

"Spring Time Fitness"

This time of the year people are eagerly awaiting the chance to ride their horses. Sometimes that eagerness drowns out the fact that your horse has been sitting around for months. Horses are similar to people in a lot of ways. One of the more noticeable ways is physical conditioning. Or the lack of being in shape! Just like some of us that spent most of the winter months indoors. Horses have been just living life and most have not had much exercise this winter. It would be nice if you could just get on your horse and have the same type of ride that you did last summer. Actually you may, yet most horses are out of shape. Not necessarily fat, just not use to being worked on a regular basis. A little time spent in getting your horses accustom to physical activities will prevent some injuries to the horse and yourself as well.

Start by some basic horse health care like grooming the horse. Removing as much of the winter coat as possible makes the horse more comfortable under saddle. All that winter hair pulls and balls up when your horse sweats under the saddle pad or saddle blanket. This makes for some uncomfortable riding for the horse. Try to start off with some small short rides of less than one mile. Notice if your horse is exhausted and sweating. If so this is an indication to proceed slowly to allow the horse to get back into good shape. Do not overlook the horses hooves, trimming and shoeing should be at the top of your list before doing much riding. By taking your horse on several short trail rides instead of just going on an all day ride, you provide the horse with the chance to build up stamina and allow their bodies to adjust to being worked.

This time of year still can be cool at night and warm during the day. In younger horses and older horses, this is a recipe for upper respiratory issues. While riding your horse around other horses, be on the lookout for horses that display coughing, nasal discharge, lowering of the head on a regular basis. These are signs of possible colds or flu's. All of which can be contracted by your horse. Yearly immunizations can provide some protection but these shots are not a 100% guarantee your horse is invincible to viruses. The best thing I can think to say is this. If you knew that you were going to have to run in a five mile race, would you prefer to just do it. Or take some time to get in shape and build up to such a physical task. Your thoughts and feelings on this should be applied to your horse after several winter months of just being a horse without much activity.

By BJ Rickard – The World OF Horses – Stall13.com
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