of the neck.



Neck continued

Additional neck warm up. Make a fist and using the face of the fist between your knuckles. Push this area into the splenius muscles (these are in the middle of the two sets of muscles you have worked on). You may wish to hold the halter so the horse's neck is flexed towards you whilst you work the splenius muscles.

Shoulders, withers and thoracic vertebrae

Forehand stretches for the shoulders
These warm ups prepare the ligaments of the shoulders and prepares for the extension of the foreleg.

This stretch warms up the trapezius, lattisimus dorsi, triceps and deltoids. The limb is supported behind the carpus (knee) and at the fetlock. Bring the leg forward gently then hold 4cms above the ground



Pectoral and radius stretches.


Pectoral stretches help with flexion of the foreleg. Support the lower limb lift until it is horizontal to the ground. Bring the radius (upper forelimb) backwards gently. NOTE a maximum extent of this stretch is vertical to the ground. The amount of angle depends upon the level of flexibility of the horse. DO NOT OVER STRETCH.



Hamstrings and biceps femoris

Hamstrings and the groin act as both propulsion and as brakes. It is vital to warm these muscles well prior to riding they get especially tired and strained during cross country and jumping. Bring hind leg forward, support the leg so it does not touch the ground hold for 2 mins.



<p>Gluteal and stifle stretches</p>	<p>Medial and superficial gluteals needs warmup stretches, they will also get a good workout propelling your horse over jumps.</p> <p>Take the hind limb out from the back of the body, keep 4cms off the ground and support for 2 mins.</p>		
<p>Massage strokes for warmth</p>	<p>Cupping and hacking</p> <p>These are massage strokes used over all muscle NOT over bony areas ribs, hip bones etc.</p>	<p>“Cupping and hacking are rhythmic massage movements consisting of light blows to the muscle groups. These movements are highly stimulating; they warm up the muscles and promote healthy nutrient rich oxygenated blood flow. “(J. Alexander).</p>	

Ridden Warm up:

10 mins Walk free walk with purpose... the walk you get when you are heading for the feed bin or stables.
 10 mins Trot- head down and think rhythm; rhythm; rhythm. Use a rising trot then sit trot for the last few mins. Or if this is difficult sit for six strides and rise for six strides.

5 mins Canter transitions - count six strides large canter six strides slow canter, repeat and repeat, this will engage the hind quarters and also tune up the propulsion and brakes ready for the X country and jumping. This also tunes the horse to listen to you ready for the dressage.

Happy competing to you and your warmed up horse!

Next article will be on correct cool down and post event massages to assist in good recovery.